

# *Their Tells*

5. Determination  
Resonates From Intent

1

Once the conduit cutting through industry, the canal is hidden now. A sluggish, sullen current that pushes its way underneath housing estates and the rail line given in its name. Perhaps ashamed of its history; Paisley's memory of Martinmas 1810 and the drowning of 85 pleasure trippers is long, and although buried underneath the grey bricks and former mill buildings (now converted, as is de rigeur, into "luxury" flats with boxy bedrooms and 4 too few parking spaces), the record of the Countess Of Eglinton's fatal lurch is burned into the streets.

Just months before, Robert Tannahill - poet, weaver, musician - had taken his own life in a culvert branching from the canal. Illness and self-doubt led him to the waterside, but just weeks before the omen of his passing was cemented in an overhead snatch of "We'll meet beside the dusky glen on yon burnside". His last acts - burning his manuscripts ceremonially, folding and then abandoning his jacket at the tunnel entrance - were a rite as much to feed into his legacy as they were an act of desperation; a pact with the canal that has left his town filled with references to his life and work

Few glimpses remain of the waterway, even around the rail line. High hedges mask sight of the low grey current - now choked with shopping trolleys, broken prams, mysterious cardboard boxes and children's clothing - but there are clues to be found if you look closely enough. Outside one of the flat complexes, a drain cover echoes out the sound of more than just sewers passing underneath. The canal skulks beneath, biding its time, waiting to reach out for more unwilling swimmers.

If you look long enough though, and follow the trace of a line on the map, beneath the evocatively titled Craw Road you find the last vestiges of what was once mighty. A strip of water with converted lock-houses breaks out into the unimaginatively titled "Old Canal" - a pool larger than a pond but smaller than a lochan, still choked with detritus of those who don't know or don't care of the history they're befouling. The only access - save pushing through bushes from the main road, tripping over discarded porn and empty cans - is from the back gardens of the Groves - Cromptons Grove and Stable Grove. The residents can look but not touch, with the lurking remnants of the hungry canal waiting behind them; and maybe, just maybe waiting until they look the other way and it can regain it's malign power.

2

110 years later in Southwark the General Strike was underway. Merely 9 days, and yet ingrained into the history of the working class and the Left, the clashes between police and workers left blows that rang not just in the ears of the disenfranchised workers but all the way up to the present day. The capitulation of the Unions led to worse suffering and ultimately death than the original conditions were responsible for; but the workers rising up and striking a blow directly at mine-owners, plutocrats and landlords has echoed throughout the 20th century and onwards.

Not for the first time, the Thames was seen as a barrier; a raised barricade to keep the unruly mob at bay in Elephant and Castle whilst those-who-owned slept in their feather beds just north. The City - then as now - as haven for those with, and the ends of the bridges as the start of an uncomfortable zone of no-go for the wealthy.

Fast forward 100 more years and the Heygate Estate is being demolished, mired in controversial payments, secret deals, slush funds and cronyism. Just a few more years on and into 2020 and the shopping centre is being crumbled back to the rubble it came from; the multi-cultural hub of unexpected shops and restaurants with a dizzying array of cuisines removed and sanitised to bring forth those more comfortable, palatable harbingers of the gentry - Prezzo, Waitrose, Pret. The river, no longer a barrier, now acts like a bulwark for the gentrifiers to rest against as they plan their routes further south, into hitherto undreamt of areas for £5 flat whites and artisan sourdough.

Dizzied by exhaustion, late hours and chemicals, there's many a glassy-eyed clubber emerged from the railway arches onto Elephant Street and gaped in incomprehension at the brutalist Heygate architecture winking its huge concrete lidless eyes in the rising dawn - or stumbled around the mobius loop of the Centre trying desperately to find the entrance to the Tube, trapped in an Escher-like ever rising staircase that somehow inexorably ends up at ground level again. Once, over stimulated and drunk, having been thrown out of a night that I was running for falling asleep somewhere unsuitable, I was patted on the shoulder by a mountainous security man. "Here", he said, "You can look at the windows while you sober up and they'll look back at you. It'll be a comfort". With little authentic left but the ghosts of the Southwark Strikers prowling the streets, there's little comfort left for those without money to burn.

- Ruaridh Law, 2021

“Determination resonating from the intent to rally when they needed it and stand before they hide. Backing the worker through thick and thin, defending their rights when they were pushed aside.

*“Gonna live what we already know,  
Gonna live through these attempts,  
We're not going nowhere,  
But we still find something to believe in.”*

And in some small part of us we know that it must prevail. The history books are marked with the victory of the General Strike, though it was harder than struggle is now for us. We say the soaring of democracy, the downfall of tyrants. Hold fast to our flag, but hold fast this time And not forever,  
That's all we can do.

History repeats itself, falling short we are a century later.

It was the only way out of economic misery. In their second time against exploitation, these people did not expect victory. These closed views I refuse.

Some move to more upmarket, modernised high streets, instead. But others are finding the change liberating; and are using it to create something better. This place is an example. It used to be old-fashioned and narrow. Now it's well laid out and wide. Even so, the centre's been prone to feeling cramped and claustrophobic at times, but what happened just now brought me up a little”

- First pass at generating narrative by the AI narrator based on the preceding text, 2021

Created by Ruaridh Law and Bryan Kerr

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