

The Listening Voice

The newsletter of the Equi-Phallic Alliance & Poetry Field Club
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"Neither Bow'rs Nor Gloomy Woods"



Once More into ARCADIA!

City Of Material Amnesia

It can sometimes feel that Southampton did not exist before the Victorian period, when much of the city was built. The remnants of medieval wall, tucked behind shops, are strangely incongruous. West Quay dominates. The Bargate with its amputated stumps of wall is cut off from its past. It looks like a folly. No good use can be found for it.

Much of the medieval city was bombed during the war. The poet Martin Bell registered the shock:

Came back on leave, amazed, it was all gone,
Nothing was where it was and all was wrong,
And everywhere looked through to green of park,
Vistas to statues or to distant spires.
And scuttled, numb, to pubs still left.

from High Street, Southampton

Both syntax and city are broken. (1)

In the opening lines of this poem Bell describes the city rebuilt. "Now, neat toy-town blocks of boxes, Noddy shops / With plastics wrapped in cellophane for sale." The gutted city, stripped of its past, was rebuilt in a hurry and all sense of what it was became lost. For Bell, after the war, it was time to "...un-pin / Bravado, unfreeze tears, feel pain."

Where there had once been "Militant ARMS FOR SPAIN boards down the High Street", a struggle for the future conducted by the workers for themselves, there was now a Cold War that penetrated through layers of ideology into the personal space within. On his return he asks "Where is the Phoenix? Surely there was burning?" It is the absence of renewal that is the seat of pain. Where he had hoped for liberating communism, the city, deracinated by war, is characterised by conservatism. Nothing that has happened since has unfrozen Southampton.

In a city caught in the eternal moment, our civic symbol, the Bargate, offers us the illusion of a connection to the past. For Bell, hurt but not yet broken, the survival of the Bargate emphasised the beauty of the medieval city that was lost.

Bar Gate survived, as usual, with its air
Of being left over from some other pageant ...



But the connection was broken and the future squandered, in both city and citizen. Martin Bell left Southampton shortly after his demobilization and never returned.

High Street, Southampton: the poem describes a soulless place — a history lost, or deep in a coma — a city that no longer knows itself. Southampton had suffered a material amnesia; with its symbolic centre so hurriedly rebuilt, a commercial rather than a modernist architecture created a malign enchantment that has proved remarkably persistent. It informed the development at Ocean Village and it is aggressively present in West Quay.

The 'cultural quarter' proposed for northern Above Bar, if it is ever built, has already attracted criticism in terms of its design: "...we feel the imposition of a symmetrical plan on this non-orthogonal site to address the Civic Centre, creates particular challenges for the architecture which, in our view, are unresolved in the submitted scheme. ... The tall buildings lack grace and rather than enhancing the setting of Guildhall Square and the listed park they have an overbearing presence on both. As such, no degree of detailed design can overcome the fundamental failings of the scheme." (2)

Southampton, city of destroyed beauty, has beauty's absence as its inverse 'unique selling point' and civic leaders have made it their business to ensure that there are no flames from which a Phoenix might ascend. Repeatedly, in renewal after renewal, the city has predicted the retail park. It is determinedly hollow.

William Sotheby & the Utopian Mount

“The sweeps of the Itchen, with their bold shores covered with hanging woods of noble oaks, present on every side scenes of unrivalled beauty; and the name of Bevois Mount unites the recollection of an old, and perhaps fabulous, British hero, with that of a man whose courage and adventures were scarcely less romantic than those of the most famous Paladins, and who, to these high qualities, added a refined taste for elegant art and polite literature. What Englishman can look without respect on the shades where the Earl of Peterborough walked with Arbuthnot and Pope! Hampshire readers will, I trust, forgive me, if I add, with peculiar and personal interest, that this classical spot has not long since been haunted by another poet.

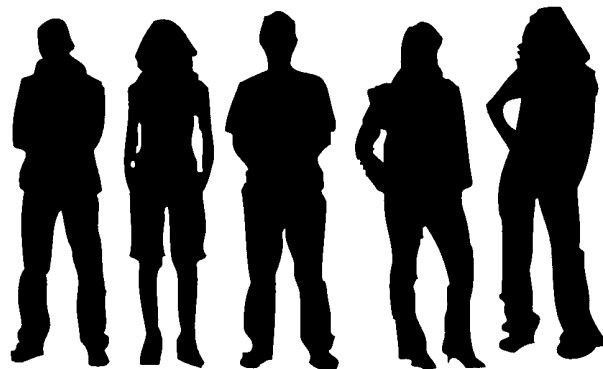
Bevois Mount, originally the property of the celebrated Earl of Peterborough, was once occupied for a time by William Sotheby, Esq. It is on this account that Sir H. E. alludes to it as “the haunt of a poet:” one to whom, as a personal friend, he was strongly attached.” (3)

If we walk through Bevois Valley and ask ourselves how Arcadia has been so transformed the answer might be found in Bullar’s eulogy to Sotheby. Bullar says, “In all his dealings he was singularly accurate ... None of that extensive circle of talent and of cultivated intellect, of which he was the attractive centre, but must have admired the beauty, the extent, the accuracy, of his remarks ...”

In Sotheby we find the end of the pleasure principle and the beginning of data. Behind him, Bevois Mount is an Arcadian idyll but in front of him it is a source of gravel and rents. It isn’t that he was to blame, he merely reflects a historical course toward nullity that the medieval city fathers, in building up the corporate vitality of their new city, could not have imagined. The Victorian genius for reducing somethings to profitable nothings, with all the innovative thinking and fast moving technological developments that such mundane wizardry implies, predicts the toxic assets and hollow economies of the early 21st century.

Martin Bell had worked towards a communism that would have made a new kind of person, it was a content rich vision, but as hope declined into bitterness and the loss of his own past in this amnesiac city, it was the *form* of things that would transform humanity. *Content* was already well on the way to becoming obsolete. The cultural seeds of this economic process had been planted in the past and unwittingly Sotheby had carried them.

YOU ARE ENTERING A DISPERSAL ZONE



With the natural world largely spent we are relocating to online sites and learning to ‘add value’ via portals. Nature has ceased to be absolute and remaindered Nature, which in its scarcity has become a commodity, provides investment opportunities for those with assets to trade and the ability to buy into a gated green world. The Nature Bubble is already starting to inflate. Those of us who are too poor to ‘get on the Nature ladder’ will pay our way in a realm of vicious accuracies and easy sentiments and we will have an excess of friends.

The sonnet below is by William Sotheby, a poet referred to — if he is remembered at all — as ‘minor’ (in his time he was mocked by Byron, see page four). In *Written at Bevis Mount* (4) Sotheby veers away from Enlightenment satire (though he properly acknowledges Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*) and he keeps clear of the gloom explored by Edward Young that would so inform the Romantic movement and the Gothick Revival. Instead Sotheby, a disciple of Gilpin, heads off into the picturesque. (5)

WRITTEN AT BEVIS MOUNT, 1782

Whether I rest in peace, till life’s decline,
Within thy bowers, oh lov’d retreat! or stray
Far from thy shades, my wandering steps away;
To thee, the Bard thou shelterest, shall consign
The meed most due, of this memorial line—
Not formed by vulgar hands, in waving way
Bend thy slope banks, and woods that dim the day.
These elms, that o’er my head their branches join,
A Hero planted, one whom conqu’ring Rome
Had proudly crown’d.—And underneath the gloom
Of yon old oak, a skilled magician sung:
Oft at his call, these sunny glades among
Thy guardian Sylphs, Belinda, sportive play’d,
And Eloisa sigh’d in yon sequester’d shade.

ARE YOU ACTING ANTI-SOCIALLY?



Amnesia & the Inequitable City

The decline of the Bevois Mount Estate and the valley below is foreshadowed in Sotheby's lines. In such comfortable hands the picturesque was a machine for seeing in: it reduced what it contained into a series of functional parts. Such formulations were as capable of the Sublime or the Beautiful as television.

Bevis Mount: it came out of a mythic past adorned by giants; it was articulated in psychoactive garden design by Peterborough and Alexander Pope; it declined into the verbose accuracy of William Sotheby's "impressive eloquence". It was extracted, processed and then sold. The nymphs, ironic or not, gave way to speculators, commodified housing and "the Romance of the Past" in the age of mass production.

Bevois Mount and Bevois Valley, once the locus of pleasure for the few, now abuts Bevois Park, an industrial area built on reclaimed land. By night it serves the pleasures of the many. The prostitutes, displaced from the brothels of Derby Road by local authority action, provide a similar range of thrills to those found in the early 18th century English landscape garden. During a walk down Empress Road at night you will be amazed by Variety, moved by Beauty Ruinous and filled with the Horror of the Sublime. The transitory nature of the prospect, with its shifting lights, its variety of mood and scene, its gloomy shades, will fill your heart with sentiments not available elsewhere in the city.

These girls, our Noble Savages, were forced out of the Jungle (as Derby Road and its environs, in more picturesque days than these, were known); they are subject to the efficiencies of the market and it destroys them rapidly and without mercy.

Amnesia has become the primary economic engine for the inequitable city. Decaying urban areas, reinvented under the aegis of this regeneration outfit or that, are provided with new names and 'street furniture'. The new administrative area of West Itchen was created to dislocate a population and create a zone of investment. It was a conceptual ground upon which could be built SRB2, The West Itchen Development Trust and, later, The West Itchen Community Trust Limited. (6)

As regeneration gave way to disappointment the young inheritors of the streets were renaming the Jungle as 'the Area'. It is the blankness of the term that makes it so appealing. It reflects the amnesiac excess of the commercial and administrative centre and the suburbs. The Area is the antidote to Southampton, it resists it, which is why ever more effort is put into controlling what happens there. And so the dangerous parts of West Itchen — which are the genitals of the city — were recently re-redefined as a 'Dispersal Zone'.

West Itchen & the Utopian Aesthetic

The CCTV cameras that follow you as you walk through the city see you through a series of shifting territories. Discrete maps overlap. The Bevois Mount Estate. The Valley. The Jungle. The Area. St. Mary's. West Itchen. West Itchen in particular bears close examination:

Welcome to the web site for the West Itchen Community Trust Limited in Southampton, a social enterprise for community development and regeneration.



Et in Arcadia Bevis: Poussin's tomb produced an echo in Bevois Valley

As a social enterprise we make our money from commercial property investment but our profits are re-invested into the West Itchen area. We do not have shareholders, we have members and together we are working towards a vibrant community.

Our Mission is:

To work as an independent Trust to continue with the regeneration of the West Itchen area, to champion its needs and to assist the aspirations of the people living and working there. To develop the assets of the Trust and to assist other organisations in the area bid for funds. (7)

The West Itchen Community Trust Limited web site reflects the vibrancy of the regeneration effort:

Working towards a vibrant community...

LATEST NEWS

No news to display

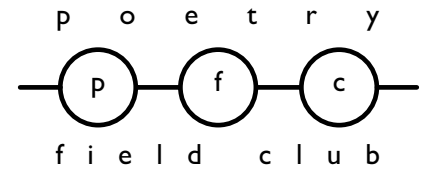


But who wants a life that resembles a job? The only social enterprise we can look to without scepticism is the re-remembering of the utopian aesthetic that inspired Lord Peterborough in the early 18th century. In the face of a politics that had become mired in the venal intrigues of placemen and the honours list, and an economy addicted to speculation and notional money, Peterborough and his fellow utopian gardeners created their own fecund realities from which new cultural currents would eventually pour. He did not retreat into a fantasy, he engaged with cultural power, a potential agency, that was more real than the economics of the South Sea Bubble and the politics of the day, such as it was.

The Moonlit Way to the Nymphs

Peterborough was instrumental in the plotting and execution of The Glorious Revolution of 1688. Later, when he saw the Georgian coup take place he knew the score and took himself off to Bevois Mount to follow the dictates of his Nature as best he could. He cohabited with a lady from the stage and built a summerhouse on a burial mound. He unearthed the skeleton of a giant and erected a Tomb of Sir Beves on the slope above the Itchen. This decoy tomb was sited behind the car park across the road from

Join the Poetry Field Club putting landscape in its place



Operative Poetry: the Muses dancing around Shear
...in a democracy power must always be disguised.

the Sobar. (8) Peterborough's 'operative gardening' worked on its subject using variety, sensation and dramatic shifts in mood. Along with other English Landscape Gardeners of the time, his creation helped to establish and develop an ontological construct, the centred bourgeois self.

In the extensive landscapes offered by poetry, we will use similar methods to generated a new collective self. Building cheap facsimiles of poetry by the oracular well on the Mount we will tempt previously unimagined poetries out of the ground.

Poetry is no more than a behaviour. Inherently anti-social, it has no time for authority, the poem is sovereign to itself. We sing for nothing less than the Moon itself and the Sun itself and the coming and inevitable proletarian revolution. We are all communes now. We create, we do not consume, the Universe.

Colin Cloute
Swain of West Itchen

Appendix: Byron v. Sotheby

They cannot read, and so don't lisp in criticism;
Nor write, and so they don't affect the Muse;
Were never caught in epigram or witticism,
Have no romances, sermons, plays, reviews,—
In Harems learning soon would make
a pretty schism,
But luckily these Beauties are no "Blues;"
No bustling Botherby have they to show 'em
"That charming passage in the last new poem:"

No solemn, antique gentleman of rhyme
Who having angled all his life for Fame,
And getting but a nibble at a time
Still fussily keeps fishing on, the same
Small "Triton of the minnows," the sublime
Of Mediocrity, the furious tame
The Echo's echo, usher of the school
Of female wits, boy bards — in short, a fool!

A stalking oracle of awful phrase,
The approving "Good!" (by no means
GOOD in law)

Humming like flies around the newest blaze,
The bluest of bluebottles you e'er saw,
Teasing with blame, excruciating with praise,
Gorging the little fame he gets all raw,
Translating tongues he knows not even by letter,
And sweating plays so middling, bad were better.

Lord Byron, in *Beppo* (1818);
Poetical Works, ed. E.H. Coleridge (1898-1904).

I can assure him that there is not a literary man,
or a pretender to Literature, or a reader of the day
who does not think and express more obnoxious
opinions of his Blue-Stocking Mummeries than
are to be found in print, and I for one think and
say that, to the best of my knowledge and belief,
from past experience and present information,
Mr. Sotheby has made, and makes, himself highly
ridiculous.

Lord Byron to John Murray, 23 July 1818;
Letters and Journals, ed. Rowland E. Prothero
(1898-1901)

Notes

- ¶ Page 2: These graphics recall those seen on signs placed around the edge of the Dispersal Zone.
1. Martin Bell: born Southampton 1918, died Leeds 1978. Quoted from *Complete Poems*, edited by Peter Porter (Bloodaxe Books 1988)
 2. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) is the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space. www.cabe.org.uk
 3. From *A walk through Southampton; including a survey of its antiquities* by Sir Henry Charles Englefield, with notes by John Bullar (1841) The "Sir H. E." mentioned (by Bullar) is Englefield, antiquary and scientist, b. 1752; d. 21 March, 1822.
 4. William Sotheby, 1757-1833. Written at Bevis Mount, 1782 was published in *Lines* 1834.
 5. *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; made in the Summer of the Year 1770*, William Gilpin. Gilpin's 'picturesque' needs to be explained in terms of its relationship to two other aesthetic ideals: those of the beautiful and the sublime.

6. The SRB2 programme consisted of a £26 million regeneration grant – the largest Government Award outside of London at the time. As a result of this initial £26 million a further £59 million of public and private funding was brought into the area, bringing the total invested into the Inner City area between 1996 and 2003 to £85 million.
www.southampton.gov.uk

7. www.wict.co.uk

8. Information received from Hobbinoll. A further hint in this direction is provided by Elsie Sandell in *Southampton Cavalcade* (Wilson & Co. 1953): "An 18th century tomb used to stand on the Mount ... but has long since been destroyed, though parts of the stone were said to be in a house at the corner of Forster Road and Bevois Valley." This house is now the commercial premises occupied by 'Mr H Carpets'.

Field Trip

On Behalf of
The Association of Anti-Social Poets

Sunday 14th June 2009

5.15PM — MEET
The Guide Dog, Earls Road,
Southampton

We will depart at 6pm to walk about a bit on Bevois Mount and in Bevois Valley. We will visit the sculpture SHEAR and Bevois Park. On discovering the whereabouts of the oracular well we will tempt previously unimagined poetries out of the ground.

7.30PM — EVENT
The Richmond Inn,
Portswood Road, Southampton

We will reconvene in Josian's Bower to celebrate the publication of *Josian in Ermonie* (Bending Oeuvre 2009) which is a poem writ over by Colin Cloute. Nymphes, Shepherdesses & Swains Unite in the Arcady of the Collective Selfe to make a singularity and re-recreate, with poetry, the Universe again.

TAKE NOTE:

To remain or return to this area having been told to leave may be an offence under Section 30(4) of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003, punishable by 3 months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £2500.00.

For further information about
The Listening Voice contact:

www.nonism.org.uk