‘Time thickens, takes on flesh’ — The Other West
Patrick Joyce

St Mary's Roman Catholic Cemetery, Kensal Green, London. Image via Wikimedia Commons, by Justinc

To recall the words of W. G. Sebald as he surveyed the graveyard of Piana, dwelling as he does on the meaning of peasant death in an earlier Corsica,

*In the urban societies of the late twentieth century, on the other hand, where everyone is instantly replaceable and is really superfluous from birth, we have to keep throwing ballast overboard, forgetting everything that we might otherwise remember: youth, childhood, our origins, our forebears and ancestors. ... Soon, we will be left with a present without memory, in the face of a future that no individual mind can now envisage, in the end we shall ourselves relinquish life without feeling any need to linger at least for a while, nor shall we be impelled to pay return visits from time to time.*

My photograph is of St Mary’s Catholic Cemetery in west London’s Kensal Green. It is here that my parents are buried, here where they await the resurrection of the body promised by their faith, and with it the final journey west. They wait alongside some 170,000 others of their religion, mostly Irish peasants in origin, buried in the cemetery since it was established in 1858. Crowded together in life, they are crowded together in death, for the area of the cemetery is only 29 acres. They are not like the dead peasants of Piana. In life they and their like were the unregarded, and they are so in death too: in 1992 the ground level of the southern part of the cemetery was raised, the dead now piled upon the dead, the older, no longer tended graves removed. Kitty and Johnny Joyce survived this turmoil but this fate will no doubt come in time. This expectation is not for those in the mausolea and catacombs of the socially exclusive north-east quadrant of the cemetery; inequality in death, as in life.

In life the harshness of the emigrant’s existence, and so too in death, for the cemetery is a desolate place, trammelled by the Great Western Railway on one side and the Grand Junction Canal on the other, a giant gasworks looming in the distance, factories and apartment blocks abutting on its different sides. My mother Kitty’s family are buried in the tiny churchyard at Kilmokea on the Great Island in Wexford’s extreme south-west; my father’s in Ross Hill burial ground outside the local village of Clonbur in Galway. Both burial places are to be envied by the city dweller, places each of exquisite beauty and peace, the River Barrow flowing in the distance in one, the mountains of Joyce Country cradling the other, in the centre of which is the ruin of *Teampall Bhreandáin*, part of which is early Christian. Piana and these places come together, the dead remembered as part of life’s ordinariness. The Irish

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way of death, in Ireland: the graves are visited and tended over the decades. In Clonbur there are frequent masses when families ‘go on the grave’ to remember. The sons of Paddy Kenny, who is one of the three figures in Koudelka’s great photograph *Irlande 1972*, are amongst the biggest men in the parish, and so have the honour, when requested, of digging the graves of their friends and neighbours. No one digs a friend’s grave in St Mary’s. The burial places there are mostly untended, the children of the dead scattered to the great reaches of outer West London and beyond. It is too far to make the journey, though kin are not forgotten, but communion with them is difficult, sometimes impossible. They linger for a while with us but it is difficult for us to linger with them.

The Catholics, until recently mostly Irish, lie close to those not of their faith in the neighbouring All Souls Cemetery, opened in 1832, and modelled upon *Père Lachaise* in Paris. The All Souls dead are less crowded together than those in St Mary’s, the city of the dead reflecting the city of the living, for in All Souls a quarter of a million dead luxuriate in the relatively open spaces of seventy-two acres. The east London Irish dead share the fate of those of my west in St Mary’s, buried as they are in the equally crowded St Patrick’s in Leytonstone on London’s east side. The two great Catholic cemeteries frame on either side the inner London that first saw the immigrant waves as they broke on the city.

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The All Souls and St Mary's dead share however a similar destiny, the graves untended and mostly unvisited. The new city way of death of the nineteenth century, and of our present, embraces both places of burial. Each have their roads and intersections, each their individual and private plots and monuments like little houses strung along these roads. All in the new ‘garden’ format of the early nineteenth century, the country transposed into the overcrowded city. In All Souls, 550 lives recorded in Britain’s Dictionary of National Biography meet their end here, and no less than 500 ‘members of the British nobility’. The Catholics cannot hope to compete, and while they have their notables these are few and idiosyncratic.3

My parents’ after-history, and that of their like, is not however one of despair, for, as in life, they are among their own in death. Just as their passing was marked by their Church and their countrymen and women, so too was their coming prepared for, as was mine, and that of the generations before me. It is still the way. We recall the words of Walter Benjamin, ‘Our coming was expected on earth. ... There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one’.4 Our road was mapped, our coming expected, our sins prepared for. My father Johnny Joyce’s funeral procession left from the Church of Our Lady of the Holy Souls, in Kensal New Town’s Bosworth Road in January 1963, its destination St Mary’s in Kensal Green. We mourners travelled up the Harrow Road, which Ashmore Road enters a little further to the east. From the house at number 11 where we lived, into the road before it, then to the house of God, and at last via other roads to the grave. The house, the road, the grave; the constituents of what I have earlier named ‘Galway space’, that space now come to London in different form, ‘Joyce Country in the city, Dúiche Sheoighé i Londain’.

In 1858, when it opened as part of one of the first great municipal cemeteries of Britain, the cure of Saint Mary’s was in the hands of the Reverend Francis J. Kirk. In the eight years that followed the opening of the new cemetery, Kirk claimed to have personally officiated at most of the almost 14,000 Catholic burials there. His claim is probably correct. The number of burials is substantiated in the cemetery records, and there were precious few Roman Catholic clergy on the ground in 1858 to do the job if he did not. In 1850 there was only one Catholic church proper in the nine miles between Bayswater and far flung Harrow-on-the Hill. This colossal total of the dead was largely made up of those who had fled the recent famine in Ireland. Writing almost half a century later Kirk reported that what he called the better class of funerals occurred in the morning, whereas the afternoon saw the real rush. It was then that ‘order and decency’ were not so easily maintained. On Saturday he might have between eighteen and two dozen funerals. He wrote as follows, ‘A very large number of the poorer class of funerals at that time were those of emigrants from the West of Ireland, all speaking the Irish language’.5 Money for burials was collected on the day of the funeral itself, when the streets heard nothing but Irish. Because, as Kirk puts it, ‘grief is dry’, public houses such as ‘The Case Is Altered’ and the ‘King William’ — fabled names in my 1950s childhood — although situated opposite the Protestant not the Catholic cemetery, were regular stops along the Via Dolorosa of the mourning Irish. In Kirk’s day, as he reports, the children of the emigrant Irish, as a century later, grew up in ignorance of their parent’s first language.

3 Among them the notable female impersonator of his time Danny La Rue; alongside him two Cardinals, Manning and Wiseman; Sax Rohmer, the creator of Dr. Fu Manchu; and Prince Louis Lucien Bonaparte.
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It was men like Kirk who had prepared the way, he as much as any man. In 1858 he began his labours with the Bosworth Road flock. He was a man who, before his conversion, had first forged his considerable ministerial will as a Church of Ireland cleric in the County Wexford of my mother Kitty. 6 The Holy Souls, opened in its present form in 1882, reflected the special relationship that existed between it and the cemetery, and so with the dead. In the early days the revenues gained from officiating at the cemetery came back to Holy Souls. The dead souls funded the souls of the living, ultimately ours. Margins again, Irish Catholic ones, the dead never far distant from the living even here, Ireland a culture of the in-between. There was however a class system at the Holy Souls, as everywhere else in London. Kirk wrote in 1902 that all Catholics in the country could share in the devotions of our Lady of the Holy Souls, for the mortuary lists are open to all, funds permitting, and around Bosworth Road in the 1850s and for a long time after funds did not permit. For four shillings one could go on the permanent list, for the yearly list it was a shilling, and £25 bought you a marble tablet in the church.

Little did we know in my childhood that we immigrant Irish children were also offspring of the sixteenth-century Catholic Counter Reformation, a late flowering of what Kirk in his time called the ‘Second Spring’. He was appointed by Cardinal Manning, the founder of the Oblates of St Charles, the model of which was St Charles Borromeo, who was born in Milan in 1538. Of noble pedigree, Borromeo had, in good Counter Reformation fashion, a mission to serve the ‘populace’ while being unwaveringly subordinate to Episcopal authority, eventually in this case as it turned out, himself, for he became this authority himself. Kirk was an Oblate, one who offers. 7

Booth’s late nineteenth-century survey of the London poor describes those who, like Kirk, offered:

The priests live as poor men among the poor. Their food is simple, their clothes are threadbare; they take few holidays. They live from day to day; if they have a shilling in their pocket no one in want will ask in vain. Abstemious and self-restrained themselves, they are yet lenient judges of the frailties that are not sins, and of the disorder that is not crime. This kindly gentleness is all the more uncompromising in denunciation or more prompt in interference. It is said that the voice of the priest or the presence of the Sister will quell any disorder; but the trouble recurs. 8

The Oblates proper were in fact usually socially superior products of the English public schools and Oxbridge, though Kirk took his degree in Dublin at Trinity. Then, as later, the higher reaches of British society were drawn as bees to the flower to what would later be known, erroneously, as ‘Notting Hill’. One early figure of this will to serve was Father Douglas Hope, Eton and Christchurch, and a cousin of the Marquess of Queensberry, whose brother funded the St Vincent’s Boys Home. Douglas gave his life to St Vincent’s in the Harrow Road. The home lay but a few hundred yards from Ashmore Road. Booth’s Life and Labour of the People in London (1902 edition) records that ‘On the further side of Harrow Road there is an intensely crowded population of the poorest description’, mostly Irish Catholics. This was

6 Francis J Kirk, Some Notable Conversions in the County of Wexford (London, 1902).
Westway under construction, London (flashbak.com). Westway slices into the other west, 1964–70, along the axis of the earlier canal, roads and railway. A place of settlement, the other west was one of constant disruption too. The author helped build this road, albeit in the subordinate occupation of ‘chainman’, the role of which was to hold a measuring device for the engineers and, with their connivance and accompaniment, drink endless cups of tea in a warm hut, this drinking being both cause and effect of the time taken to complete Westway.
served by the St Vincent’s Home (with its own bakery and printing works). There Hope practiced ‘a remarkable self surrender in the unromantic monotony of the Harrow Road’, dying from the rheumatic fever this self-surrender brought on. He is buried alongside many of his flock in Kensal Green. As Booth put it: ‘His entire devotion isolated him from his fellows in the outside world’.9

Kirk, like Hope, was enjoined by Manning to care for the ‘straggling flock’ of Irish Catholics, many of whom had been displaced from their lodgings nearer the centre of the city by the building of one of the three great ways that shaped the fate of our world, the Great Western Railway. That, the east-west Harrow Road, which carried one in and out of London, and the Grand Junction Canal — all built by Irish labour — configured the psychogeography and the political economy of west London, especially my enclave of Paddington and adjacent north Kensington. This territory was equally plotted for us Catholics by the world the Oblates and their like made, the routes to and from their houses of God and their schools that for us transacted the three great ways The monster of ‘Westway’, the great raised highway of 1972, was to be a fourth.

THE ROAD AND THE HOUSE

‘The one becomes the all at the centre’, to quote again the words of Henry Glassie on rural Ireland.10 For him, Ireland is a culture of centres, the centre managing the constant impress of the margin (the margin of the in-pressing bog, say). At the centre, in the centre, is the house, and at the centre of the house the fire. Thinking about the play of margins and centres upon one another may be a revealing way to understand the life at home and the new life of the immigrant away from the first home, and not only the lives of the Irish. In the new as with the old life the centre unravelled as the margins ate into it, even as the ravelled centre in turn worked to repair itself. Centre and margin could be reversed, turned upside down. In number 11 Ashmore Road, the margin might invade the house, entering the floors and ceilings of our flat, worrying away at us who lived below the top and above the basement levels, most of all endlessly worrying away at my mother as she tried to keep us (anyway well-instructed) children ever quieter for fear of the gales of abuse that would blow from below. A state of barely interrupted civil war existed for eighteen years between my mother and ‘downstairs’, the sovereign territory of an appropriately-named English tyrant called Mrs King, christened ‘Banty’ by my mother in recognition of her indestructible will to fight and — none too obliquely — her diminutive stature and bandy legs. The centre frayed, frayed all our nerves, and by another strange inversion was expelled to ‘out there’, beyond the house, to the territory shaped by the paths that made up Irish London.

Margins and centres are in truth part of one another, each a different pole of how people brought, or failed to bring, order to their lives. The house, the road and the grave; stability, movement, and separation, the ending that is death.11

9 Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London. Volume 3: London and the West End (London, 1902), 126 (also, Chapter 12, ‘The Outer West’).
All space is divided therefore, the Galway space of the Joyces no less than that of number 11. Galway, and the Connacht within which it lies, no place more than this ‘West’ has been the locus of lost origins and hoped-for renewal, for nowhere is more fetishized in Irish culture, and in other cultures too. All space is political. Galway’s imaginative and real spaces are for example distinguishable as the ‘Tory landscape’ of Yeats’s east Galway, the plains, and the ‘Galvia deserta’ of the west, the highlands, including Joyce Country. The ‘radial space’ of the east, with the big house at the centre, and then the ‘itinerant space’ of the west, the space of the poor and the disrespectful peasant, the space of the left as opposed to the right.

Though we are aware that death marks separation, even here division occurs, because we also know that death in Irish rural culture was and is only another margin, for the living and the dead mingle. In ‘The Journey West’ I transposed the house from Ireland to England, and in this essay I transpose the road as well. The grave I have already said a little about, and it is the living of the city and not its dead who are my subject here. The road and the house, between them, are my way of considering the friction of centres and margins in the making of order by the seemingly never-ending stream of migrants into London. They comprise therefore a way of understanding what a ‘city’ is, not just the Irish city but that of the others too.

As Bachelard writes, ‘in its countless alveoli space contains time. That is what space is for’. Although they are often thought such, time and space are in truth not two things but one, and if space contains time then time ‘takes on flesh’, as the great Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, wrote: ‘Time thickens, takes on flesh. Space … becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time’. For Bakhtin, time and space were ‘forms of the most immediate reality’ and not simply the transcendental conditions for the possibility of perception which they were to the philosophers. To recall the words of Pierre Bourdieu, What is ‘learned by the body is not something that one has, but something that one is’.

This charging and thickening of time and space is above all the case for childhood, but occurs throughout life too: the times of our lives are rooted in places, spaces that carry time ‘forever’. I wrote before of how Bachelard puts it:

“The house ... is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways, we would recapture the reflexes of the ‘first stairway’, we would not stumble on that rather high step ... The feel of the tiniest latch has remained in our hands. So too is the road a group of ‘organic habits’. The roads, the paths followed on the roads, form the tiny universe of the child, and they form too the universe of most city inhabitants. These small worlds are the real city for most of its people. Adults, no less than children, occupy tiny corners of the world for the majority of their lives, and it is in these corners that we become habituated to life. When we die we become even smaller corners of the earth. These corners, first in the churchyard, the village of the dead, and then in the modern cemetery — which is now the city of the dead — are the places where roads end and memory becomes located. The times of childhood and adolescence are ‘forever’ rooted in those pathways that make up
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the abstraction ‘city’ and it is in and by these roads, Ashmore Road and Southam Street, say, that time thickens, takes on flesh. When only flesh is left, the spaces of the cemetery thicken time in another way.

Bakhtin and Sheeran are literary scholars, and their examples are drawn from literature. However in Bakhtin’s work it is clear that the literary ‘chronotope’ (simply, ‘time-space’) is duplicated in life and drawn from it. For example, the ‘agora’ (marketplace) of the Greek city state was a ‘real life chronotope’, the techniques of Greek literature presupposing and reproducing it, for only in its space-time could character be formed and freedom practised, so that personal and civic virtue might be made there, in that place, where one could be seen and heard by others. The Roman patrician household was another such place where time thickened and took on flesh. Over time, as a less public sense of the self developed, this expression of the link between the real and imaginary weakened and changed form, but remained crucial. Indeed, how could it be different, for surely all literary genres, all narrative forms, are simply collectively produced and culturally established ways of capturing reality. These depend, as Bakhtin saw, on specific ‘time-spaces’ which are the organizing centres for the fundamental narrative elements of literature, the places where the knots of narrative are tied together, in life however as well as in literature. By the road, the house and the grave are we known and know ourselves. Bakhtin too talks of the road and the house, also of rooms within the house (the bourgeois parlour) and the spaces of the house, for instance the threshold.

Our London agora was the road, our households plebeian not patrician. This is a map of the roads and houses that made up the other west, the enclave of Paddington and North Kensington in and by which childhood and adolescence were configured. It shows the micro-geographies of the paths that connected home, church and school, until school was left, at the age of 16, and religion, if not Catholicism, was abandoned.

Spreading north up the Edgware Road from the original Tyburn — the great ritual site of state execution near Marble Arch — the margins of fashionable Tyburnia were already a slum by the early nineteenth century. Poor London crawled its way behind rich, as Bayswater, Kensington and Paddington developed. ‘Squalid’ housing edged its way along the Edgware Road until it met the Irish-built Grand Junction Canal and Great Western Railway. Then it lurched west along the Harrow Road until this gateway to Harrow public school met St Mary’s Cemetery in Kensal Green. South of the Harrow Road is North Kensington. Further out west along the Harrow Road are the interwar suburbs of Willesden, Harlesden, Cricklewood. Here was the wild west in the 1950s, places full of new factories and the immigrant Irish, and still the places where the old Irish and their kin reside, alongside those of the centre — my sort — displaced since the 1970s by rising house prices and gentrification (displaced again as even these outer suburbs are inexorably poshed up).

The great architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner was characteristically unkind and accurate about this less salubrious side of postwar suburbia, the antithesis...
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of John Betjeman’s ‘Metroland’: Willesden was ‘a dismally incoherent muddle’; Harlesden ‘unremarkable’; Dollis Hill, north of Willesden Green, ‘a dismally indifferent array of industry and offices’; and as for Kilburn, to the north, ‘there is very little to single out here’. And yet for the young of rural Ireland who imagined, and who came to inhabit, outer west London, it was a singular place, its singularity imparted to me as a child by this youth (who danced in the fabulous Banba dance hall). It was for these young of the 1950s, as it was for my mother and father before them, a place not only of work, but of dance halls, of sexual license, of storied pubs. Kilburn and Cricklewood particularly achieved a kind of local fame, something Pevsner had no inkling of. Nor of this unrespectable, masculine song of the other west of that time:

Hammersmith for poverty,
Kilburn for pride,
Camden Town for the rough lie-down,
And Hyde Park for the ride

To the south and east of the cemetery, and beyond North Kensington to the south were and are the fabulous riches of the south, divided, roughly, by Holland Park Avenue, the Bayswater Road and the beginnings of Kensington Gardens. At the southern end of North Kensington, close to the great divide, was the most notorious and the earliest of all the slumlets, Notting Dale, known in the mid-nineteenth century for its potteries and its piggeries. The Dale had also been flooded with people displaced by inner-city railway building, many of them Irish. Crime was another occupation, not least in my time, when the area had become pretty solidly poor white English. The Dale was the cradle of the Notting Hill race riots of 1958. This was Colin MacInnes’s ‘Little Napoli’ in his novel Absolute Beginners, published in 1959. He describes the Latimer Road that went south into the Dale, ‘which I particularly want you to remember, because out of this road, like horrible tits dangling from a lean old sow, there are a whole festoon of what I think must be the sinisterest highways in our city’.

Despite his breathless veneration of youth and denigration of age, McInnes is correct in his description:

This was the residential doss-house of our city. In plain words, you do not live in our Napoli if you could live anywhere else. And that is why there are, to the square yard, more boys fresh from the nick, and national refugee minorities, and out of business whores, than anywhere else, I should expect, in London town. The kids live in the streets — I mean they have charge of them, you have to ask permission to get along even in a car … And there are piles and piles of these dreadful, wasted, negative, shop-soiled kind of old people that make you feel it really is a tragedy to grow grey.

In the middle of Notting Dale is Portland Road, the subject of a BBC television programme of 2013, which asked, ‘Is this the UK’s most gentrified street?’, and answered in the affirmative. Dale and Hill after the 1960s became not only ‘gentrified’ but ‘super-gentrified’, among the most sought-after parts of a bloated,
unequal city. From the Rotting Hill of Wyndham Lewis in 1952 to the Notting Hell of Rachel Johnson in 2006, so went the times. The first described the post-war desolation of the place, the second the trials of selling a ‘rare-to-market’ mid-Victorian house, and tending little Posy, Mirabel, and Casimir, names that displaced the Freds, Dorises and Alberts of an earlier day.  

To the east and north of St Mary’s and All Souls cemeteries lay poor Paddington, my cloth-cap respectable Paddington of Ashmore Road and the east-west Harrow Road, ‘which you’d hurry through’, MacInnes wrote, ‘even if you were in a car, and a canal … that nothing floats on except cats and contraceptives’. Further north beyond the enclave and the Harrow Road was Irish Kilburn. Some distance to the north-east beyond poor Paddington were the real if not quite so fabled riches of Paddington’s Maida Vale and ‘Little Venice’, where the canal turned posh and no longer stank. As always in London, neighbouring but divided worlds, and as always bad houses and good.

Always the house, always. The anchor in the storms of the city. The censuses of 1901 and 1911 show considerable crowding in Ashmore Road early on, worse than in my time. After our leaving Ashmore in 1963 the street worsened again rather than improving, as the houses were allowed to decay further.  

The Paddington Mercury reported in 1978 on the renovation, by Brent People’s Housing Association, of a dilapidated house into what was termed a ‘dream house’, a decent house still being for many, especially recent black immigrants, only a dream. The road also made news the same year for the campaign to ‘Clean Up our Filthy Street’.

Over these steps from the Harrow Road the poor found a haven of sorts between the canal and the railway, in Kensal New Town, another slumlet, as bad as Notting Dale. There, my primary school, St Mary’s, was located, and situated a couple of hundred yards across from it, on the far side of a tiny park, the church of Our Lady of the Holy Souls in Bosworth Road. Around the corner from the church lay notorious Southam Street, though so circumscribed was the world of the child that I only knew the street from the age of eleven, when, a thousand times again, like the Halfpenny Steps, I walked it between home and secondary school. On this bad side of the Harrow Road the future British Labour Home Secretary Alan Johnson lived. His hugely popular memoir gives a revealing picture of the Southam Street he lived in up to the 60s. And yet he scarcely mentions us Irish, except for seeing us as interlopers at the end of his street, kids ‘not from around here’ and recognizable by our red hair (sic).  

21 Census and Press Cutting on Ashmore Road, Westminster City Archives. From Paddington Mercury, 17-10-78, 19-9-78, 7-7-78, etc.; Paddington Times 2-7-82.
Earlier on, the Catholic Irish had thronged Kensal New Town. Kensal first grew up between 1835 and 1850. In 1851, only half the inhabitants were London-born, many of its people making the trek from another west, this time from the agricultural west of England — from Somerset, Dorset, and Wiltshire. Employment was to be found for men in the gasworks and women in the laundries. Laundry work still carries on today, the wealthy of South Kensington still a market. ‘Soapsuds Island’ was the name given the place then and ‘to marry an ironer was as good as a fortune’. Kirk, the first Bosworth Road parish priest, reported that in the late-nineteenth-century the population of Catholics there and in its surrounding area was 10,000, many of them dislodged from Marylebone by the building of the Great Central Railway, the tracks coming into London from the north this time not the west. The dispossessed made their own journey west, the regime of the railroad dictating all, the Great Central and the Great Western. The mile-long Catholic procession on St Patrick’s Day in the Town attested to the faith and to Irish identity. According to Booth’s Survey, the Catholics were the only ones locally who went to church.

Across the canal, on our side, the Nonconformists of all denominations were almost as active as the Catholics, serving their artisan/clerk following with a characteristically numerous range of institutions: Improvement Institutes, Pleasant Sunday Associations, Literary Societies, and savings, sports and medical clubs. The poor Anglican majority mostly went nowhere. Not that they were unaffected, the opposite in fact, for before the welfare state got going religious institutions were almost the only recourse of the poor. On the large-scale Ordnance Survey map of 1894 I can count ten such institutions on the fifteen minute dawdle I took to school as a child of five to eleven years, most of it on the wrong side of the canal: churches, chapels, schools, mission halls, and church halls made up the ten. Religion still provides much of the leaven of immigrant social life, only now it is the African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants and not the Irish, and evangelical religion not the Romanists.
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Further east from Kensal New Town, along the canal, the new Great Western Railway and the canal itself had opened up local employment by 1850, and Paddington canal basin, off the Harrow Road, gave work to a thousand English, not Irish, working 'on the dust', for the canal also became a channel by which London's baser needs were met ('the dust' signified the processing of London's rubbish). The Victoria County History tells us that these workers made up an 'exclusive society', comprised of families extending over several generations, and further linked by shared rural origins. Wherever the people were there were the bees, drawn to the honey, the honey of 'service' and of wish-fulfillment. In this case the community was 'served' as the term indeed went by the Paddington Wharves Mission.

The area around Ashmore Road was superior to most of North Kensington (erroneously referred to as Notting Hill, especially by estate agents). It had begun life more superior still, as a new middle-class 'development' known as St Peter's Park. The area was mocked, as most of London still is, by its nomenclature, its 'greens' and 'parks', 'estates' and 'commons', in this case its model Victorian estate gone rotten, just like 'Rotting Hill' beside it. By the 1860s the middle classes were already moving out, and by the 1880s houses were being sub-divided, as the area became run down. Houses were mostly of nine rooms and might be let to two, three or more families, at first to clerks and well paid artisans, before the tone was further lowered after the First World War.

In 1921, Bayswater’s prosperous Lancaster Gate East Ward was inhabited by 61 people per acre (inner London had about 70 per acre). Harrow Road Ward (the end towards Paddington station) on the other hand, had 180 people per acre, and much the same number in 1931. Infant mortality was very high at this time in North Kensington, and the worst parts of Paddington were designated areas of 'housing stress'. In 1951, with 93 persons per acre, Paddington had the highest living density of all the metropolitan areas of London. In 1961, the figure was 86, still the highest. In 1967, Westminster City Council, which included Paddington, surveyed 16,500 households (it owned 10,000 dwellings), finding that 86 per cent of them were still without their own lavatory or bath. It was worse still in North Kensington. Golborne Ward, which took in Kensal, had the highest population density of any ward in London, seven times higher than wards in 'South Ken'. An enormous number of these people were children.

By 1961, 26 per cent of North Kensington’s population had been born outside the borough. We had in 1963 rejoiced in moving out of Ashmore Road to an ‘estate’ in Fulham, but like many others, rapidly missed the old connections. Alan Johnson went even further afield, to a house in Slough, on his way to the top. Londoners were arbitrarily sent to all corners of the city and beyond, happy to be out of what they had, yet fearful of the new. My mother moved back to a partly reinvented Notting Dale in 1970 — the ‘council estate’ version — and then the Portobello Road area before her death in 1982.

Pevsner and Cherry write of Kensington, and the same is true of Paddington, that it was,
A microcosmic representation of all public housing developments in London... The northern part of the borough is a different story from the south. ... In the area from Notting Hill to Kensal Green the post-war planners faced a century of poverty, overcrowding and neglect. Here one can trace the whole history of changing positions in urban improvement from the piecemeal philanthropy of the late nineteenth century, through the radical slum clearance schemes, planned in the 1930s but not carried out into the 1950s and later to the realization, from the 1970s onwards in favour of rehabilitation and more homely contextual infilling.\(^{18}\)

Homely? Certainly better, though the space which people had to breath in was still very limited, and when a home was made, it was tenant make-do-and-mend that did the making, working always in the face of the restrictive space that the planners thought adequate for the lower orders. British living space per person is still among the smallest in Europe.

The consequences of the astonishing growth of London after the deregulation of the financial sector and the effective destruction of public housing in the 1980s are well known. The property market has reached astronomical levels, sending Londoners into exile from their own city. The market is at one end dominated by huge financial interests, and at the other, the level of quotidian housing, by a huge patchwork of owners, of varying sizes, many of them relatively small. Macro-capitalism and micro-capitalism combine to profit from lives made difficult by this monstrous London ‘Thing’, this ever-new form of ‘Old Corruption’. London changes only to become the same. In nineteenth-century Paddington, as in the west of Ireland that many of its new inhabitants had left, large absentee landowners abounded. In the Joyce Country of my father, the Anglo-Irish aristocracy and Trinity College Dublin had the grip; in Paddington, All Souls’ College, Oxford, and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (later the Church Commissioners), who managed land held by Westminster Abbey and the Bishop of London.

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners were widely criticized for drawing revenues from slum properties. In letting these they certainly laid down housing regulations but these concerned the regulation of ‘vice’ not roofs, pipes and walls. It was as late as the 1960s that the Commissioners escaped the embarrassment of being slum landlords by selling much of the south Paddington part of their estates. The great secular developers came into the picture after 1850 when the streets of London exploded in number with the astonishing growth of the city. This was the city de novo, similar to the city in South America today, and indeed levels of inequality in British landowning in the present are on a par with Colombia and Brazil. About half of 1 per cent of the population own almost 70 per cent of the land, and in London, as elsewhere, these proportions are little changed from the nineteenth century. Indeed, many of the same families now, as then, own London.

The original developers of my own road and its environs comprised an amalgam of big and to varying degrees old money invested in land and titles. This money worked hand in glove with the Anglican interest, holy money. The story of St Peters’s Park is typical of London as a whole, and so that of the Ashmore Road that was part...
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of it. One family dominated, the Neelds. Joseph Neeld (1789–1856) was Member of Parliament for the rotten borough of Gatton in Surrey and for Chippenham from 1830 to 1856 (both seats of which he bought, quite literally so given the politics of the day). He served out his tenure as a staunch Conservative and Protectionist, managing not once to speak in Parliament in those twenty-six years. He was one of five brothers born to Joseph Neeld, a prosperous London solicitor. Joseph the Second speculated successfully in East India and Bank of England stocks and in land in London and Chippenham, where he owned many houses and quickly set himself up as lord of the manor. His real fortune, however, was made in 1828 when he inherited the then stratospheric wealth of almost one million pounds from his great-uncle, the silversmith Philip Rundell, one of the wealthiest men in England. Joseph Neeld had prospered well enough by 1831 to marry Lady Caroline Ashley Cooper, daughter of the 6th Earl of Shaftesbury, a farcical and short-lived affair as the marriage was. 29 With no legitimate heirs he willed his property to his brother John, who was the Neeld who developed St Peter’s Park.

John was educated at Harrow School, a long way up the wilderness of the Harrow Road, and at Trinity College Cambridge. He later became a governor of his old school, in the time-honoured English way. He sat as a Conservative for Cricklade in Wiltshire from 1835 to 1859, and for Chippenham, also in Wiltshire 1865–68, and, unsurprisingly, was created a baronet in 1859. The Neelds in their turn sold land to the Goldney family who were their Wiltshire neighbours and similarly well-connected and even longer well-established. Sir Gabriel Goldney was also a Tory politician, sitting for Chippenham from 1868 to 1885. Poor Chippenham, the town a mere appendage of the houses of Neeld and Goldney. The Goldneys had become wealthy clothiers in the town in the sixteenth century. They too developed land for housing in Paddington (there is a Goldney Road there, and a junction and pub called the Chippenham). However, it was John Neeld that led the charge — there is a pub called the Neeld Arms.

Pushing into virgin Paddington in the 1860s, knowing as all the best developers did, and do, when to release land onto the urban housing market. Neeld granted leases to Edward Vigers, a substantial local builder and timber merchant, the first of many such leaseholding builders. Vigers subleased in turn. And so it went down the chain, sub-leases to sub-sub-leases, and then to speculative owners, of varying sizes, often of one or a few properties only. Living in the area in the 1950s, like most people there, we had no idea who our landlord was, operating always
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d through an agent. Builders and landlords did not always have an easy time. Vigers had already been speculating in land in North Kensington and found the building of St Peter’s Park a risky enterprise, as he had to construct roads and sewers, besides a bridge over the canal. He also had to manage the tribulations of the small builders to whom he had subleased. Over a quarter of the builders on the estate failed between 1870 and 1872. Vigers was himself in trouble but was bailed out by Neeld’s trustees, who knew his worth to them.

By the time of my adolescence, the other west, or at least the ‘Notting Hill’ part of it, had become the epicentre of ‘the 1960s’, the place where swinging London swung most (Soho, the other contender, was pretty much next door anyway). Before the Second World War, Notting Hill had already become somewhat bohemian, and its prosperous edges became populated postwar by the well-to-do, liberal-left intelligentsia and literati of the day, including Anthony Wedgwood Benn as he then was. Notting Hill now became the ultimate in a new version of the exotic slum. This was also a time when the ‘working class’ was being rediscovered, as was ‘blackness’. The West Indian population of Britain, most of it settling initially in Notting Hill and Brixton, increased dramatically from a few tens of thousands in 1951 to almost half a million in 1971 (half a million or so left Ireland for Britain in the 1950s alone). Both discoveries came together in Notting Hill. It was there that high society discovered the low and the black in the form of a new kind of slumming that culminated in the Profumo affair, which rocked the even tenor of the old order, an order that seemed increasingly unsteady on its legs in any case. ‘Club government’ proved however to have powers of rejuvenation not suspected at the time, and it survived and mutated as a strange and very British specimen in the global neoliberal zoo.

It was to Notting Hill that the so-called ‘counter culture’ drew the disaffected in their tens of thousands. Here was what Jonathan Raban in 1974 called ‘The Magical City’. This was not Plato’s city, but ‘a ruined Eden, tangled, exotic and overgrown, where people see signs in scraps of junk and motley’. Here people could explore a kind of hyper-privacy, a place purpose-built for the unrestrained exploration and expression of the liberated self. The London Free School and R. D. Laing were active in the area, which in fact extended over the Grand Junction Canal into my immediate environs in Paddington — the Free School met at the Chippenham, one sort of ultra-freedom meeting another in the strangest of historical conjunctions. All this was pretty puzzling to us natives, and still is to me. On the one hand, it was very pleasing to discover that one was at the centre of the known universe. The sense of liberation, of something new, was tangible but much of what went on was somehow out there, not quite part of what was real, even though with the vast talking up of the place, it became difficult at times to be sure about what reality was. Can this really be ‘swinging London’, stinking Tavistock Crescent and the Portobello immured in the stench of decay, the usually advanced physical decay of the buildings themselves, a smell then found almost everywhere in the other west?

Reality was to be found for us in terms of what came out from within the area rather than what came in, particularly in the shape of music and the fashion that went with it: long before reggae became popular, ska and blue beat were

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30 Osbert Lancaster, All Done From Memory (London, 1963).
pounding out on the streets of almost all of the other west. The Who were originally denizens of nearby Shepherd's Bush, and, in the 1970s, a later generation than mine, Harrow Road made claims to immortality as a birthplace of punk. The Clash came out of the Warwick Estate, built on the ruins of a section of the Harrow Road (on the wrong side of the canal again) that was of a poverty and desperation equal to anything in Notting Dale or Kensal New Town. The Road has its own historian, the perfectly pseudonymed Tom Vague, self-styled post-punk Situationist, indefatigable local historian, ‘psychogeographer’ and political activist, the living embodiment of the counterculture of the time, still punching away decades later. His works include Bash the Rich: The Radical History Tour of Notting Hill (2007), and Getting It Straight in Notting Hill Gate (2012). Not many kept the flame like him.

Instead, with the 1990s, and reflecting the times perfectly, came the bromide version of Notting Hill in the film of the same name. This, as Tory Boys and Tory Girls flooded into the area, expensive dress shops proliferated, and super-gentrification moved relentlessly north up the Lane. Davids Cameron and Beckham now have residences in the area. This is at one end, the posh end, while at the other were and are the immigrant waves that followed the Irish and the West Indian: the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Moroccans, then those from the Horn of Africa. Harrow Road itself continues to be slowly gentrified but remains still fairly intact, grimmer in fact because the life of the streets is gone, and the ultra-local is no more. The ownership and style of the adjacent shops, pubs, cinemas and services (medical, legal, and so on) changed little between prewar days and the 1970s. These shops catered for almost every conceivable need, so that one rarely had to leave the area. This represents a degree of lived and densely textured continuity unimaginable today, when shops change so much and so often and provide so little, and when local services have gone.

Memory now, my memory, is structured by this seemingly changeless succession of way stations on the roads of our west, the same shops and offices always returned to, the same people always in these offices and shops. The shops; Pearkes the grocers, the ‘Home and Colonial’ where the ‘rations’ of post-war London were to be had, Holtoms the corner shop, the cobbler on the corner, framed by the window and seemingly always at his last, his fingers deformed by his trade. The offices; the rent office, the post office, the office of the ‘poor man’s lawyer’. Memory is scaffolded thus, by the incredible force of things, by the buildings themselves, their exits and their entrances. This is why Bakhtin was right, why time and space are one, why the house for instance, its thresholds and its rooms (the kitchen with its centre at the fire) are real ‘chronotopes’. Indeed, as he saw, at bottom there is no difference between real and literary ones, for not only is literature structured by narrative life is also, and it is only the real time-spaces of life that because they make narrative (and hence life itself) possible, make literature possible too. As Bakhtin wrote, ‘The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. All the novel’s abstract elements—philosophical and social categorizations, ideas, analyses, cause and effect—gravitate towards the chronotope.

34 See www.bbc.com/news/magazine-18394017
36 For the material world, especially in its nonhuman forms, as both the scaffolding of memory and the ‘props’ that make it possible see Patrick Joyce and Chandra Mukeri, ‘The State of Things Rethinking State Theory and History’, forthcoming in Theory and Society.
now as then, endlessly sucking its people in and spitting them out, an eater of people. Only, there has been a strange kind of reversal too. In photographs of the main thoroughfares and 'respectable' side streets like Ashmore Road in the 1950s and 1960s there is apparent to me now an inverse ratio between the awfulness of the inside of the houses and the marked order and relative prosperity of the streets when they presented their best face, usually in the form of the shopping street. Now, the betterment of the inside of houses is matched by the bleakness of the streets outside, as in the Harrow Road of the present. Presenting the best face, being 'respectable', back then might involve the pristine unused front room, with its unplayed piano and its unused best china, but this was a mark less of the overcrowded and mostly tenanted other west than of areas where the working classes were able to buy or rent a whole house, however small, classically in the industrial north and midlands of England. There the 'front room', and the internal configuration of space within the whole house, represented the rage for and obsession with order that marked the lives of those who were constantly subject to uncertainty and disorder. Nonetheless, the internal configuration of homes in London's other west — spatially and temporally serving the purposes of eating, washing sleeping, defecating, socializing, gendering and so on — did its best to mimic the aspirations evident in the whole house, even if such aspirations were so often cruelly abused by circumstance.

Creating order, balancing the centre and the encroaching margins, was central to the old proletarian life everywhere. It was not only a matter of the times and spaces of the home but involved the constant mobilization of the repetitions and rituals that made control over lives possible. This is what the anthropologists call the management of liminality, the cultural framing of marginal and therefore threatening times and spaces, above all the patrolling of the contours of inside and out, of the body — the anus, the mouth especially — as of the house. So then, now, but with significant differences. The old proletariat is replaced by the new 'precariat'. Realtors in the USA tell us that the Jacuzzis in American houses are used only once or twice in their lifetime. However, the old rage for order usually meant knowing and keeping one's place, the new aspiring to get out of it.
This prewar London in the midst of ‘the sixties’ meant living in different times at the same time, the one time contradicting the other. The realities around one were not just of prewar days, however, but as much those of Victorian London and nineteenth-century Ireland. Nicholas Roeg’s *Performance* (1970), with Mick Jagger and Anita Pallenberg, was filmed in Notting Hill’s Colville Square, a study of the excesses of the new freedom and its curious links to the old violence and an old London, that of gangs and their territories, their ‘manors’. The contradictions of the time are caught in it, as they are in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow Up* (1966), a hard-eyed study of a new kind of bourgeois urban alienation emerging in the midst of our manor’s plebeian ancien régime. The film-makers did one job on the sixties, the novelists another. The other west was the stage set of both. However, it was a photographer who has perhaps left the deepest mark, Roger Mayne.
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The fantasy of architectural modernism; the planners’ Trellick Tower, completed 1972

The writers included Jonathan Raban, but it is Colin MacInnes who is best known. In his *Absolute Beginners*, for all his clarity about what the place was really like, there is the persistent romanticization of Notting Dale as his ‘Little Napoli’. The cover of the first edition of the book carries a photograph of Southam Street (in Kensal) and in the background is Enzo Goldfinger’s newly built Trellick Tower, for a time the largest single-building residential block in Europe. The crumbling old and the super-modernist new. The photograph is by Roger Mayne, whose 1,500 pictures of Notting Hill’s Southam Street have become emblematic of the other Notting Hill, not the newly ‘trendy’ one (the word ‘trendy’ itself only became trendy in the early 1960s).

In ‘The Journey West’ there is a photograph of the crumbling houses of this street, which I contrast with the relative order and respectability of my own Ashmore Road. Yet Mayne too, for all the brilliance of his presentation of the squalor and vibrancy of the area presents once again a view from outside. He is another bee to the honey of the other west, like the nineteenth-century clerics who came to serve, service the nectar that nurtured them. Mayne was like many others in finding in his own version of Little Napoli nurturance to compensate for an emotionally and imaginatively limited middle-class childhood. Mayne’s view of the street is endorsed by the insider Alan Johnson. He is right to do so, and Mayne and Johnson between them present a compelling picture of the Street and the London it represented. Mayne was a great photographer, by any measure. His Southam Street photographs remain his most celebrated works. They have been exhibited worldwide and were a highlight of Tate Britain’s blockbuster exhibition, *How We Are: Photographing Britain* (2007), for which his *Jiving Girl* (1957) was the show’s poster image. The entire series of his photographs is now held by the V&A, part of the ‘historical record’, how we are. These photographs have also come to represent what some historians now understand as the social history of the postwar working class. There is more to be said, however.

Southam Street is for me the street of a thousand paths, a thousand walks. Memory is written on the body of the child and teenager. It is what photographs cannot say as well as what they can that is part of what they are. Of the two Mayne images on p. 94, one is a typical photograph of the street at play, full of children, as Mayne so often photographed it.

In the second photograph there are no children but for the pram outside, and now older people exist as well. In a lousy street, this was one of the lousiest sections: the photograph intersects with my thousand-fold memory of the street better than most of the others. In a street that stank, this corner stank the most. To the child’s memory, manifest now but made in my body then, the rotting windows and doors and the makeshift curtains, and the even more than usual awfulness of the disrepair of the buildings, convey the sadness and the destructiveness of the place in a way that the other photographs do not. Here

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39 For an account of these writers and of literary representations of Notting Hill, see Miranda Davies and Sarah Armstrong (eds.), *Inside Notting Hill* (London, 2011). As well as Raban and MacInnes, see the black novelists, Michael Moorcock and Mustafa Matura. Nell Dunn was also writing about working-class south London at this time, and the playwright Ann Jellicoe about lower class London. Jellicoe was married to the photographer Roger Mayne.

40 On the Tower, see Jerome Borkwood, *Tales of the Inner City*.

41 [www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/how-we-are-photographing-britain; The Street Photographs of Roger Mayne](http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/how-we-are-photographing-britain). This includes the preface to the 1986 Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition catalogue.

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The street dominates the people, who by comparison with the other photographs cede precedence to the road and the house. The road and especially the house predominate, as they do in my memory and my senses, as they did in the life of the people who lived there, who were forced into the street by the awfulness of the houses. What the photograph cannot convey is of course the other senses beyond sight, and as regards that sense in always framing the world they always exclude as well as include — the insides of the houses, figures of order in the streets (the political sphere), the other streets adjacent, all similar, but all different. There is no weather in the pictures, no seasons, which existed even here. There is no colour. And there is no sound. The house is occluded by the road, as is what goes on in the houses. Mayne mostly photographed at certain times of the day, when children were playing and young people out. We do not see the street much at other times. Like MacInnes, Mayne emphasized children and youth, for the child in postwar Britain was a symbol of hope and of what was new, contrasting here with the street and what was old. In fact, the houses do not really exist at all, the street itself serving the interests of an aesthetic of decay, of the crumbling city.

Mayne said he photographed Southam Street because he thought it was ‘beautiful’. ‘My reason for photographing poor streets is that I love them,’ he stated in the late 1950s. ‘The streets have their own kind of beauty, a kind of decaying splendour.’


44 In ‘The Journey West’ essay in Field Day Review 10, I began with some thoughts about Josef Koudelka’s magnificent photograph, Irlande 1972. Koudelka was another admirer of Cartier-Bresson, but it is also to an earlier tradition that he reaches back, the pictorial, for his photographs always have a studied, staged character, and it is not coincidental that he spent much of his earlier life as a photographer making images of the drama in his native Prague.

The houses form a sort of frieze in front of which people move (and they do move, this catching of people in action, especially children and young people, being a wonderful achievement of this follower of Cartier-Bresson and his desire to capture the moment). The photographs are an example of the contemporary current of ‘street photography’, and so part of the ‘documentary’ tradition. Twentieth-century truth became located in this tradition, and it is by photographs like these that we know, or think we know, the recent past of London and Britain, and Ireland. The tradition of the photograph as document displaced an older one of the photograph as a picture, but the pictorialist tradition is just as ‘true’ as what came after, seeking as it did to find the essence of the situation in a way we may now find naïve — the essence, say, of family life in the family or the marriage portrait.

In terms of what they cannot help but exclude, but which is sometimes forgotten,
these photographs, all photographs, are a world without the other senses. Of hearing: the fraught arguments emerging from basements and front doors, the sheer sense of people's helplessness I felt even as a child, the barely suppressed violence in people's behaviour, for the street was riddled with petty crime and youth gangs were numerous and vicious.\footnote{Alan Johnson takes a remarkably benign view of local violence throughout This Boy.} The sounds of street life, the smells. The smell of the bubble gum factory at one end of the street and mingling with it the stench of the Robin Hood and Little John pub across the road, both announcing the beginning of my morning walk down the street. Here, in a cleaning job that was far too much for her frail form and health, my mother was forced to work during one of the prolonged periods of my father's ill-health. In memory, the smell of dirt and decay lingers most, dirt and decay to the lived senses being an altogether different matter to their presentation through the photographic eye.

Neither is there in these photographs the touch of the street to my feet as I walked it morning and night, through all weathers, or as I felt my way through it in the midst of London's smogs, the handkerchief around my mouth black by the time I reached my destination. It was then I tasted the street, the smog given added strength by smoke from the steam trains that ran at the back of one side of the street. Malcolm X and Brendan Behan, who both saw the neighbourhood, and probably the Street, and who both knew a thing or two about slums, were taken aback by the awfulness of the place, an abomination that ruined people's lives.

Southam Street and its like were no different half a century beforehand. Worse indeed before the welfare state came to the rescue. Brutalized by extreme poverty, people were terrorized by the various manifestations of Victorian philanthropy that were still manifest almost half way through the twentieth century. In the Dale, for instance, the writ of the monitorial Improved Tenants Association and the Harrow Mission ran unchallenged for a good proportion of the twentieth century. The Mission was an offshoot of Harrow School, as was the Rugby Club of Rugby School, the Club letting the old school down in the fifties when it was an epicentre of the race riots of 1958.\footnote{See, 'The Journey West', on the public school clubs.} Notting Dale was also a home to the "The Cruelty Society" whose ever-present threat was to take away one's children; and to the 'Tuppeny Leanover' where men who could not afford a bed slept upright (attached by ropes to a pole). Present behind all of these was the spectre of the Workhouse, where for a day spent breaking stones a night's lodging was to be had. Such was philanthropy.

Yet even here, the heart of the home, the kitchen and the kitchen's centre the hearth, could serve as the point around which decency could be wrung from that life. The testimony of those who knew the twenties and thirties as well as the fifties and sixties in Notting Dale, and North Kensington, shows us this, and takes us into the houses.\footnote{'Our Homes, Our Streets', Notting Hill Community History Series, no. 3, 1987, and 'Women Remember' in the same series. See also on Notting Hill and Dale the online material of History Talk (the interviews of which are at present currently unavailable): Patricia E. Malcolmson, 'Getting a living in the slums of Victorian Kensington', Vol. 1 no. 1, London History; Liz Bartlett, Having a grand time: North Kensington memories of days out and time off; They were happy days: memories of growing up in North Kensington; An old inhabitant, Kensington, Notting Hill and Paddington with remembrances of the locality 38 years ago; all Kensington and Chelsea Community History Group, as are Changed destinies: memories of the Spanish community in London; Andrew Duncan, Taking on the Motorway: North Kensington Amenity Trust, 21 years. See also, Notting Dale Urban Studies Centre, Looking back: Notting Dale 1900 onwards; Notting Hill Peoples’ Association Housing Group, Losing Out': a study on Colville & Tavistock; Nicola Soames, North Kensington and Notting Hill: a select bibliography (London, 1981).} The fire range in the Improved Tenants Association flat became the hearth, around which things turned, 'as we did everything in one room'. Later on, Pearl Jephcott, a scrupulous observer, recorded how the 'one room flat' of the West Indian migrant was better kept than many a white habitation, a Jamaican women's room being furnished 'by the most lush of Edwardian tastes'.\footnote{Pearl Jephcott, A Troubled Area, Chapter 6.} What was wrung from life was missed, at least for the white English, with the coming of the new council estates.
There is a poem called ‘Southam Street’ by Gavin Selerie in which one of the former inhabitants explains,

I’m not complaining mind
I’ve got my own place-
one family one place
that’s what you get
with the modern.

And on Trellick Tower, now a grade II government-listed building, which was at once a salvation and a new kind of scourge:

the lift section, with ten bridges
four funnels and lifts like a castle
it’s called the ‘Psychiatric Wing’
because when the lift breaks down
you don’t want to come out
the best view of London/she said.

The old way of life was completely obliterated, for the whole street and neighbourhood were demolished. The people of the other west moved on, to their own houses if they were very lucky (and if they were West Indian, out of necessity). Chiefly, however, they moved to the new council estates of the 1960s and later. These are the words of Kit Roper, in the 1980s, an old inhabitant of Notting Dale: ‘it doesn’t seem possible what they’ve done. You thought you wouldn’t ever forget it, but you did. That’s how it’s gone. Unless you had a photo of it to show people. Otherwise you have forgotten how actually it was’. Roger Mayne, perhaps, has the last word. Perhaps, for the legacy of these streets is to be found in the minds and imprinted on the (often sickened) bodies of those who lived there and knew them, and on their children and their children’s children. Yes, the past has yet to happen.


II

OTHER HOUSES: THE SUFFERING OF THE IMMIGRANT

In *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, the Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad relates how the immigrant lives along the fault lines of the state. These fault lines are at the core of our identity, for not to have a state, a nation state or otherwise, is not to have a home, at least in the modern West. The immigrant is always anomalous and therefore, out of place, a ‘displaced person’ in the language of a devastated postwar Europe. Place therefore seems to be central to our identity, and place in this sense, the new ‘home’, is ultimately in the gift of the state. Because the immigrant is out of place Sayad writes that she or he is always ‘at fault’, so strong is our state-given understanding that being in place means to be accepted, someone who is not ‘at fault’. As well as at fault the immigrant is always ‘on trial’, waiting at the door for entry in.51

This suffering of immigrants and of their children is common to all who move to new habitations, but in different ways and to different degrees. In the other west of the London I knew, the Irish and the West Indians expressed these differences in their own ways. In ‘The Journey West’, I have described something of this experience of arriving and being anomalous and at fault. This description involved the rural Irish home left behind and the new home found in London, at the kernel of which was the physical house itself, the lost Irish rural house and its meanings, transplanted to the English house found, in my case the one in Ashmore Road into which the Irish meanings were poured. It is possible to understand this other immigrant experience, one of other houses beyond those of the two islands, in terms of the Caribbean house and the London one. Of course there were and are all the other immigrant experiences of London. The immigrant family from 1930s, educated, middle-class Germany, for instance, recreating in a North London house the house of home, the transported middle-European/Jewish kitchen set beside the cosmopolitan space of the inviolable ‘study’.52 However, in thinking about the other west it is to the other of this other west that I turn, the immigrant Caribbean one.

Unlike the Irish, to many West Indian emigrants Britain was already ‘home’. Schooling systems and the culture they implanted were ‘British’, as Barbadian Austin Clarke among many others, informs us in his pregnantly named *Growing up Stupid under the Union Jack*. After centuries of to-ing and fro-ing, the Irish knew what to expect. Not so the West Indians, for on arrival in Britain they became indiscriminately ‘black’. To go home, and then to be rejected was a hard bed to lie on, one the Irish did not have. Nonetheless, while the Irish had the advantage of whiteness it also took their arrival in Britain to finish off the business of making them Irish, a business long begun in the tangled history of the relationship between the two islands. Britain, especially England, was in no sense ‘home’.

The complex racial hierarchies inherited from slavery and empire in the Caribbean had differentiated shades of blackness at home and given each its place in the hierarchy, but in Britain these were set at nothing, also the distinct island cultural differences. Paradoxically, not having an identity, being anomalous, created an identity for the immigrant anyway. Given the history of the British

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Empire, being black was at the highest pitch of being anomalous. And being out of place was also a product of coming to England with the expectations of someone who was perhaps quite high up the skills hierarchy at home, unlike many of the Irish. Many black immigrants came with a level of education higher than the whites they encountered in daily life, and often with a respect for education not paralleled by the working-class English.

While the 1948 Nationality Act granted full citizenship to all Commonwealth citizens, the reality, and the legality, of discrimination in Britain on racial and ethnic grounds made the suffering of the black immigrant all the more intense; this was also the case for the Irish, if less so. 'No Irish, no blacks, no dogs', words to a present generation perhaps known best as the title of Johnny Rotten’s first excursion into autobiography, were common on the advertising boards of British cities, including the other west (long before this time, my parents experienced this kind of discrimination in the 1930s, before in the 1940s they were needed for the war effort). It is easy now to forget that as recently as the late 1960s racial discrimination was perfectly legal in Britain, the government Race Relations Acts of 1965 and 1968 limiting it thereafter, at least in theory, though a historically parallel series of immigration acts, curbing non-white immigration, told against what slow advances there were.

There was much ground to make up: a Gallup poll of 1958, reported that over 70 per cent of respondents were against ‘mixed marriages’. The long history of slavery was played out on the ground, on the streets of the other west. The Notting Hill race riots erupted precisely in those streets that MacInnes imagined as sucking on the tits of the Latimer Road sow. I missed them, having made the journey west to County Wexford for the summer holidays, but a little later, on the corner of Southam Street and the Golborne Road, where I went back and forwards to school, the Antiguan carpenter Kelso Cochrane was brutally murdered by a gang of young whites. The history of the aftermath of the riots is almost as shameful as the riots themselves: the local publicans, the local authorities, the local MPs (especially the Labour one), the press, the police, the Church, Parliament, all exemplified this shame, by directing blame away from their own overt or covert racism and towards the totally innocent immigrant, for immigration itself had become, and has remained, the culprit. Local authorities especially, for the Royal (sic) Borough of Kensington and Chelsea had a long history of ignoring the plight of North Kensington. From the days of nineteenth-century Vestry government onwards, this part of the other west was the neglected child of super-rich South Kensington and Chelsea.
Although many West Indian immigrants did not come directly from rural or farming backgrounds, their story is also, like that of the Irish, part of the greater story of the death of the world of the peasantry in the second half of the twentieth century. Plenty of those with the experience of labour in agriculture and of owning small farming properties did migrate. In the 1948 census, 50 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women worked in agriculture. Side-incomes might be got in the cultivation of what were in the circumstances micro-farms, in general considerably smaller than the Irish ones, and a very large number of people were scarcely more than a generation away from the land. People still lived in the shadow of slavery, and of the slave masters. In the plantation economy of Jamaica in 1950, farms of over 100 acres were only 1 per cent of the total number, but represented 51 per cent of the total acreage, while 70 per cent of farms held only 14 per cent of the land.

The transplanted Caribbean house has been considered by several scholars, the West Indian ‘front room’ for example in some accounts exemplifying elements of what was left behind. Others argue that the front room is less a matter of transplantation and more one of adaptation to the forms of respectability immigrants found around them in England. But surely it is both, and in a curious and circular way, because the respectable, Victorian English bourgeois or working-class ‘parlour’ was first exported via the colonial process to Ireland as well as the British Caribbean. New meanings were accrued in the process and new additions from the indigenous cultures, extending the circle back to the metropolis, and then in the future sending it back again to the ex-colony. So, there is no single point of origin, yet there are strong distinctions nonetheless, ones rooted in a shared but dramatically differentiated culture, that of the colony and originally of slavery.

In Caribbean culture the house, unlike the Irish farmhouse, was more a sort of congeries of spaces, the yard (or plot, garden) and the house together, the house by itself of less significance. The potential disparateness of these Caribbean spaces (cooking may be done outside for instance) is physically curtailed by the picket fence (at least in rural areas, for in urban areas this is more difficult, yet still the fence is there, culturally, an imagined one but still real). Culturally, coherence is given to the habitation through the deep significance of the ‘yard’, which signals the unity of the habitation itself; the space that is one’s own and can be called ‘home’, and the space that above all represents the
continuity of the kinship group. 61 Yard is a synonym for home, especially in Jamaica. 62 The yard is also a place of social exchange; and there are specialized yards, for medicine, healing and religion say. The yard is particularly important as a place for growing things and supporting life, a kind of garden in fact. There seems a deep connection between the kitchen, and within it the hearth, in the Irish house and the yard in the West Indian one (the garden is markedly less significant in Irish culture than in British Caribbean). And these connections are profoundly historical in both.

Both can be taken to be real chronotopes, real places where time and space are most deeply sedimented. The yard/garden is integral to the history of slavery and colonization. In one sense the colony is itself a sort of garden (a recreated garden of Eden), in the form of the plantation, and there are obvious similarities between the plantation process in Ireland and in the West Indies. Within the plantation there is the distinction between the great house and its compound and the locations of those who labour, especially marked in the case of the black, slave colony, where the slave village and within it the yard/garden has been taken to be the earliest expression of collective identity in the slave Caribbean. African-derived forms of religion were practised there, often syncretically with Christianity, forms feared and looked down upon by the colonizers, Obeah for example. It was in these spaces that slave revolts were planned, on ‘negro ground’. The yard/garden was for the powerless at once the smallest and the largest space.

Just as my parents as immigrants carried the house in Ireland within them to the one in England, so it was too for the West Indian immigrants that surrounded us. It was the model of what they tried to build, and the material form of what they had lost — material because the physical house imprints itself upon our bodies, so much so that some anthropologists say that the house is kinship. 63 Sometimes this original house was what they wanted to lose, something that had become inadequate or even repellant to them. Sometimes the houses they inhabited in the original home were other than those I have described in the Irish case: many fled from Ireland who lived in houses totally inadequate for their needs, from town houses, rented ones, poor houses and poorhouses, the barely housed, houses that were not of the Irish rural type that made up the majority. Coming to the new house in Britain may have been a liberation, though it was more often a desperate disappointment. Nonetheless, the Irish rural house and its Caribbean cognate were the type of what ‘home’ meant and what it should be in the culture of these immigrants.

Kinship and the roots of belonging are formed by repetitive bodily practices in whatever kind of house is inhabited (houseworking, sleeping and so on). Life and death in peasant culture are rooted in these practices too, in the significance of eating for example, bread being linked to both death and reproduction. The house is not merely a container, not even an expression, but a cause, an agent. Through its practices the whole nature of the social is encoded and laid down in us, the social of family and kin, of age, gender, generation and their hierarchies, but also more widely the social of the community and the state. In short, the political is
encoded for us there. The term ‘economy’ derives from the idea of household management, from Latin oeconomia and Greek oikonomia, and oikonomos ‘manager, steward’ from oikos, ‘house, abode, dwelling’. The house encodes the religious as well as the political, for in the Christian faith it is the house of the Father that promises to embrace all, redeem all. In the King James Bible, in John 14:2, we read ‘In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.’

There are many accounts of the black and white inhabitants of the other west that help give human expression to the anthropology of the house, and above all to the suffering of the immigrant. They have their different uses and values. But I have found nothing as eloquent as the collected ‘testimony’ of West Indian immigrants to London in the mid-1970s produced by the white American sociologist Thomas J. Cottle. He does not tell us of the transplanted home but of the struggle to find a home, so that we must read this struggle through an awareness that it is played out in terms of what is lost and found, relinquished and remade. Donald Rodney’s photograph In the House of My Father helps us fill in some of the absences, however. It is a close-up image of his own hand, in which sits a minute sculpture of a house constructed from pieces of Rodney’s skin removed during one of the many operations he underwent to combat sickle cell anaemia, an inherited disease that affects people of African and Caribbean descent. The exhibition from which the photograph is taken was dedicated to his father who had died in 1995. The house is fragile. It is two storey, more like the English house than the Caribbean one perhaps. It is made of a skin that is itself however not English, or at least not made first within the shores the father had come to. The black skin makes the new house just as the old house does.

Cottle’s technique is one of listening hard over a period of years to relatively few people and then producing a representation of the talk he heard, and not merely the direct words of the interview form, as is usually the way. This has produced a remarkable account of these people’s experience. I shall quote his people’s words at some length, for the piercing truth they have, and I shall intersperse their words

64 Paul Ginsborg, Family Politics: Domestic Life, Devastation and Survival 1900–1950 (Yale, 2014). This encoding of the social and the political is a subject in my next essay in this series, where I explore what it means to have a nation, and to have a state.

65 On the eclipse but not the extinction of the household as a modality of governance in relation to the pastorate and to pastoral power, see Michel Foucault, Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977–78 (ed.) Michel Senellart (London, 2009).

with my own, brief commentary. Of the London house found in Cottle’s chapter on housing and the feeling of space that his respondent’s have, the centrality of the house to the whole immigrant experience becomes apparent. As he writes, housing is the ‘single most effective cause of segregation’ for the black immigrant in London.

Warren Oster is sixty-six. His is the usual story of poor rented housing followed by the passage from one council flat to another, one only slightly less inadequate than the previous one, especially as the family grows. Energy wanes, hope fades, resignation comes as he fights what he calls ‘the battle of the house’. Because he is black the battle is especially hard.

Throughout his life he would tell anyone that employment and education were the vital aspects of living, but to himself he admits that it is the home which above all determines whether a man is happy or not: ‘Take a happy man, he would always say, and put him in an unhappy house and you will see a change in that man. Overnight, you will see that the spirit of that man has left him’. People think that men do not take an interest in their house, only women, but they are wrong, for a person is judged by the house, for the poor flat means the poor life. If a person wants to reveal his or her success it must be done through the home. ‘Clothes are like beauty; only skin deep. To know the soul. I have to know the home’. Cottle is welcomed in this home, ‘but never am I there without him looking about his reception room or kitchen, his eyes getting smaller, his face showing a familiar sadness. He looks because the presence of a visitor reminds him to look again, to take stock again.’

His home always seems to remind him of where he is in the world, and where he is meant to be. ‘It pulls me so far down, my home. I come back from work ... And I reach the corner, the turning even into the street where I can see the building, that’s all, just see it, and it’s like I’ve just remembered something that I was supposed to get, but it’s too late now to get it. So I must go home, every night of my life with this feeling that something important hasn’t been taken care of ... It’s like some men receive their sad news in the post. My sad news is the house.’

His home is ‘waiting for me like it wants to tell me something, give me a message, and the message is: Warren Oster, you are a liar ... I want to count, but my home tells me, you couldn’t have done all that well to end up coming home every night to this kind of place’. He is surrounded by ‘people, good people, but living so close together like animals, not like people, and every single one of them, just like me, old, young, in between, men, women, all of them doing the best they can do to fight off the feeling that the building, their homes, are making them feel. They don’t want to feel what they feel, you know it isn’t something that they like to do’, but it is how they cannot avoid feeling.

His activity was once consumed by the search for that one place, the exception, ‘the low rent-high charm place he knew must exist ... the homely flat’. But the stories with the happy endings here are those told by white people not black people. If his search has ended, unlike his wife and many others, he cannot be resigned but is still consumed. ‘You want to know what I call my home? I call it my living...

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67 Cottle, 121.
68 Cottle, 129.
69 Cottle, 127.
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grace, my home of the dead. The neighbourhood is a cemetery to me. I don’t have to walk to a cemetery, I live in one. You’ve seen it.’ He kids himself that he is alive, because he knows that his home and neighbourhood are part of a cemetery while his neighbours delude themselves it is not, ‘but that’s a lie, too, because everybody around here, the children too, probably, they know it’s a cemetery. Everybody knows it; they are all thinking the same thing.’ He is consumed by a sense of waste, ‘Strange how it goes. You come here, an immigrant, life starts again, it really does. You, and all these people, but you’re special, they’re special, it’s like maybe you can be reborn … But you’re not, we are all together again, just the way we were when we came, just the way we’ve always been.’ He lies to himself the most in spring when the weather is warm for the first time, but nobody can be happy living in a cemetery.

On the other hand, Beatrice Waters has not given up, although in Warren Oster’s world she may be deluding herself. She will move ‘till the day I die,’ and life is filled by the pursuit of a better place, for she will not flag from, as she puts it, always ‘settling up.’ It is the same story, shared by her, Oster and the others, the relentless search to find comfort in the city, comfort and pleasure in the house, in the city of London, which is itself a new home. Beatrice keeps moving until ‘I’m happy in this country’, comfort, pleasure and happiness proving elusive in a new England that shows them little welcome.

Her sense of worth rises as she secures the top floor in a council house, but there is a price to pay, for her husband Henry has heart trouble. Perhaps the relentless search is something to do with the fact that she has no children, for children would slow her down, although she may have found a kind of rest with children that the ideal home holds out for her.

She is different from Warren Oster, though of a similar age, is less consumed by ‘the battle of the house’, less eaten up, or she is consumed in a different way.

I move to prove to myself that I am still alive, deep down, where my strength lives, I mean … I need to move to make people know I won’t stay only where they want me to stay, live where they think I should live, how they think I should live. I won’t be still like they want me to be either. To be still is to be silent. If we did what they want us to do, live, you know, like they have planned for us, we’d be in jail.

Moving is not a substitute for something else she says, but part of the (immemorial) immigrant’s drive towards getting on, ‘bettering one’s lot, improving one’s position in the eyes of other people as well as one’s own. She moves ‘to be free, no matter how little that bit of freedom turns out to be’. Her neighbours ask why she is always moving, why she doesn’t want to be part of the neighbourhood, but she retorts,

There is no such thing as neighbourhood when you don’t have freedom. All we got is a ghetto. What they really should be asking is, don’t you want to be part of this ghetto, or that ghetto, those places, you know, where people like us are meant to live? … You know the day I’ll settle into a neighbourhood, and stay and stay until I die, that’s the day when they say, blacks, yellows, browns, the whole world is all equal to one another. Go live wherever you want.
Few, perhaps, have Beatrice’s seemingly boundless energy and hope, and perhaps most do not share Warren’s bitter sense of waste, but how Beatrice describes immigration is true for all, for white as well as black, for my mother. After we left Ashmore Road, she continued what I earlier called an internal migration, constantly searching for something better, something that would comfort and bring happiness. As Beatrice Waters says,

*You don’t immigrate once, the main trip, I mean, you’re immigrating all the time. From the moment you arrive to the moment you die, you are always emigrating; always trying to find a good place, a good home, then a better one. Sort of like you’re on the run, always on the move.*

Sheila Cooperton is thirteen years old. She has rarely slept in her own bed, never mind had her own room. The family has never known anything but economic hardship, and its anxieties are always on display. This is because anxiety eats the soul, but also because movement in the small flat is so difficult, people are always on display to one to another. ‘Nothing anybody in the family does … can be done free of evaluation and a display of all the family problems, anxieties, despair.’ The habitation itself is ‘a symbolic representation of precisely how far they have gotten, and how far they are going to get.’

73 ‘It is a monument to nothing.’ her father says. In Ashmore Road, with the family small, and a settled place of living and a stable source of income, our anxieties were less, though they were real enough. These lived anxieties for children were the commonplaces of our time, acute among those of my Irish school friends with big families, especially when a father had been lost. The Coopertons, like the Joyces, tried to keep the noise down to prevent internecine strife, but I did not experience the acute longing for privacy, for a true home, of Sheila Cooperton. I had number 11, such as it was, and in the circumstances it was a lot.

The thirteen year-old imagines a room, an imaginary room somewhere in London, ‘which she wants to believe does exist, is what she calls heaven. You spell that,’ she adds, ‘with a capital H.’

74 The child daydreams paradise, and the house is reduced to a sort of essence: she does not even see what the inside of the room is like, it is a room just by itself, ‘I imagine a little block that a child plays with, you know. And it’s just there, in the middle of nothing. If you see what I mean. That block is my room … I’m afraid to imagine what it looks like because then it will go away.’ She has dolls and toys, not a lot, but what she loves above all is the place ‘where all these things go’. An old chest her mother had, an old doll’s house she once had, but the room that counts is the room that comprehends these other little rooms: ‘If you have a real room that you like, then you can play with a doll’s house better’. Then you can ‘make up anything’. There you can be alone, and yourself, be creative and so fulfilled.

She loves the family and wants to be close to them. However, she feels like she is ‘living in a tube station. Everybody is always coming and going. I don’t even know who I am, half the time.’ When you live so close to people you feel you’re all becoming one another, ‘so you start thinking and acting like them, until you think you really are them.’ This is highly disturbing for the child, for her sense of self is
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Obliterated: she dreams that she is her sister and that the sister was still herself too, which means that ‘nobody was me anymore, even though I wasn’t really dead.’ She has lots of dreams where she either disappears or turns into somebody else. She says that sleeping in the same bed as others doesn’t mean you aren’t afraid, for she lies there in the dark afraid that something is going to happen, ‘in the bed, I mean, I don’t know what it is, but I start to shiver’. To have one’s own room is to have one’s own world.

Time and space are one. Hope, regret, resignation are a matter of the spaces of the house but also of time, of fate and history. These narratives of space are just that, narratives, stories always set in time, and stories about time as well. The house measures ‘getting on’ or its absence, which themselves always make up a story. Doreen Grainger is a bright eleven year-old, but she does not know what it is to feel eleven. ‘I feel old and that’s all that matters. Well, I feel old lots of the time … More than anybody believes. People think children only think about getting old, but never that they’re old. But everybody is only as old as they are, so they feel that old.’ She goes on, ‘You know what I think? I think families that don’t have a lot of money always feel older than they really are’. The children who live around here she says, they do all the same things as other children do, ‘except the rich children who have their own houses and things like that, but I don’t think they really are children … I don’t talk about this with anybody, but I think it’s true’.

She explains what children are really like around here,

actually like us, we’re afraid too many things are going to happen that are going to make it bad for us. Most children, though, they don’t think like that. They do whatever they want or whatever they have to do every day and don’t care about what happens to them all that much. But we can’t do that. So we have to worry about it, or pretend there’s nothing to worry about. So we act like we’re children, which is what we are, we don’t always feel like we’re children because we’re worrying about those other things. It’s like we’re more like adults.

For her, one of the ways out of her anxieties is reading history. The conundrum of what being a child is, which she confronts in her life every day, she explores through this reading, and her thinking about it, thinking worthy of a philosopher of history. Will things get better, will they stay the same, what does it mean to grow up, to be an adult? Does it have any meaning at all, and so does making a progress through life have any purpose? She is drawn to history because she already in part feels an adult, and therefore that things may always be the same for her and her like. She wants to understand the origins and have some kind of explanation of this seeming sameness: ‘I think maybe I like history because I’m afraid to find out what’s going to happen to me. Or maybe something even worse; maybe I already know what’s going to happen to me’. The chill wisdom of the eleven year-old.

She wants to find out about West Indian history and about people like her, not kings and queens. Nobody writes about those who were not rich, and she is sad about this for these are the people who made her as she is:

75 Cottle, 156.
Maybe things that happened long, long ago to people you've never even heard of is the reason why things are the way they are for your parents and you. People say, well, that's the way it's always been, which is what you study history to find out about, the way it's always been.

But then she works out a way forward that is other than an awareness of things always having been the same:

But nobody knows if it's always been like that. How could they know if they were not alive? See, that's what's important about history; that you can sort of be alive when you weren't really alive. That's why teachers should tell you about the people who were alive then, and not just the things that happened ... That way, learning about history is like making believe you could live three different lives instead of just one life: the life you have, the life people had before you were born, and the life people are going to have after you die ... Maybe things have always been the same; I don't think so, but maybe for some people they are. But people don't look like they did millions of years ago, so how could other things be the same? I was thinking, maybe what I want to know about history is whether everything will be for my family like it is now. Nobody can see the future, but they can see what history was like, only not the kings.

Nonetheless, she knows that the history books are mostly written about the rich people, so that

I'll have to get rich. So somebody will write a history book about me. But that's for sure never going to happen. All you have to do is figure out a little what happened to your own family, long, long ago, and you know that's never going to happen. I guess history makes me sad, sometimes ... Rich kids, probably do too, but they can also tell from looking around at the way their older brothers and sisters are growing up that a lot of their pretending is going to come true. That's how they're different from us. When I'm pretending, I know I'm pretending.

This strangely acute child, who is not a child, continues,

I know everything about the future; that's because I find out about history. I don't think the world changes so much, not if you look at it. That's another thing people want to pretend about, that everything is changing, getting worse, or getting better. It stays the same, that's why I know for sure what's going to be. I wish it was different than it is, but I know it's not. When you live around here, the most exciting thing sometimes is to wonder whether this might be the day when you're going to die.

Margaret Jane is seventy-eight years old, born in Barbados, now a great-grandmother. She is one of the old ones, 'those who have it all in our heads, you know'. Since she was a little girl back home she has always heard about how people wanted to make a change, make some progress in their lives. This desire she talks about as 'the current': 'You make the current to begin with, you could
sort of say, then the current takes you the rest of the way. Current was being
prepared about the time I was born'. She feels that God is forwarding the current,
'I feel God looking down on us and telling us, 'I'll find you a home. I'll find you a
home. Give me time. Give them time.' She talks about how since the time of the
Bible people have always been on the move, migrating to find a home:

And we're the time, we're the people whose lives are being used up to help the
time pass. It is my life, my children's lives, my grandchildren's lives that are
being used up with time. How many generations have to pass before the job is
completed? ... Our task is to be the generation that starts the move. Our lives
are meant to help the time pass. The children cannot see this, they aren't meant
to. But as you get older you see it so clearly it begins to frighten you. You don't
have to talk about it with people your own age; they know. They figured out
the same way you did. People's lives, you see, are like a human bridge. Instead
of going across a valley or a river, this human bridge goes across time. One
generation starts the bridge, the next one carries it on a little further ... No one
sees the end ... The biggest and most important job is to be a member of that
bridge ... I can see the bridge, even if many people can't, people my own kind
too ... What's the use, what's the point of it all? The answer is right there before
people's eyes.

The point is to survive, 'that's what we all must do; survive as long as we can,
because of that bridge'. She says that she has to take care not only for her own kin,
but for everybody because the bridge needs as many people as it can get, for 'we
are all history, each of us, little bits of history that God insists we carry on'. This is
an epochal sense of history, clearly informed by the Bible, but also to this woman
a feeling of being part of history as 'the current', one in her account that is not
about being alone, but being part of families, big families, 'countries of families'
as she says. It is a sense that comes with age, something the young ones will learn
eventually and to their benefit, just like Doreen Grainger. 78

III

THE CHILDREN OF FREEDOM: EDUCATING OUR MASTERS

Doreen would have been going through school at the time Thomas Cottle
got to know her. However, there is little sense of what school meant for her in
his narrative. The accounts that Cottle gives of education and of work are less
revealing than those of the house and the home, and of people's sense of space
and time. He is not aware, for instance, of the intimate relationship between the
house and the school in British culture. Schools are referred to as schoolhouses
sometimes. This is not merely semantic or a literary allusion. And it is not simply
a question of schools, for the house is a material and cultural form that permeates
all of life. We talk about courthouses, houses of God, the Houses of Parliament, for
a reason. The roots of all belonging are formed through the practices of the home
and the habitation that, as we say, ‘houses’ the home, so that the house itself is not
merely a container of these practices but also a cause of them.

78 Cottle, 163–65.
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In academic historical work, I have explored this in terms of the state, of government offices and departments of state, but most of all in terms of the school itself.\textsuperscript{79} Out of the interplay of the first, domestic, house and the later, subsequent ones one may discern how power really works, in particular what I earlier called the ‘club government’ of Britain, the club being but a synonym for the second house in all its forms (although government as a club has of course a somewhat different connotation in the history of the colonized rather than the colonizer). The power of the state was intimately connected to the powers of the house, and perhaps the most direct and important expression of this was the connection of both to the power of schools. This was above all apparent with the British public (i.e. private) schools, where the most crucial unit of all was the ‘house’, in which most of school life was lived, and where boys were best taught to govern themselves so they could govern others. This involved not only the public school, but also the Oxbridge colleges, which like all colleges, including religious ones, also functioned as a house and a home. Christ Church, perhaps the most traditional of Oxford colleges, is called ‘The House’.

However, this is not only a matter of the elite public schools, for state schools of all levels of attainment bear the mark of Britain’s peculiar private ones. This is especially apparent in the case of the would-be elite state schools, especially the old grammar schools, though this aping of one’s betters is still evident in Britain today. But it is not simply a question of mimicry, for many of the essential techniques of British education were pioneered by the public schools in the nineteenth century and then, given the class-based nature of British education, transplanted to the system at large. Therefore, in my own ‘Secondary Modern’ school, we had houses, housemasters, weekly house meetings to exhort us to greater achievements, including sporting ones which were organized on a house basis (Alban, Beckett, Fisher, More — good English saints). We had indeed a headmaster, modelled on the Victorian original, and we had a prefectural system. Doreen Grainger was too young for the secondary modern school, but she may have shared something of this experience of the second house in the Comprehensive system that followed the class divided grammar/secondary modern one of my day. And if she went to one of the selective state schools that still survive strongly this would have been even more the case. Whatever the school one was in loco parentis in more than just a legal sense.

It is January 2015 and I sit talking to a group of students in St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College.\textsuperscript{80} The members of this group, some of them, could be the children of Doreen Grainger and Sheila Cooper, who themselves are the children of the public housing ‘estates’, where many of these young adults come from also. My generation was the one that mostly grew up before the estates and then were the first to move into them. I am of the generation of these kids’ grandfathers, and feeling my age, I call them kids though they are young adults. The College, founded in 1990, is the successor to the Cardinal Manning Secondary Modern School for Boys, which I attended between 1956 and 1961.

On the same day in January, I sit in the office of the College Principal, Paul O’Shea, third-generation Irish by way of Wales. On his office wall, there are two...
caricature portraits, one of the radical and Quaker mill owner John Bright, a tribune of the people, the other of Robert Lowe, an opponent of the franchise reform that Bright championed. 81 It was Lowe who coined the term ‘educating our masters’, knowing that if reform had to come it would be necessary to educate ‘the democracy’ he so feared. The state in Britain still educates the democracy, the political elites of one day replacing those of another, the attitude of Lowe still there in one of the most highly governed education systems in the world. It was Lowe who invented ‘payment by results’, forms of which have in recent decades been reborn in British education. My parents were the children of Gladstonian liberalism (via its Irish Free State and Republic of Ireland manifestations); I was a child of state liberalism, and the St Charles class of 2015 are the children of neoliberalism, even if this feels at times like the Victorian sort again. All of us the children of a freedom that aims to make us free by making us ordered beings, in houses and in other ways.

The physical form of the College encloses the bones of what was ‘the Manning’, some of the old buildings being put to new uses. I have recalled something of my experience of the latter in ‘The Journey West’, describing it as a Kremlin of London Catholicism, entirely Catholic, almost entirely Irish. 82 However, it was only one part of the institutions of Roman Catholicism that made up most of the enormous physical area that was St Charles Square in the other west (St Charles Square is the largest square in London, a city of palatial squares). The square itself is the organism not the school, not a Kremlin so much as a ‘little Vatican’, a term by which it is still used locally. As well as the school there was, and is, a Catholic primary school, a Girls’ Secondary School, the parish church St Pius X, a Catholic children’s home and — secluded in the centre in its own self-seclusion — a community of the Discalced (barefoot) Order of Carmelite Nuns. In 2010, their convent was the subject of a penetrating and hugely sympathetic film by Michael Whyte. 83

The heart of the Carmelite charism is prayer and contemplation. These are not private matters between the individual and God but are to be shared with others since the charism is something to be given for the whole world. The quality of prayer determines the quality of the community life and the service which is offered to others. The convent was in Catholic doctrine the electricity that drove the square and its circumambient communities. Not that we knew much about this in 1960, when as lewd boys of fifteen we escaped to the roof of the Manning to smoke and to peer down over the convent walls below into the gardens where the nuns laboured. There was never anything to report. Nothing changes, everything changes: the institutions are still there but the students I talk to are a world away from us then. Only one of the group I talk to is Catholic, or Irish, and this reflects the College as a whole.

They are still the children of immigrants, however; their backgrounds are Somali, Eritrean, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Caribbean, Kossovan and Slovenian, among others. They are chiefly Christian, though of very different traditions, and at least 20 per cent of the school is Muslim. About 80 per cent are ‘non-white’, and around 40 per cent are African in background (meaning that most but by no means all were born in Britain, but the parents are immigrants). About 25 per cent

83 No Greater Love, also shown on BBC television.
are Afro-Caribbean. A higher proportion than the national average qualify for free school meals. The College is very successful, described as 'outstanding', a 'beacon', in the official reports. I feel this as I talk to the students and the Principal. They get a very high proportion of students to university and college, including the elite 'Russell Group', where they are only slightly below the national average of 14 per cent. They will mostly be the first of their family to go to a university. My parents’ and my generation barely knew what a university was. We mostly left school at 15 years of age. At the age that these contemporary students are pondering their futures we had already been working several years. Attendance to Oxbridge has even been known at St Charles, but these children are not of the elite, highly selective, schools of Catholic west London, The London Oratory (where Tony Blair and Nick Clegg sent their children and where I was refused entry in 1961, though I had passed the 'eleven-plus' exam) and the Cardinal Vaughan School in particular. Again, nothing changes, for both these schools are now as they were then, pretend public schools, still with strong Oxbridge links, still highly selective.

What is striking about the students is their strong sense that London and the College have much to offer them. They have, as the Principal says, a belief 'in what they will become', a belief that is merited. They are not 'negative people'. London education has improved immeasurably in the last twenty years or so, and the College is rightly proud of its role in this. They come from all parts of London, unlike the 1950s and 1960s when the Cardinal Manning was intensely local, confined to the 'other west'. The school bonds them, and they are immensely positive about the college, and this bonding. It serves as a kind of 'house' for them in fact, a second home.

Whereas in the past the school cemented bonds that were already real, in Irishness and Catholicism, now religious and pedagogic institutions deliberately create them. An atmosphere of aspiration pervades the College. Its website features a succession of its own success stories, students who became lawyers, doctors, financial traders, community workers, one an advisor to Tony Blair. This accent on aspiration is only one part of a pervasive culture of aspiration now apparent in neoliberal Britain. However, it is also perhaps what these kids need, even if it may not ring so true after university, when the difficulties of graduate employment and the London housing market kick in. This premeditated, de novo engineering of the social bond exists nowadays more strongly than in the past, and this is so even with the Catholic Church (and other religious institutions), for although there is the given commonality of the shared faith, when I talk with the local parish priest of St Pius X church, he tells me that he sees his role as being a pontifex, literally a bridge builder. For in the conditions of this new, more splintered other west, his is the business of reconciling many faiths within a One True Faith which is anything but one. West African, East African, East and West European, Filipino, Caribbean, Irish and English Catholicism all have somehow to be reconciled. The headmaster's role is a similar one, the role of Paul O'Shea. 'Community', home making, has now been given over to professionals in God as well as in man, for prelate and teacher alike are in the new neoliberal dispensation forever giving and receiving instruction in how to be 'leaders', and how to engineer souls and make 'communities'.

Time thickens, takes on flesh — the other west
Time thickens, takes on flesh — the other west

I am aware that the students I talk to are highly self-motivated, and highly motivated by their parents in turn, who are mostly recent immigrants, and frequently people who, I discover, came to London having tried other destinations first in their own personal odysseys. When I suggest to the kids that it seems from what they say that their parents are living their lives through them, they agree enthusiastically. Their loyalty to parents who have struggled for them is touching — they want to ‘make it all better’ for their parents, who ‘depend’ on them. They want to ‘build them a better life’. The students and their parents have made a deliberate choice to come here from their old schools, and so from all parts of the city, often making long journeys. They are both London and global in outlook, parts of communities outside Britain, to which some of my interlocutors return, with various degrees of regularity. Nevertheless, they feel, they say, British. ‘English’ means nothing to them at all. They associate Britishness with ‘being fully integrated’, with ‘a sense of community’. Those who were born outside Britain, and left while very young, cleave to the nation of their birthplace and put that first, before Britain.

They are, however, far from representative of people of their age in British schools at large. Theirs is a particularly intense (and extensive) immigrant experience and an experience of a London going through astonishing changes since 2000, or so. The London of the postwar decades was static, with a declining population; today the population increases, and there is an expanding if often poorly paid job market, at least for their parents. This is inner London, their London, though their eventual destination will probably be outer London, for now just as then with us, they will be forced out of the centre as the property monster careers on. London is now on a different planet from the rest of Britain, and the wealth inequality between it and the rest of the country is now scandalous, though social inequality within the city itself is still highly marked. As Paul O’Shea is quick to remark, this kind of student is much thinner on the ground in Hull or Bridgend.

Like us, these provincially London kids do not know much about the rest of Britain, and their belief in Britain will be sorely tested in time. Already one or two who have gone outside into the Britain beyond the big cities feel the lack of ‘community’ that London presents them with. Nonetheless, they are very aware of class and social inequality, though unlike my own experience of the north-south Kensington divide, they do not so much transact these differences in their daily lives and so feel the sting of class less. One student who lives in now-expensive Pimlico shares my psychogeographical sense of class, ‘they are trying to push us out’, and another who has walked Ladbroke Grove along its length has this sense too. She seems to be unlike the others, who come in and out of the area pretty directly and do not tarry. It is almost like an epiphany for her, her sense of how the sights, smells and sounds can change so powerfully from poverty to ultra-prosperity as she walks up the Grove. At the same time the whole thing is ‘one thing’ to her, and this is somehow something strange and puzzling, budding social historian as she is. However, the consensus follows the Hackney boy on an estate where all in the locality are pretty similar. They feel they see the same kind of people at school as at home, like us in the 1950s and 1960s indeed, and like us ‘Sec.
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Mod.’ Manningites class is not present to them dramatically in the educational institution (in the Vaughan or Oratory say, where they would push up against echt middle-class children and parents).

‘The Vaughan’ was a grammar school and is one manqué today, eager to hold on to its highly selective status, which is based upon a subtle mix of academic attainment, first and foremost, and then secondarily, family Catholic observance. The headmaster in my day, in that role from 1952 to 1976, was one Monsignor Kenefleck. His aim for the school was that it turn out ‘Catholic gentlemen’. The pupils wore gowns, as well as uniforms (at the Manning uniforms were compulsory, but were often in severe states of disrepair, and for poorer pupils sometimes subsidized by the headmaster himself). The Vaughan school magazine took much the same form as those at Eton or Harrow, say, with news from those chaps who had gone ‘up’ to Cambridge (until the 70s there was a special connection with Cambridge, not Oxford). There were accounts of old boys in the news, and details of the school tour abroad. The height of our ambition was ‘school camp’ in Surrey, if we did not go to Ireland. Old boys in the Vaughan and the Oratory did in fact make the news and were important people. The London County Council published a list of secondary schools in West London in the 1950s aiming to inform parents about choosing schools. In 1953, it informed its readers that Vaughan old boys were to be found in the Foreign Office, the Commonwealth Office, in law, medicine, in what it called ‘the higher reaches of the Civil Service’, as well as industry and commerce.

This publication never crossed the threshold of our houses, and our parents were poorly informed about the choices available, in my case being directed to the London Oratory for interview by the headmaster (‘What is the meaning of “pacific” Joyce?’ I knew, but it did me no good). Our parents knew nothing about the place or the other grammars that might be available, or indeed what a grammar school was. For the most part, our parents’ education ended very early, and they were anyway not much au fait with British customs generally. But they were fanatically devoted to the education of their children in so far as they knew what this was, every bit as much as the better informed parents of children in St Charles College today. They were, I think, deliberately kept misinformed, at least in the case of the four out of more than thirty in my primary school class who passed the dreaded ‘eleven plus’ and qualified for places like the Oratory (for most of us, the preparation for jumping this hurdle was dire). Places tended to go to families that were on the inside in church matters and with a little better education themselves, and to those who could afford the expensive school uniform and the bus fares, which we could, just about.

Places like the Vaughan and the Oratory are not only keen to hang onto their status, but have the parent power to do so. In 1985, the parents led an action against the diocesan authorities, and the wishes of the headmaster, who wanted to dissolve the sixth form in the interest of promoting a more democratic sixth form college regime. Led by the professional Catholic and novelist Piers Paul Read, and the erstwhile radical feminist Mary Kenny, they won the day. St Charles College today has relatively little connection with the other two schools, and its

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84 The Vaughan Magazine, in the Local Studies Library, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Central Library.
students have limited conception of their existence, and thus of the system of injustice under which they labour.

Despite the positivity of St Charles College and the students, there is a dark side to its recent history, and there is another reason for thinking the students I meet are not fully representative, even within the College itself, or within London immigrant communities. For, it becomes apparent that the duties of the pontifex are particularly necessary here, and that I am in 2015 still seeing the healing of deep wounds in the psyche of the place. In 2010, in the middle of a crowded Victoria Station, a gang of twenty or so St Charles’ students brutally murdered 15 year-old Sofyen Belamouadden, a student from a Fulham school. The conflict was over who had rights to the turf of the station itself, for it was through the station each day that students from several institutions moved uneasily together. This uneasiness drew on local and school loyalties in tandem, the darker loyalties of belonging.

For the class of 2015, local turf seems less important, the school as or more important than the immediate ties to where they live. The professionals have done a good job. The murder resulted in the biggest case of joint enterprise in British legal history, and eventually three students were convicted and sentenced for murder, five for manslaughter, two for conspiracy to commit grievous bodily harm, and seven for violent disorder. Three were acquitted. The highly controversial legal doctrine of joint enterprise imputes criminal liability to the participants in a crime for all that results from that enterprise. Application of the rule in this case imputed criminal liability for wounding a person to participants in the crime who knew or were ‘reckless as to knowing’ that one of their number had a knife and might use it, despite the fact that the other participants did not have knives themselves.

Joint enterprise if existing in the world of my class of 1960 would have netted a good harvest. Not a lot has changed, despite the predictable media frenzy attendant upon the 2010 case: gang violence was rife then, among the Teds for example, and bicycle chains, knuckle dusters and knives did as much harm as the weapons of 2010. It is now another sort of violence which detains the government and school authorities in 2015, that of ‘terrorism’. Ten from the Ladbroke Grove area have gone to fight in Syria. The students I talk to experience racial discrimination every day of their lives, not usually overtly but in the little, indirect observances of life (going into a shop, walking home at night). It is much worse for the boys than the girls. They are, boys and girls, extraordinarily sensitive to religious and cultural distinctions, indeed they have been trained to be so, trained also not to get angry. The College has done good work, aspiration and hope — for the time being — enabling them to manage. ‘We try to mask it’, one says, ‘it will never change’, ‘you have to deal with it’, you just get on and work hard.

For the Muslim students, most but not all, there is a strong following of the tenets of their faith, manifest in clothing and religious observance. This reflects what the Principal calls a strong sense of ‘Muslim injustice’. The Muslim students feel, with great justification, under surveillance, and it is a little bit like the Irish in the 1970s and the IRA bombing of London. Our skins...
and accents blended us in but our loyalties were mixed and in conflict, for our understanding was deeper than that of the press and many of the people around us. The government’s current ‘anti-terrorist’ policy, called ‘Contest’ has four ‘arms’, one of which is ‘Prevent’. The local Prevent powers-that-be are currently worried about the Muslim students in the College going into a separate hall during school assembly (the hall that was once our school assembly one). This is what they call ‘ungoverned space’, and there is great anxiety about it. And yet it is a necessary space for these students if they are to be what they want to be, Muslims. Again, a wholly new hierarchy of governmental professional expertise is mobilized, brought to bear upon school life in a way that was not the case previously. In the case of Prevent this mobilization looks to be doomed to failure: the faith itself ends up stigmatized, those who espouse it expected to have what are meaninglessly called British values. I visit in January 2015, the week after the Charlie Hebdo murders in France; the Muslim students, I am told, deplore the events but also shrug their shoulders.

The tide of the Irish has retreated; some remain, nonetheless. In September 2014, I talked with Sister Angela and Sister Margarita in the presbytery at Our Lady of the Holy Souls in Bosworth Road, West 10. Across the little park from the school is St Mary’s, the infant and junior school I attended from 1950 to 1956. They have now spent over fifty years in the parish, both as head teachers in St Mary’s. The Sisters of Mercy have taught here since 1895, and they are old enough to have known some of the teachers who taught me as a child, most of them nuns. At one time in the early days, there were 900 pupils in the school. The sizes of schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century years of the other west are almost unbelievable to us now: one local Infants School was the largest in London, that of Wornington Road in the Golborne Ward. In 1874, it had 873 small children in 10 classes, and a year later an inspector counted 179 children in one room. The educational philosophy of so many of these overcrowded schools, apparent in our time too in the many bad schools of the other west, is well described by Alan Johnson, who once danced to the following tune, one associated long before his time with Wornington Road School, which he attended for a while;

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\begin{align*}
\text{Mr Harris is a very good man} \\
\text{He tries to teach us all he can} \\
\text{Read, write, arithmetic} \\
\text{But he don't forget to give you the stick.} \\
\text{If he does he makes you dance} \\
\text{Out of England into France,} \\
\text{Out of France and into Spain,} \\
\text{Over the hills and back again.}
\end{align*}
\]

What was once the Sisters’ busy convent in Marylebone is theirs no longer, and they live nearby over the canal on the better side, amongst everyone else. Over the decades, they have also progressively shed the nun’s habit. They are emblematic of the retreating tide of the Catholic Church, as well as the Irish. The presbytery in which we sit was once the hallowed sanctum of the priest, and the nuns were never allowed in. The priest hardly ever visited the school; now he is always

87 Jerome Borkwood, From Kensal Village to Golborne Road: Tales of the Inner City, 107.
88 Tales of the Inner City, 107. Alan Johnson, This Boy, 35, 57, 74-75 and 252 on Wornington Infants School.
there, wanting like a good professional to be seen on the job. Now the presbytery is shared with the priest and the congregation, and through a half-open door I get a glimpse, as I did in St Pius X, of the life of the celibate clergy, temporarily looking, unhomely, so that these custodians of the house of God seem somehow at a tangent to reality, men without a home. The priest now tries to make a home of sort for the area’s homeless, aided when I visit by the Sisters of St Mother Teresa in their white saris. Like other priests, he is fed up by the lingering legacy of the old Irish, the social clubs-cum-drinking dens. He is much too clever and up-to-date for that sort of thing, a man sans craic, not that that sort of thing would get you very far these days. However, because of London’s great immigrant population the Catholic tide in the city is still strong, Africans, West Indians, and especially Filipinos having taken our place (and the place of the Spanish and Portuguese who followed us and are now gone).

Both sisters are from County Clare, and just like my mother from Wexford, they still sound as if they have never left home. Although Ireland was poor when they left, they were shocked to see the poverty in W10. At home one was poor, but never short of food and space. Here it was at least four families in a house, including the basement, and they talk of two Irish families, the mothers of whom washed and shared the only decent blouse they had between them, turn and turn about. Poverty now can be bad, but is nothing like then they tell me. Other things have changed too. They no longer go on home visits, part of the mission of the Sisters of Mercy, whose special devotion is to the poor. What they once did, the state now does. They are full of praise and delighted remembrance of the ‘Catholic mothers’ of the parish, women who then, not like now, were a constant presence in church and school, even coming together to make school copybooks out of sugar bag paper (stitched, not stapled) when supplies were few in the 1950s.

There is not now the old friendliness they say, and parents are not so much behind their children as before. The Filipinos keep more to themselves, although they also bring great faith and help to the parish. They do not want to ‘integrate’ so much, and according to the sisters, this is because of shame about their own poverty, and about their culture, for unlike other immigrant groups, their children will not do their native dances in school. Nonetheless, as they tell me, the Irish endure, second- and third-generation Irishness still being a strong presence in the parish, even though most of the Irish have moved west. However, where once there were nothing but Irish at Sunday Mass, now it is mostly only the old that remain. The parish priest in St Pius tells me of the old Irish ladies who are still there, how they talk about the terrible shrinkage of the congregation, even though it remains strong, only with the new elements included now, elements they do not see. Nonetheless, as one parishioner puts it to the priest, ‘Sure father, aren’t we all Irish in the sight of God?’

My school compatriots were destined for the skilled working class, and the clerical life of the lower middle. Many of them, at least in the A stream, did somewhat better than this, climbing up the ladders of seemingly endless exams that were then required to better oneself. I was the only one who went to university, indeed the only one for many years after. At least a third of my class of thirty or
Assembly hall, secondary modern school west London, ca. 1960. This is very similar to the hall of the author’s Cardinal Manning School, and conveys the utilitarian modernism that was the ethos of these schools, in contrast to the public school manqué of grammars like the Vaughan.
© Manchester Libraries
so would have prospered at university. If we left school with some qualifications, we also left with an almost complete lack of direction, encountering jobs we were simply dispatched to by a so-called career advisor. They were jobs that we did not like and quickly saw as dead ends. This disaffection spurred almost half the class of 1960–61 to the unusual step of emigrating to Australia at the very tender ages of 17 and 18 under the ‘Big Brother’ scheme, although when they landed in Sydney no brothers big or small were to be found, and they had to fend for themselves. Most of them prospered pretty well, the majority returning eventually. We still congregate in various west of London bars, shouting to make ourselves heard above what we take to be the terrible din of pubs of the modern day. Most of us still feel, if to differing degrees and in different ways, ‘Irish’. Some of us, born here, have gone back. As one of us puts it, it is second nature for us to be somehow British or English, but first nature to be Irish.

We were educated to be boys, the Cardinal Manning Girls to be girls. Girls did needlework, domestic science, and if they were lucky or in the non-academic stream at a grammar school, shorthand, typing and bookkeeping. We did woodwork or metalwork, and never a syllable of a foreign language passed our lips. Indeed, the non- or less-academic sides of the grammars were very important, although you would not have known it from the weight the schools placed on the academic. The grammars had their own class system, as I later discovered, though there was a chasm between them and the rest. Not that we did not have ours, that of the pedagogic technology of ‘streaming’ so-called, namely, the subdivision of the secondary modern school itself, according to ability, so that not only was there a hierarchy between schools but also within them too. The British (and Irish) class system was actively taught in the schools, as much by the physical experience of being classed at school as by the subjects taught in the classroom. The class room itself did the teaching, its physical form doing the classifying and ranking. Our supposedly ‘modern’ school was in fact a throwback to the reformed nineteenth-century public schools and their obsession with competition and hierarchy.

Even though we might have brothers and sisters (in the Manning Girls) in other ‘streams’ the A team was a team apart, the people who did the exams, the prefects who exercised a little, brief authority. The humiliations and other hurts of streaming, of going ‘up’ and ‘down’, were perhaps less hurtful than those of the negative experiences of those who were academically successful but still had to face their snobbishness. They were real enough, however, all the more real because they were just as arbitrary as the borderlands between the junior and the grammar schools. Not only arbitrary, but actually fake, for the whole entire edifice, the entire system was based on the now-discredited idea of intelligence testing. It is most especially discredited in the case of Sir Cyril Burt, one of its foremost advocates and a major architect of British education, who was, post-mortem, revealed to have invented IQ data—and, it was claimed, collaborators. Burt was in fact keen to apply his principles to the ‘backward’ children of our other west, in the case of the notoriously bad ‘Protestant’ school in the street next to St Mary’s. It was only when the fakery was exposed, in the late 1970s, that those of us who cared realized that we had been robbed. Most of my compatriots do not feel this, or at least do not seem moved to anger about the educational system that failed...
them, for it is all so long ago, and you live the life you have. I do not forget, for I progressed further through the class structure than they did, and so I saw what was on the other side. Being able to see both sides in this case makes for being angry, not English, which is to say ‘reasonable.’ Yes, ‘God help the poor man’s son’ whom, as Adam Smith observed, ‘heaven in its anger has visited with ambition.’

Anger is many things but one of these is that it is useful, productive; ‘anger is an energy’, as John Lydon, a.k.a. Johnny Rotten, has put it. Lydon’s father was from Galway. I am related by marriage to Lydons. I do not know if we are family. Perhaps, but whether or not I share some of this anger, and with it the urge to express oneself which anger brings with it. I did not share the awfulness of his upbringing in North London, a decade later than me, one that was no fault of his parents. Above all, I did not share his experience of insult, rejection and failure at school. But I do know about it and about the other things he experienced in the city’s north. I have seen whole families in the other west ripped apart by drugs and alcohol on the outside, and on the inside the experience of poverty and insult. Anger is an energy: the students that I talk to in St Charles College do not, as yet, have anger and may never do. As I say, they are taught not to be angry, the culture of aspiration of which they are part teaching them this. Anger, in this view, is ‘negative emotion’, akin to what in the dreary rhetoric of the right wing is called ‘class envy’.

The students of St Charles College and their contemporaries may, however, survive the culture of aspiration, or turn it to other ends than those at which it is aimed. The great contradictions of the life around them may lead them thus. As may the sense, including the contradictions, of what it is to belong to Britain and England, to ‘be’ British and English. A large part of what this being is concerns the past of Britain and England. They will soon discover, if they have not done so already, that ‘their’ histories, ‘their’ pasts, are not the same as the majority of those around them, the still great majority of the white faces they will encounter as they discover Britain. This may make them angry.

But this ‘British’ history does belong to them, and is something that they have a claim on, a right of citizenship, just as much as any other right. This is where they, mostly, were, born, and this is largely the culture that makes them what they are and will be. This is the polity they will have to live and therefore the one that brings responsibility for this living, for themselves and those they bring into the world. This is their home, the place where who they are and what they might be is ‘housed’. Always the house, always, and the sheer physicality of being in this place and no other. All this goes for the immigrant elsewhere, including an Ireland that in recent decades has perhaps of all European nations been changed the most, including the changes wrought by immigration.

What is this responsibility of which I write? I shall end with a quotation from Jürgen Habermas. I do not equate the German and British pasts but I do affirm his powerful claim that what it is to have a past is to have responsibility for this past, in Britain (and Ireland) just as much as Germany:

...there is the simple fact that subsequent generations also grew up within

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91  ‘The Journey West’, 76.
92  Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Edinburgh, 1759), 181.
93  The title of his second autobiography, Anger is an Energy: My Life Uncensored (London, 2014).
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a form of life in which that was possible. Our own life is linked to life contexts in which Auschwitz was possible not by contingent circumstances but intrinsically. Our form of life is connected with that of our parents and grandparents through a web of familial, local, political, and intellectual traditions that it is difficult to disentangle, that is, through a historical milieu that made us what and who we are today. None of us can escape this milieu, because our identities, both as individuals and as Germans, are indissolubly interwoven with it. This holds true for mimicry and physical gestures to language and into the capillary ramifications of one’s intellectual stance ... we have to stand by our traditions then, if we do not want to disavow ourselves.  

But who then is this ‘we’? What has the Turkish immigrant and the child of the Turkish immigrant in Germany to do with this ‘we’? What of the Irish immigrant and their child in Britain? What of the other immigrants and their children, the Jamaican, the Pakistani, the Bangladeshi and so on? Above all, for the still great majority of so-called indigenous British, English and Irish, the ‘whites’ I suppose you could call them, what is it to be ‘we’ now, when to be so is still to have a nation and so inescapably a national past. What are the ‘traditions’ to be stood by if we do not want to ‘disavow’ this troubling elusive and fleeting ‘ourselves’?

I recall here some sentences in ‘The Journey West’:

Forgetting is nonetheless easier in English culture, being all too agreeable for those who have historically been at the dispensing not on the receiving end of power, and who do not have a ‘ruined’ past. The past here is power not wreckage, and Irish history hurts in a way English/British history does not.’

In the British case, and it is of course part of the tradition of so many British immigrant pasts too, the recipients and not the dispenser of power, the traditions that must be stood by if ‘ourselves’ are not to be disavowed are very often written in blood. This is something that the English, and the British, have yet to face and acknowledge, for a bland consensus on the British past still prevails in the culture at large. It is to these questions that I turn in the next essay in this series, when I consider what it is to have a history, something deeply connected with having a home, and having shelter.

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