

Moseley Road (Apologies to Ocean Colour Scene)

Do you recall the day we caught the train?
Two of us, singing The Riverboat Song;
Off the grid, in Moseley Shoals, in the rain?
Moseley Village vibes, we knew we belonged:
40 past midnight and one for the road,
Policemen and pirates, where the river flowed.

You sang “Where is the love? Where is the soul?”
The river turned to tarmac and was dead;
Dreams were ground with litter in Moseley Shoals,
You’ve got it bad, the downstream up ahead
And like a king you stalked up Moseley Road,
Time to get away where the river flowed.

30 years later and my fleeting mind
Lining your pockets, photographs you took;
Life is like a circle, time to rewind:
It’s my shadow, I come again to look -
You stalking like a king up Moseley Road
And singing your songs where the river flowed.

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Note: this poem took inspiration from the lyrics of The Riverboat Song by Moseley band Ocean Colour Scene. The titles of every song from Moseley Shoals appear in this poem.

The Old House (Ferndale House, Moseley Road)

When I return, off the grid and a ghost,
No former tenement will know my tread;
But where the spring-time blossom`s raiments spread
Their rich brocade I`ll wear.

The old house - a place my heart loves the most
Sheltered under a cathedral of trees;
It`s a gloom of green as translucent seas
A peace beyond compare.

Together again from the spirit host
Silently we`ll gather in Moseley Road,
Pass under the trees where the blossoms snowed
Unseen, no one to stare.

Thumbs Up To A Road Sweeper On Moseley Road

Thumbs up!

Got a trolley with all my tools,
Free as a bird, make my own rules;
Kitted out in hi-vis and gloves
Off the grid and a job I love

Thumbs up!

Thumbs up!

I see no inequality
On the road but diversity.
If asked I'd say my job is skilled,
A happy man of my own will

Thumbs up!

Thumbs up!

A worthwhile job to help others -
We're one - all sisters and brothers.
Urban happiness in my work,
An important job, no time to shirk

Thumbs up!

Night on Moseley Road Waiting For The Foodbank To Open (Quakers Friends' Institute)

"Memories"

The two women coughed their lungs out of their throats
Disembodied in cardboard and dirty coats.
Squatting in a doorway like litter on the street,
As the wind blew around decaying concrete.
Victorian streets pointing to the city,
The retch of despair heaved with anonymity
Under buildings on which transience is written,
Passing memories fade, without root and smitten.

"Like the smiles we left behind"

The hour grows late and dumped across the pavement
Fast food cartons, plastic bottles, night time scents
Splashed across the footpath or up graffitied walls
Drunken revellers, which taint and flavour all.
Work for the road sweeper - fag butts, empty cans
And chip paper beneath cars and white vans.
The two women hide within their own cocoon,
Concealed by cardboard and clouds over the moon.

"That we gave to one another"

The women pass the night with songs and yawning,
Foodbank opens 11 in the morning.
There's lots of homeless and it's limited stock
So they need to get in and don't have a clock.
Second hand clothes are 50p on the rack,
What they are wearing is soiled and look like sacks.
Now off the grid with memories and regret,
So they sang their songs so they would not forget.

“The way we were”

Homeless women, together, now all alone;
Cast off, unwanted, like fast food chicken bones.
The women sang they would do it all again,
Dreams are not litter, cast offs, left to remain.
When the sun rises the road sweeper will come,
The traffic will roar and Moseley Road will hum
But they will be gone - to the welcome foodbank -
It's here, limited stock, good people to thank.

A Cup of Tea At The Foodbank (Quakers Friends' Institute)

The world to whom Charlie Chaplin once performed
Comic character, in the face of cultural norms,
Romanticized the homeless through media hype
Divorced from reality as an American stereotype.
In Moseley's destitute are no dented bowlers,
None carry spotted bandanas over their shoulders:
Only a struggle with mental health and once-held dignity
Off the grid and a desperate grasp on their former identity.

Spat at, kicked and abused by those with no humanity,
Such expressions of "concern" are displayed by society.
Pathological deviants in need of strict control:
A little self-discipline is good for the soul.
Dismissed as vexatious and so they are punished,
Living out of litterbins, labelled as "rubbish".
The cutting look of eyes filled with pity or disdain:
The world soon forgets but the scars remain.

Hiding in car parks that stink of human excrement;
Sleeping in doorways with the acrid smell of disinfectant.
Drunken flung arms, staring eyes and twisted feet
Littering Birmingham, its suburbs, parks and streets.
Wandering between foodbanks in apathetic dejection,
The cheapest alcohol cushioning the blows of rejection.
Time rolls on, but its passing does not end their pain:
The world soon forgets but their agony remains.

Roaring over his cup of tea in the foodbank canteen
"It was picking up trash this place came into being!
Trash is what we are, we have no education;
We are trash on the streets of the nation!
We are fed trash and we are treated like trash,
Begging in door ways for dog ends or cash.
I am trash and trash is what we all are!
My wounds have healed but I have got my scars".

The homeless are not unwanted cast offs left behind;
We label them into pigeon holes of the mind
But they are people, not cast offs, lying in crumpled ruin
To be consigned as litter and over Moseley Village to be strewn.
The homeless need more than clean socks every week;
They are human, not litter, under society`s feet:
Inequality exists within our neighbourhood,
And respect helps them more than pity ever could.

The Khanda on Moseley Road

The Khanda

Pinned proudly on the gates for all to see,
An emblem of cultural diversity.
A holy sign of the Sikh faith and code,
Punjabi heritage to Moseley Road

The Khanda.

The Khanda

A double-edged sword, a chakram, two knives
Called "kirpan" with one God to rule their lives.
Three weapons and a circle, their belief
In Khalsa and Langar for poor relief

The Khanda.

The Khanda

Sign of God without beginning or end
A circle, duty to not just friends
But for all - in oneness - with God's love
From Moseley food banks to Heaven above

The Khanda.

The Khanda

Off the grid - a cauldron and martial might,
Food for the hungry, doing what is right;
Langar for all in the community
Regardless of the ethnicity

The Khanda.

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28th February 2023

Note: The Khanda is the amalgamation of 3 symbols - a double-edged sword, a chakram and two kirpan which represents Miri Piri - spiritual and temporal authority - the Sikh doctrine of providing food and protection for the needy and oppressed.

Balsall Heath Library & Moseley Road Baths

Edwardian community hub
Made of red brick and terracotta
And off the grid
Because when first built
Everyday people worked 7 days
12 to 14 hours a day
With one day off
For Christmas.
It would take a world war
To bring the baths and library
Into the grasp
Of everyday people.

Community is not just a word:
We need other people
To interact with and love:
It's what makes us truly human.
Now, more than ever,
We need strong, supportive communities.
Moseley Road in Birmingham
In search of urban happiness,
Victorian inequality to cultural diversity
And one of only 3 baths
In the entire country
Listed as Grade 2*.

Landmark of community
Library run by Birmingham City Council
And it has a clock tower:
Family friendly, computer access,
Benefit verification service,
Exhibition space, free for all.
The baths were threatened with closure,
Rescued by Friends of Moseley Road Baths,
Non- profit community enterprise.
Beautiful building, long- term future,
Well-loved and well-used,
Huge historical and architectural significance.