



Ghosts Disappearing Histories



Celebrating the Clubs of Moss Side and Hulme from the 50s to the 80s

Poems
&
Short Fiction



Ghosts

Disappearing Histories

Crocus
Manchester, England

Ghosts Disappearing Histories

First published in 2012 by Crocus
Crocus books are published by Commonword
6 Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS

Copyright © Commonword and the authors 2012.
Some rights reserved.

The stories contained in this collection are works of fiction and any
resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

Creative commons license summary:

Creative commons license

Ghosts Disappearing Histories is licensed under a creative commons
attribution-noncommercial-noderivs 3.0 unported licence.

Creative commons may be contacted at www.creativecommons.org

This book is governed by creative commons licenses that permit its unlimited
noncommercial redistribution.

Which means that you're welcome to share it with anyone you think
will want to see it. If you do something with the book you think we'd be
interested in please email admin@cultureword.org.uk and let us know.

For further information contact Commonword

www.cultureword.org.uk

Acknowledgements

This publication has been funded and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and by Arts Council England.

Thanks to Yvonne McCalla and Sharon Raymond for all the hard work they put in to make this publication possible.

And thanks to everyone who took part in the workshops and who contributed to this publication.



Contents

Introduction

Fiction

Mornin, Miss Hyacinth

Yvonne Mc Calla

Outside the Monton

R. D.

Bleaching My Skin

Tashia Tauzeni

Post Office 2

R. D.

Inter Alia

Toni Sams

Life Story

A Night At The Reno

Antoney G

Poetry

Weekly Shebeen

Keisha Thompson

The Field

Bethany Hermit

He Can't Get In The Club

Bethany Hermit

The Reno And The Nile

Segun Lee-French

Scruples: Xmas '85

Segun Lee-French

Ghosts Poem

Yusuf M'Rabty

Childhood Life

Kofi Nelson

Moss Side Days

Abisai Amba

Crescent Blocks

Abisai Amba

Wonder Crescent

Usman Azeez

MtyTaxi (Demolition)

Usman Azeez

The Half Moon Houses

Kirabo Rizik

Crescent Blocks
Edith's (Est 1949)
A Slice
Refund
Unidentifiable Human Race
The Dervish Inn
Best Club
Alien Samaritan
Dad?
Sundown Town
Complex society

Ore Modupe
Tauzeni Vanessa
Dale E
Dale E
Dale E
Afzaal K
Mike M
Antoney G
Antoney G
Antoney G
Antoney G

Introduction

This collection has come out of a series of workshops run as part of the Commonword project Ghosts: Disappearing Histories, an Heritage Lottery Fund backed project to record, recover and archive the history of the African and Caribbean owned clubs of Manchester. These clubs formed the social and cultural backbone of the Moss Side and Hulme black community from the 50s to the 80s, when urban 'redevelopment' closed them down and broke up the community they served. Looking back now we can see that the music and the ideas from Africa and the Caribbean helped shape a new, radical and progressive idea of Britain. Moss Side and Hulme in Manchester were at the forefront of this, from the early flop houses set up by African seamen so that they could have a bed for the night, to the social and cultural renaissance of the clubs and shebeens. Everyone went to them, black and white, indigenous and foreign, unknown and famous. You would meet people from all over: from Nigeria, Jamaica, Liberia, India, Trinidad, Poland, Ireland... People with a common love of the music and with a common experience. People with the courage and compassion to look across the divide.

This book is in small part a testament to that time and to the people who lived it, helping make Manchester the city it is today. The work here, often honest and from the heart, is by workshop participants ranging in age from 11 to 60, and represents for many the determination of the community not to forget.

Fiction

Mornin, Miss Hyacinth

Yvonne Mc Calla

Hyacinth stretches lazily, then wanders down the hallway and out through the front door. Leaping onto the wall she looks down to see that her neighbour, Egbert, is already out on the front door step, panting slightly.

-Mornin, Miss Hyacinth, how yu be?

Hyacinth sniffs as she looks down at the source of this good humour. She likes Egbert well enough, which is surprising considering their different natures, but she considers herself above that sort of behaviour, and a little bit above Egbert too, for that matter.

-Good Morning to you, Egbert, I ham very well, tank you.

-Look like it goin to be a scarcher today.

Hyacinth gives him a doubtful glance.

-Egbert, I hardly think you have the hadequate hexperience to make pronunciations on the climate.

He brushes her off.

-Trust mi, it might look a bit misty but once di ladies dere start put di wheels in motion, sun soon rise. Di day gwan to be clear an...

Hyacinth executes a perfect, if slightly delayed, double take.

-Wait! What do you mean 'wheels in motion'? The glance she throws Egbert as she says this doesn't exactly inspire confidence in his prediction, much less the explanation he's about to offer.

-Where yu tink everybody goin dis time of morning, before sunrise? Oh-oh so, look like yu don't know everytin den, Hyacinth.

They've known each other a while now and Egbert feels quite pleased at her bafflement. Sometimes her know it all attitude really gets up his nose.

-Eh eh, yu damn fool. What do you know about sunrise and weather forecast, man. You have a degree in weather-ology?

Egbert pauses, to give effect to his words. For once he feels the superior one.

-Is wat yu call 'common sense'. Yu hear about it? Listen ooman, all yu haffe do is hobserve what is goin on around yu. Use yu eyes. Look, ooman, look!

-Wat yu mean look, yu ol greyback, short neck. Tink I don know how fe use mi ownna eyes?

Theres a flash of red tongue as Egbert grins. He loves it when Hyacinth gets agitated and loses her enunciation. He's about to goad her further when two women approach. Mrs Morgan and Mrs Jones.

From their voices you might think they are similar, but Mrs Morgan is a stout, firm woman with a body like a cornmeal dumpling and Mrs Jones is very nearly the opposite: tall, nervous, with wiry limbs and an equally wiry posture. Both are wrapped up against the muggy early morning chill, their footsteps crisping on the lightly frosted pavements. Mrs Jones' shawl fits as tightly as her gloves, boots and hat. Their breath swirls in miniature clouds ahead of them. Mrs Morgan is busy telling Mrs Jones how her niece, Ida, is getting married next month to a man she met on the Windrush boat from Montego Bay.

-Yes, mi dear, de two of dem been saving wid mi pardner for last six months. He don't miss week yu know, regular as clockwork, five pound every Saturday.

-Eh eh! She have a man she can rely on. Dat is good.

Mrs Morgan continues, with more than a hint of pride -Wedding is book fe St John's Church on Ayres Road. Dem have honeymoon plan too, in Italy! I have yu invitation in di house. I'll pass by after wuk today.

Hyacinth and Egbert exchange glances. Not many people who have just come over can afford a wedding *and* a

honeymoon.

As the women pass the gate heading for the bus stop, still chatting, Egbert continues in a stage whisper.

-How yu tink di sun rise up every morning, jus by himself? Is our people come from back-a-yard show dem how it a go. Is wi set di machinery in motion, 'so to speak'. He particularly enjoys 'so to speak', happy to be able to use one of Hyacinth's own phrases against her.

-Yu damn idiot! Yu nuh know is the moon set that mek di sun rise, like a balance on a scale? What stupidity yu talking now?

Egbert's huffs.

-Yu love call people stupid ee? Tssss...Let mi tell yu ooman, if it wasn't for our people dissya land would stay in darkness all day. Why yu tink hevery morning dem go to wuk long before di sun come up? Sun cyan rise at all unless dem put di machinery in motion.

Hyacinth looks at him in total disgust, as if not only has he completely lost his marbles but she can actually see them rolling around on the floor.

-Neva heard so much rubbish in mi life, Egbert. If you spent less time listening to such gossip maybe you would have been blessed wid better sense.

-Notting wrong wid mi sense ooman. Is a scientific fact based on hobobservation. Yu neva tek science inna school?

Hyacinth jumps down from the fence and strolls up the path to look Egbert in the eye.

-Not only did I take it, I came FIRST in my class.

Egbert smiles smugly.

-Well yu know dem tell yu haffe hobserve di events leading to up to a fenomenan to find di cause. Is somting I been wondering for months now an all I know is sun na come till dem gone a wuk.

Hyacinth, busy cleaning a paw, pauses, and trying to look not

the least bit interested declares,

-Egbert, I don't expect you to understand the intimate workings of the physical universe or speculate on it's laws.

As she finishes saying this she glances at him and wrinkles her nose in disgust.

-Do you have to do you have to do that in front of a lady?

Egbert looks up from his balls, sighs heavily and shakes himself out.

-Hyacinth, sometimes yu sound like yu nyam dictionary fe lunch an start burp up di words.

-I am tryin to inform you of a the facts. You should listen to people better heducated than you, rather than insult dem.

Head and tail in the air she turns and starts towards the door, aggravating poor Egbert even more.

-Tink I doan know nobody, is it? Yu know about Miss Townsend ova di road? She pass her exam in Jamaica but di raatid man say dat it not enough fe teach dem inna England, tssss... Damn feisty if yu ax mi. Yu know bout dat?

-Think you're the ongly one who know someting? Hyacinth retorts, determined to outdo him. -Bet you didn't know Mrs Morgan's children are arriving this weekend. She send for all three of dem from Kingston.

Egbert harrumphs gruffly. -Hmmm... Well, I hope dat husband of hers stop running around wid Miss Hattie.

Hyacinth, shocked, jumps back on the fence to cover her surprise.

-Hush man! Si how people can carry go bring come? Miss Hattie is a respectable lady. How many teachers do you know? And wha you know bout Miss Hattie? Yu head favour dasheen. Tssss...

-Eh eh! Yu a mind reader now, is it, Hyacinth? How yu know wat goin on inna mi head. Maybe mi know more den yu tink. Then under his breath -Cooyah, she gwan like she nice eee.

Hyacinth looks down.

-Look like you cyan't hold more than two things in you're head at the same time.

Egbert bristles.

-Fi mi head twice as big as unna...

He clams up as the front door opens and his mistress, Miss Brown, comes rushing out, everything in confusion. Fighting her coat, hat & gloves she calls out to Mrs Morgan.

-Whooee, Mrytle! Got an extra shift dis morning, hold up for mi. Move dog!

Egbert shifts his weight out of her path. The two of them watch her, arms akimbo as she struggles into her coat, running to catch up her two friends. After a breathless 'good mornin' she tells them excitedly -Yu doin anyting next weekend? Got some dance ticket to raise money for di new West Indian Community Centre dis Saturday. Yu want one? Is a dinner dance, ongly 1 shillin each...

Their voices trail off as they walk out of earshot. Hyacinth scratches a flea behind her ear and decides it's time for breakfast.

-Think I shall go and break my fast with a nice saucer of milk.

Egbert makes a face and puts out his tongue.

-Baby food! Piss water! Yuk! Call dat food, Hyacinth? Yu need ground food wid some oxtail soup, dumpling, chicken back, or a nice marrow bone. No wonder yu cyan't mash ants.

Hyacinth looks back at him from the doorway

-I have no need or desire to mash ants or any other kind of insect. I shall perhaps see you later, when I have availed myself of vital sustenance. I suggest you do likewise. Good morning, Egbert.

As she turns her tail and disappears through the catflap, still complaining about peoples' 'manners', Egbert rolls his eyes.

-Dere she goes again...Miss Speaky Spokey.

-Good morning Hegbert!

-Yuh no dun yet ooman?

Outside the Monton

R. D.

The dog is still there, outside the Monton, tied to a bike. It was there this morning, when it had already started to rain. And it carried on raining all day. There were three conclusions to be drawn from this:

1. The dog was an outside dog and sitting all day in the rain was not an unusual occurrence for it.
3. The owner of the bike had not returned.

Confidence in these conclusions was eroded slightly by the dog's habit of staring intently at anyone who went in or out. Not a malingering stare but the stare of a yellow dog in the rain. A soggy stare.

The clouds had broken but the rain was carrying on when the owner of the bike returned. He looked like he worked in a factory. The dog gave a small, yellow yelp and a growl, which from the distance emanated as steam. The bike owner unwrapped something from a brown paper bag, dropped it on the pavement next to the dog, then went into the Monton and up the stairs. Up the stairs was the gambling, and anyone who left their bike all day in the rain was likely to be a gambling man.

Small children had spent a good couple of hours running past before the owner appeared again. Perhaps he kicked the dog. Not a vicious kick, but a kick that said everything you might want to know about his fortune at cards. Then in one swift, endless motion the dog was untied, the bike mounted and ridden away. Leaving the dog on its own.

The dog looked up and down the street, turned around in a circle, going through the motions of chasing its tail, then padded

up to the Monton entrance and lay down in a dry spot close to the doorway.

A photographer emerged, took a photograph of the dog and re-entered. The second of the three conclusions was that the dog didn't like its photograph being taken. It followed the photographer and over the noise of the bus could be heard angry screams.

Bleaching My Skin

Tashia Tauzeni

The celebrating had started and I was so proud to have said that I was part of that ceremony. I was holding the big, shiny and bold star which represented us blacks being bright and different. But when I was holding that star I started to think about the following year, if my life would be better or it would be exactly the same.

The dancing girls had started to get my attention I wanted to come in and join them but apparently I wasn't allowed to wear a mini skirt. Everyone was cheering on the parade and it was such a phenomenal feeling to see that some whites where there in the crowd cheering for the freedom of blacks. I don't know if the people in the south are having as much luck as we are right now in the North West.

Problems started happening after this day. I tried to get a nice home for myself because I wanted to start a family but all they had in stock for me seemed to look exactly like the sewer. I took it anyway thinking that when I get a reasonable job I'll be able to pimp it up a little bit. When I was young wanted to be a doctor but my teacher told me to give up on my dream that no-one of my colour would get that kind of occupation. He told me I could be a singer, a dancer or a runner. I wanted to prove him wrong so I set off to find the job with my name on it. Every hospital I went to and asked for a job just laughed in my face and threw me out.

I wonder if you can bleach your skin. I'm tired of being black my family tells me to start being proud of who I am but I'm not. I bought that skin changer lotion but I doesn't seem to work I'm still black after 3 weeks of bleaching not one single change to my skins I was so disappointed.

Then my skin started to get light patches and I tried to get

my skin even again. I looked in the mirror and I would not recognise myself anymore. I am changing from Orewa Fefe Olawafakumi to Toby Barret. I started to think I should not change what God created me as. I should be proud of who I am and not change for any one. Started to cry in the damp of my bed. I would have loved to be in my mum's arm again.

Post Office 2

R. D.

For reasons he failed to explain his hands were covered in paint. Most of it was white but there was the odd splash of blue. And a red thumb. On his left hand. I thought he'd been painting a Union Jack, but he didn't look the flag painting type. Or the type that would much care about Union Jacks. He told me he'd just got paid and was helping his uncle out with a bit of decorating, before he went to Paul Marsh. I didn't really care but I listened anyway. They were going to knock half of the old high street down, I told him, but he already knew. He already knew a lot of things but wasn't the talkative type. I rolled myself a weed and we watched the cars go by.

-Is that a fact?

-Most probably. About as factual as the earth revolving around the sun.

-It don't do that mate, they just make that up. Want some?

He did and out of politeness I dragged half of what was left and handed it to him. While I waited for him to say something I paid attention to the pigeons on the church roof. They looked miserable. It was sun and not a cloud in the sky and they were miserable. He noticed them as well.

-Strange lot them, you don't usually... I mean, they look despondent, don't you think? Unhappy.

-Not like they can smile, is it? I used t' have a budgie. That was never miserable except when it got ill and kept falling off its perch. Made a right pile of shit then. Thought I'd have to stitch together its arse.

-Better to just kill it, put it out of its misery.

-Made it through though, tough little bugger. So what made you into a religious nut?

-God, I guess.

-Not your pet cat? What should I be listening to then?

He kissed teeth, which was what he did whenever I asked him a question about music. He meant I'd have to go down the Reno and listen to him. And the problem with doing that was I'd been banned.

-All you have to do is apologise. Phil is, you know, not going to hold it against you if you apologise.

-I called him a fucking cunt.

-You called me a jumped up arsewipe, but I'm still talking to you.

-I don't remember that.

The truth is I don't remember a lot of things, but my guy does and he doesn't let it bother him. He knows if he keeps reminding me eventually I'll crack. But today isn't the day. I stand up to go to the Post Office. The guy with the rabbit was there this morning, so I didn't go in. He freaks me out. More of a boy really, he looks about nineteen. Walks around topless cradling a white rabbit in his arms. The rabbit looks sick. In fact, it might not be the same rabbit. It always looks like it's about to die. I think it is dead and this is a new one. I say I'm going to the Post Office and does he want anything?

-No, I don't think so. No. I have this new record in mind, I'm going to get it today. You'll like it, it's your thing. You should come down tonight and find out what it is.

-I can find out another time.

-It'll be too late by then, it'll be gone. You won't know that you've missed it and it'll be gone.

-That's life, I suppose.

-That is life, yeah, you're right. But it doesn't have to be. I'll see you around.

Like I said, he already knew. He knew before we all did, even if, like the rest of us, he didn't see it coming. I know that doesn't make sense but the music told him, and the atmosphere in the

clubs told him. What he thought and didn't say was that being stood there night after night watching the dance floor, it was like watching pigeons. And even though it didn't look like they had a reason, there was a reason nevertheless. Sure enough it was sunny but the rain, especially in Manchester, was never far away.

Inter Alia

Toni Sams

I wanted to say something profound, at least something more than the usual chat up lines, but the heel on my shoe had snapped and it's hard to be deep when you're listing to starboard, already drunk and with a stupid grin on your face. He bought me another drink though, and we ended up friends.

That night I should've fallen asleep straight, the moment my head hit the pillow. That's not how it worked out, though. I kept remembering what my friend said to me. He said the dawn was invented for lost souls. He thought it was funny but he was wrong. Well, he was right and he was wrong. The dawn was the last time I saw my brother. He was in Monrovia for a while after that, then Lagos, then nobody heard from him for years.

I always think the dawn now is when the sky shows off its bruises. They're invisible at other times. But other people don't see it that way. Dawn is eighteen hours until the next party begins. It's getting home and not having to worry about children. Dawn is the only time when the whole world stands still.

My friend is admiring my shoes. He says the only thing more important to a shoe than a foot is the eye. And in his eyes my shoes look gorgeous. I'm leaning on his shoulder to correct my list and waiting for the rain. It's just over the tops of the houses and when it arrives it will stick to every bit of us and for me it will be tears and for him it will be... I don't know. I want to say joy but I don't think rain is joyful for him. Rain is Manchester. Rain is...

We start to walk home, to the uneven click of my shoe and the washed out thoughtfulness of the street lamps. And the birdsong. My friend doesn't notice any of this though, he still has the last tune we heard in his head. He's humming and the

clouds have gotten over the roof tops and that is when I realise how alive I really feel. The warm, soft, hush as the clouds open behind us. I feel the rain, I feel it, and he's still trying to hum but his body's stiffened and the only thing he can think now is that we're getting wet.

Life Story

A Night At The Reno

Antoney G

I first visited the Reno nightclub when I was all of thirteen years old. A little young to be going to a club you would say, but the Reno was like no other club I've been to, then or now.

I was Moss Side born but not bred, having left the area a little under a month after I was born. My mother was white, from Manchester, and my father black from Sierra Leone. After they divorced I was raised by the white side of the family, living in various areas of Manchester which were then all predominantly white.

In those days my brother and I were called half-castes, the term being 'legally used' to explain mixed race people. I knew next to nothing about being black. Most of the schools I went to were all white, and I had no black relatives in England other than my father. My last comprehensive school was entirely white, me being the only non-white there.

However, as I got older I would visit Moss Side regularly because Manchester City's ground was situated there. Usually I'd go with friends who were white, and whereas they felt at odds in the area I didn't. My having an afro hairstyle lead to me going back there to a local barbers. I'd travel almost twenty miles on a two pence bus ticket, then pay fifty pence for the haircut.

In my early teens I ended up playing for a local football team in Moss Side. It felt odd having team mates who were all black compared to the teams at home. At first they called me Two-Tone, a mix of my name and my parentage, but that soon stopped.

I spent a lot of time in The Moss at that time; I felt comfortable there compared to home. At the time I was living on the outskirts of Manchester, which whilst it was exactly rural had hills and the countryside on one 'side' and built up areas on

the other. It was the 70s, a time of the National Front, which was an issue in places like Derbyshire, Lancashire and Yorkshire, and as I lived in close proximity to all three I felt it most.

At home it was all niceness and pie during the day but at night-time you'd get abuse from drinkers and passing vehicles. It was not quite the sundown towns of America in the years of racial segregation but I continually had to be alert once it went dark. Moss Side was the only place I felt safe after dark as a teenager.

The Reno was different. I wasn't scared as I was with my black football mates, who were local lads. At the time the place had the feel of not being legal, it felt run down, and the mix of people there was eye-opening! If I recall correctly it cost me about a pound to get in – put it this way, I put my one pound note in and got no change!

Once inside it felt tight, there were bodies everywhere; men, women, lads and girls; and it was all mixed – black, white, a few Orientals, even Asians. We got there about 2 a.m. and it smelled of sweat, smoke, perfume and aftershave. The pungent sweet sickly smell of cannabis was everywhere – it wasn't new to me but to have so much in one place was different, it was as if that was oxygen!

We thought we were dressed cool in our Levi cords and Slazenger jumpers, but inside I was blown away with what I saw. People were dressed up, and down; men in suits of all colours, designs and materials; women in dresses and skirts. There were hats galore, especially on the older men, and the women all had various hairstyles. To be honest it felt like a cross between Saturday Night Fever and Shaft because of the shirts, shiny, opened to show off medallions, and the leather coats, long and short. To me, I'd only ever seen stuff like it at the pictures or

on TV. Everyone looked so cool, while one or two looked like pimps off Starsky and Hutch.

And the music was so loud it was as if you had to shout to be heard, and it was all black sounds— from disco to reggae, and soul to early hip hop. It wasn't what we listened to at home, nor was it in the charts as such. The thing is everyone was moving to the music, either vigorously or just rocking, and most were drinking at the same time. I didn't drink at the time, nor smoke, but trust me, it felt as if you were doing both as the fumes seemed to be everywhere. I felt so light headed it was unreal, like I was riding a wave of sorts. The whole experience, that first time was surreal. I was in another world, literally. It wasn't all love 'n' peace but it had a stressless atmosphere. You were aware of who was dealing, or who was 'dangerous', so you avoided them; and, for me at least, it felt as if I'd only be in any trouble if I went looking for it — which at the time was a novelty as it usually found me!

After leaving at about 6 a.m. I recall hitting the street feeling as if I'd visited another world totally. In time I'd only go about four or five more times but it still had the same effect and appeal to me. I could never persuade my mates from home to go though, they had that fear of Moss Side that most outsiders had if they weren't black.

I felt lucky because although I was raised mainly in a white community I was able to cross what was at that time a sort of social and cultural divide, kind of getting the best out of both worlds.

Poetry

Weekly Shebeen

Keisha Thompson

Hair sheen is no defence for all this smoke
My throat aches to join the swallowed chorus
Heels are threatening to break clean off
Every time I glance at him dancing with her
It pummels my chest like a domino slap
Tomorrow is church
But I'll be here next week
The blue light is on in this shebeen
When politics toasts rhythm
The filth and love-thy-neighbours pale away
Dipping our troubles in to the pooling bass
In this light everything is glistening like gold teeth
Yes I'll be back next week
As they knock us down on the outside
Occupy our concrete
conserve our culture
We two-step in Raymond's basement
Clandestine spirituality
In full possession of the horns and the off-keys
Someone said there is raid coming our way
But I will still be back next week
Inelegant feet were skanking fire along
Princess street, today our men jerked out of
The political shuffle in to jungle thrusts,
a torrent of blues and blacks and browns and reds
I saw them gnashing at the time, shredding it to
pieces that would still slot into the mosaic of
Our demise, ankles are swollen
Tears are livid, rifts have become internal
There is no way we will return to

a nocturnal humble shuffle
But I'll still be back next week

The Field

Bethany Hermit

Dying to dance
under rays of bright lights
singing new songs that we could
sing to all our tomorrows
we took to a field with the moon,
and stayed there until the field was built upon
with bricks containing our freedom songs in buildings
that were beautiful but roofed
with alcohol, sweat, pissed stained floors
we named this place
The Field in memory of the pastures
underneath it.

Soon we queued forever to get in
and even though our feet
were being pulled forwards
and backwards and forwards then sideways
by songs
that had become familiar
with a thunderous bass leaking from towering speakers,
inside our bodies we stood there, still
looking up for the moon
but like moths
in a whirlwind of awe
settled for artificial lights
because they flashed to red
from green and from red
to nothing.

And in the end
we stood like dead sunflowers
in this noisy place
in police cells and offices
marital courts and churches
on doorsteps, stairways
Asdas and Tescos, Morrisons and Wilkos
at funerals on microphones
with children in our arms
singing songs about The Field we shall
get back too, The Field where we
belonged –

roots shifting
routes shifting
until all roads are lost
in dirt and filth, no soil
until they charge us to sing
and we pay
to truly be in the club.

He Can't Get In The Club

Bethany Hermit

He can't get in the club
I want to be in the club
You cannot enter inside of this club
He can't get in the club

Just stay outside,
grow wild with the shrubs
drop your attitude
next time
wear nice shoes
preferably ones that distract from the face
you have that glint in your eye
that the doormen recognise in the mirror

Mate I wear contacts

Mate you need contacts
Because

You can't get in the club
you want to be in the club
But you cannot enter the club
So you won't be in the club tonight

The Reno And The Nile

Segun Lee-French

They were sweat gargled crushed cinnamon sighs
in a jealous town with apartheid nightclubs.

They were fried red snapper blues
which obliterated guilt with Guinness

And you were gentle lady sweet,
you would come out in your gold shimmer dragons

and cement mixer makeup, caterpillar lashes splatter
black light on your cheeks. I would come feverish

the wind of your decay would castrate me,
my chin scraping the dancefloor.

Scruples: Xmas '85

Segun Lee-French

Tin walkman sings tumbling down
the crowded stairs.

Fish blue dress sucking skin,
blonde lips open to wet gold teeth.
Tinman sees her shuffle bodies,
charismatic convulsions & velvet smiles.

Jilted tinman sings brittle whisky breath,
whines cryptic guttural hate.
Doormen catch him, gently embrace.
Tinman stains a white shirt.
Small stance is strong – crisp elbow strike to chin.
He crumples, soggy fingers
tripping on the step
into amber air.

Tin walkman sings in frozen mud,
his mouth, a dark endless room.

Ghosts Poem

Yussuf M'Rabty

Dub sounds and ganja smoke
Slow grinds
Yet older folks use this place to play dominos
In the days.

But I'm dressed right
Flared corduroys,
White shirt and a trilby hat
For the nights.
And the fact that it's all too big is almost unnoticeable
Under rose tinted basement lights.

Places like this are a real community
I like to just watch whom I see,
But more crucially,
Who sees me.

See, I have uncles that come here
And for every person who comes in
I take one more step back into the fog
In attempt to disappear.

Because I look too young,
The music is too loud
The drinks are too strong
And I just can't enjoy myself

But the others say they're glad I've come.

Childhood Life

Kofi Nelson

During my time of childhood
I lived in Moss Side.
I remember the toys I played with
and the food I ate.

In 1999 when I was 6
I remember one Christmas eve
I heard a knock at the door, a man came in and went straight
into the living room.

I snuck down stairs
looked into the living room;
it was a man in a red suit with a white and red hat and a white
beard.

I thought to myself its Santa its Santa but
then I saw the strings attached to his beard
and from that night
I never believed in Santa again.

Moss Side Days

Abisai Amba

I remember those days like yesterday,
the way I played in the industrial city
and had to watch out
for dangerous objects
that might hit me from high above.

Crescent Blocks

Abisai Amba

The sunshine was bright through the window.

As I got out of bed,

I realised

I was in the old run down slum I call my home.

As I went to wash my face I was welcomed

by icy water.

I turned off the tap and got dressed.

I walked out of my front door.

It creaked closed behind me.

I could hear the mice run across the narrow corridor.

Wonder Crescent

Usman Azeez

Some of the time I spent
at the crescent was fantastic.
I loved the food
and the people were lovely.

Then I started to notice
the wallpaper peeling off walls.

But it wasn't just me:
some people even had rats
helping themselves to the food.
Overnight, very quickly
people started leaving,
children started vandalising
and spraying and stealing.

The crescent was destroyed, a wonder
no more,
it was a broken crescent.

My Taxi (Demolition)

Usman Azeez

I just finished washing the china plates
my mum got me from Canada
when I heard a devastating crash.

I went out to see what all the commotion was about.
There was my precious taxi

smashed by the demolished brick building.

People were staring to check if
anyone was in there and

I remember I asked a neighbour
to get my papers from the taxi
and there
beside the rubble, and my taxi

lay dead my neighbour.

The Half Moon Houses

Kirabo Rizik

They were built 42 years ago; sadly they were too weak to last too long. Hulme ASDA has taken over. The Crescent lasted 20 years you know. They were named Crescent because they curved like the Crescent moon. If I were Alive then I would visit them every noon. The block was so long that they would fit over a million people into the block. Most of the people that lived there were poor. Loads of gangs wanted to sell. They only wanted money. Out of these would mean billions.

Crescent Blocks

Ore Modupe

The houses are dirty and rough, the streets are full of rubble and rats.

There is nothing to do on the weekends, just listening to police sirens:

mum will not let me out because of the drugs and violence.

There's a certain blinding stench, a scene so ugly, so disgusting.

The place stinks like dead rats and expired food.

I day dream about a beautiful place I will live in,

the birds will be singing and floating in the air like a feather.

The scene will be so peaceful; it will smell like roses and strawberries.

To be honest, I think my dream will become my future,
but till then I'm going to have to wait.

I have loads of friends because my school was too small, but it
was also expensive

Mum worked very hard for her money, and we had to pay taxes
and the landlord

So now I'm going to have to get a job as soon as I leave high
school.

Edith's (Est 1949)

Tauzeni Vanessa

Princess Road is a very popular road
but since December, I understand it is very cold,
not all people have been visiting or shopping here
compared to before, now I am thinking very clear.

I don't know if it is because I am black
or is it the 'unwell treated'?
Shop next to me called Noah's Ark.
Is it because I have replaced it with my own African jewellery
or is it because I have changed my shop so surprising?

I don't know what's wrong
but I intend to carry on and be very strong.
My shop is cheaper
unlike the other one it is brighter.
Imagine how cheap my shop is but still
I don't get enough bill.
I am black African and proud
But still get sucked to the ground.

I need some customers to keep living
but now I think I've stopped believing.
I don't get a lot of credit around here,
that is why I am moving back over there.

Each month I get fewer customers
all because of those life stealing betrayers.
During the time I am living here
I keep dreaming of living over there.
I realise it is not me, it is them

and their black people's problem,
just because I am coloured and they're not.
That's called racism, I've been told.

I can't afford a text book,
I have to buy food,
turn the oven on and cook.
My kids can't have a good education,
I don't get why there is complication

I tell you why I haven't stayed here
And I have moved back over there!!!

A Slice

Dale E

In a place where the sheep slept
And the dark spirally lanes crept,
There we kept
A generation's sacred secret.
An unassuming place
Which the bass graced
Sharp and frequent
A loose waist or two -
Unconventional
In its panache.
Between the bedroom and the entrance
Brash outfits which lacked
Material, surely wrapped
In coats soon discarded,
With responsibility and care
The charged dance floor the target,
Feel electric in the air,
Expectant, heated glares
Just steps, no speech in there
A section of heaven
In dis living nightmare.

Refund

Dale E

I count the dues I've paid
But the return is non-existent
I turn and look at his then
To learn it's all inconsistent

He whose dues' roots
Lay astute and pure
Lead and stem to gifts galore
A floral life which causes awe

I paid my dues
Through suffering and flack
An attack of a past
My parents had

I paid my dues
While he just laughed
I've thought it through
Now I want them back

Unidentifiable Human Race

Dale E

I knew I was right
When I said there were aliens
But I'm not trying to stay
Seems their atmosphere is failing them
Some are orange, some are pale and then
There's brown and black
Have they got a name for them?
Men are oh so strange
Some live in close range
But in another place
They live out of weapons' range
And I say I come in peace
Fools try abducting me
With their primitive devices
That's an insult to me
And how am I going to eat?
I don't like any sandwiches
And how am I going to speak
When they use so many languages?
But with no rocket fuel
And no human cash
I'm stuck in MacDonald's
Flipping burgers in the back.

The Dervish Inn

Afzaal K

In this battered caravanserai whose
doorways alternate night and day.
How seeker after seeker with his desires,
abides his hour or two and goes away.

Mint tea and delicious sweets,
served on silver trays.
We talk away the sorrows of
this thing and that yesterday.

The servants clear the tables,
to make room for the sacred pipe.
The hashish is ground expertly,
between the ghulam's palms, heartedly

The chillum is filled with the precious leaves,
the crown is lit crimson red.
We pass the sheesha round,
the ancient ritual begins.

The fragrance of paradise is in the air,
the place one step away.
As I recline on the silk brocade couch
the wide eye maidens enter and cast their spell.

These harem creatures of beauty sway their charms,
I am a soul bewitched, journeying towards ecstasy,
intoxicated, touched by their poisoned lips,
leave me and let me be, till the dawn arrives.

Best Club

Mike M

It was probably the best club ever –
Let's not forget the Hacienda,
I'm a B-boy for life, won't be no other,
I would break-dance on the floor and attract Madonna,
The early eighties, those were the years
When I would spin on my head,
Do a backspin, then a windmill and literally cause an
atmosphere,
The bouncer would say, "Easy Mike,
Ya takin' up de dance floor
Doin all that spinnin and flippin,"
I'd say "Ya betta just chill, cos I'm still trippin!"
Then at two in the morning at the end of the night
It was straight to the Reno,
We be skankin to pure rub-a-dub,
Hulme and Moss Side came alive,
It's five in the morning and we still there givin it the jive
"Where's the shebeens? Where's the blues?"
The police – 'duttu babylon' – wanted clues,
It's 6.30 in the morning, mi 'ead's still spinnin around,
Can't believe I was only 15 and
My top night, it only cost me £5.

Alien Samaritan

Antoney G

Excuse me, but I'm new here,
I feel like an innocent in this land...
Could you help me, lead me,
Possibly guide me with a knowing hand?

It seems like I'm walking through a fog,
A man blinded, with no use for sight...
I'm afraid to step one foot forward,
Confused, do I go left or to the right?

You seem to know your way around,
So firm of step and very self-assured...
If I'm right then you know the answers,
So surely, friend, you've been here before?

I promise I will not be a burden,
No monkey resting upon your back...
Just don't leave me here a-wandering,
I've come this far and your help is all I ask.

Everyone so far has closed their curtains,
And I've no light to guide me home.
You're the first person that I've met
Who's stopped to listen on this strange, lonely road.

Dad?

Antoney G

Didn't meet my Dad until I was fifteen,
He went out for a paper...
An' didn't come back!
Where did he go;
Why didn't he come home;
Was it my fault, didn't he love me?
That's all I asked.

He came out of Africa,
Right after a war,
Settling in England, to find love,
Build a life.
Yet what he had, it wasn't enough.
He became a bigamist,
With numbers two and three 'wife'.

The price of which?
Well, I got cast aside, as did my mum,
Just one more broken home with no father in sight;
It was hard yet we made it,
We battled through,
With me swearing if I met him we'd fight.

That day finally came,
But I had troubles of my own,
Didn't feel love,
Nor like fighting, all my anger was gone.
We talked like strangers,
Or adults, if you like, then I walked away,
At least he didn't call me his favourite son.

Sundown Town

Antoney G

Being raised in a kind
Of sundown town,
Where blacks weren't welcome
As night came around;
By day, being half-caste,
I was kinda 'alright',
The locals only became bigots
With the fading of the light.

It wasn't all that hot,
No rural Mississippi,
Yet old habits die hard
In their place, their country.
People you knew,
Polite an' decent by day,
They just burnt deep inside,
The bigotry kept at bay.

Drink played its part,
The courage it gave;
Though it was only a factor
In the way they behaved.
Being mixed-race back then
Only brought cursory glances,
In the sun they let it be;
It was only as dusk fell
That they thought with white hoods...
Of long burning crosses,
Of black fruit dangling from trees.

Vicious abuse, regular foot-chases,
Sometimes a lot more,
It kept you alert, on your toes,
Seeking out well-lit places.
Aye, as the sun went down slowly
In that quaintly quiet northern town...
You soon knew you were different,
Whatever shade of brown.

Complex Society

Antoney G

Hey there, World, don't be afraid,
I's the same as you 'cept I'm a Moss Side boy.
The only gun I've ever seen is plastic,
Used for games, we called it a toy.

Hey there, Neighbour, don't look so alarmed,
I'm not a danger just 'cos I've got locks...
Don't be judgemental, just give me a chance,
It's just a different cover on the front of my book!

Hey there, Society, go take a look at yourself,
You need to relax, 'n' show a lil' faith;
Get rid of the complex, stop the persecution...
Learn to see we've a right to this place.

Hey there, Decision Makers, you should be aware,
We've escaped the ghetto, we've crossed over the tracks...
We're now a part of the fabric of this area;
You policies are old, relics, things of the past.