

Leeds Line by Line

An anthology for Leeds Lit Fest
2026

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Published by Heartlines Writers Collective, 2026

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ISBN:

Cover design: Liz McPherson

Editing: Liz McPherson

Typesetting: Liz McPherson.

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Introduction

Welcome to *Leeds Line by Line*, an anthology created for Leeds Lit Fest 2026 and inspired by the many stories, places and people that make Leeds what it is.

The collection is wonderfully eclectic, ranging from iconic buildings and football to markets, shopping, art, streets, ginnels, squares, wildlife, history and personal memories. As editor, it has been a privilege to encounter so many different perspectives on the city and to see Leeds reflected through such a rich variety of voices. Together, these pieces create a portrait of a city that is constantly evolving while remaining deeply connected to its communities.

Alongside the anthology, we also created a collaborative community poem, gathering contributions at two sessions held at Headingley Library and at the Leeds-themed open mic hosted by Soundbites. The open mic attracted a standing-room-only audience as poets, both new and experienced, shared their work. The atmosphere was full of energy, sparking conversations about poetry, creativity and Leeds itself. Some of those poems have found their way into this anthology.

The community poem is included here and is also shared through Headingley Library and on the Heartlines website. Thanks to my lovely writing friends and especially Tim Brookes for their help in getting it across the finishing line.

We hope this collection captures something of the character, creativity and community spirit that make Leeds such a great place to live, work in and visit.

A free PDF download of this book is available at www.heartlines.uk.

Liz McPherson. June 2026.

Recurring moons

babbling ... you go down
into the lost city
there are secret squares
of olde worlde trees,
botanical gardens,
that exist in dreams only,
an alchemist's shop,
a bustling market, where you
can buy truffles or star fruit;
and embedded in all the moons
above late-afternoon Mabgate –
a clock striking four-thirty...
it's time for an extravaganza,
swing into a glittering ballroom,
full of mirrors and chandeliers,
the tall, dark waiters are waltzing
round a medley of tables,
and a drag queen in sugar-pink tulle
points you in the direction
of an escalator... you step onto
the ground floor at Allders,
customers in Fifties-style hats
head for bargain counters,
then out, through the double doors
an old man in Dortmund Square,
selling the Evening Po-aa-ss-t
falls off the cliff of his own voice ...
you wake up startled, baulking
at your loss:
a city anchored, but sunk

Linda Marshall

Creeping unwillingly Roundhay to Armley

It's a long descent from home to Armley but not an easy one in a car, sure you would think, even a Ford unpopular. Six thirty is an ungodly hour even to an atheist but there is little traffic, less competition, Street Lane, a steady cruise. Unhappily-married, semi-detached pairs stop for a schlepp of shops. A waft of dark rye with caraway seed lasts down to Meanwood past the Legendary Exploding Toilet onto a green wave up to Headingley. Where "Vegetarian mini-crêpe anyone?" echoes from a 5th November, street party, easing the embarrassment of celebrating the burning of Catholic traitors. Past the end of Bennett Road where I trained and, asking a girl, "What does your mum do?" was answered, "Oh, Mummy writes Feminist books." And a boy, expressing himself in a dentist's waiting room by dancing on a glass-topped (organic, ethically-sourced) coffee table was asked by a parent, "Tarquin, do you really think it's a good idea to be doing that?" I still have a gold bridge 50 years later by Mr. Simmons. The street lights dim as the brick bastions of retaining walls rise on either side. I smile at my friends sticking their heads out of drainage seeking, sensing, sniffing. Food is plentiful from students' overflowing dustbins and vomit. Through the Stargate of Kirkstall valley past the sectional fence which once broke David H's arm like a concrete guillotine, keeping him safe from the railway siding. On past the ends of terraces to the Co-op grocers and butcher's where Alan Bennett lived as a child, making his future living by taking it all in. Into Salisbury Terrace and the mouth that will eat me at 7 am until I am passed out of Rombalds Terrace at 5 pm thirty years later.

James Lyon-Joyce

City of mine

Give me your Georgian terraces, crescents, colonnades and cupolas,
brutalist blocks and steel shards but keep me safe.

Give me the music, opera, visual arts, sculpture, film, drama, dance,
protect and preserve small interests, but keep me safe.

Give me the schools, colleges universities, libraries, computer hubs,
the proud traditions of adult education, vocational learning,
free speech and enlightenment, but keep me safe.

Give me the open spaces, hidden parks, pitches, pools, athletic clubs.

Let not team spirit turn into toxic tribalism, but keep me safe.

Give me the clinics hospitals and emergency services.

Find me some public dentists and spare me the casual cruelty
of the doctors' receptionists, but keep me safe.

Give me the opportunity to worship, or not, in my own way,
without prescription or proscription of others.

Secure the separation of sacred and secular in law,

And keep me safe.

James Lyon-Joyce

Relocated

We thought we were moving to Leeds,
then discovered we'd come to Yorkshire.
The diversity of landscape here is an unimagined spell:
coast, moorland, dale and fell,
etched by strolling rivers
beyond a vibrant city hub.

Today, walking an ancient bridleway,
roots and stones jaggging underfoot like Yorkshire wit,
I watch summer dusk engulfing the trees above me
and a wash of soft light
rinsing the fields below.

Friends and family were aghast at our defection to the bumptious north
and even to us, it was just another stop
on the path of fledgling careers.
Never expected we'd stay for thirty-five years.

Barbara Lawton

Leeds Central Library, Reference Department, 8.30 p.m.

So good to be three floors up
surrounded by pigeons
fingers flying through catalogue cards
nobody there in the hour before moonlight when everything
is possible
and the books whispering
in the quarto room
with leather-bound tongues.

Liz McPherson

On taking a walk in your lunch hour

You cross a checkerboard of stones,
where vagrants seek pennies for visions,
loop ranks of towering knights and pawns,
enter crenellated streets, where citted girls
thrall to stiletto heels and telephones.

The air is hot, it stinks of drying cloth
and through the feudal haze of fumes,
you follow merchants to the corn exchange,
past gilded mansions sprung from brittle bones,
to barter grain for heaps of gleaming gold.

Turn from the main thoroughfare,
observe the sallow faces sunk in ponds,
their severed hands with mangled finger ends
gathered by children in rags, ears clogged
by commerce. Witness their lives and deaths.

Dysentery and cholera slither through slums
while righteous men choke fortunes
from good worsted wool or khaki uniforms.
And, in dark mills, bright summer snow
rots lungs, drops poison onto cobblestones.

This city breathes through warp and weft,
buildied with wool from godly lambs,
while cattle graze as ranks of clouds unfold.
Inside god's house, the pious lift their voice as one,
fletch songs that rise in praise of burnished dreams.

Liz McPherson

Highway Star

after Jericho Brown

It fuses with a song, my brother's car
and melancholy always thumbs a ride.

Melancholy always thumbs a ride
when I'm sung back to the back street of Low Lane

and parked there on the back street of Low Lane –
my brother's red and black Vauxhall Firenza.

Cooler than Starsky's car, that Firenza.
On Sunday he'd drive us to Knaresborough.

When my brother drove us to Knaresborough,
we always passed men in white playing cricket.

When we passed men in white playing cricket,
I heard the crack of cork and twine on willow.

I love that crack of cork and twine on willow.
It fuses with a song, my brother's car.

Mark Connors

The lives of others

after the collection of Leeds Art Gallery, Upper Level Landing

antennae and spotlights leaking gastric fluids that squeezes young women's
bodies dry.

tattered fabric wounded by fluorescent spits of blood.

2005 — i was born ugly to a world that didn't welcome me.

butt. skin. boobs. hair. protruded lips. double chin. hair jet black. dulled to heat.
shoulders pulled

back to a spine in permanent ache. still a blubber ill-fitted. still in futile

anticipation to be

violated.

i could be, instead: a runner,

stubby legs sending waves to the hard concrete with every step; a moth revered
to deliver news

that sends people to grief before a phantom grievance;

clad in spotlight a circus spectacle applauded;

good enough; good.

the only things real under the fronds are its own shadows.

take me to the lakes where all the poets went to die, i don't belong.

i blew the flute of the pied piper and only the bin birds danced to my tune.

she strikes a pose to drive your eyes towards him; i jump out the oblique window
with

a sack filled of burnt lantern's ashes to the brim.

i would be better as a creature of the early days, prettier in dots and burnt grazed
lines.

have a cup of tea when the install process is complete.

she looks to my camera, her eyes long and lopsided.

three of cups — friendships; amicability; one person cries and the other listens,
and still

she stays

crying; black swan; omen in plain sight

it's all you can see as the ship sinks behind.

2026 — canvas stretched continents to a road that spells plain in a foreign
language pressed

to the tongue.

Niki Almira

Could have been anywhere

On a walk through the squares of Leeds, we entered the one named Woodhouse. Circular, unspectacular, empty, except for the woman sat on a bench with a child in a buggy.

I was for walking through, on the other side. But Kate set off towards the woman.

As we neared, I recognised the pump that hung from the buggy.

The woman, arms exposed, tattooed. 'Ben' on one arm, 'Harry,' the other.

We nodded, smiled, stopped.

The boy sat still, staring.

"And what's your name," I said.

"This is Ben." "Hello Ben," and I touched his arm.

No response.

The woman, we did not get her name, wanted to talk.

Ben, her son, 3 years old, rare genetic disorder, only six hundred in the world.

Can't walk, cannot talk, cannot eat, often unhappy.

Twin, Harry, walking, talking, eating, laughing at home.

Seven tortuous months Ben had been in hospital, mum with him, every day, every night.

Dad and Harry at home in a Leeds suburb.

He unable to deal with the situation, grieving.

In that park by the Clarendon Wing, momentous heart-breaking issues were discussed.

Would it be better if Ben's inevitably shortened life was allowed to be even shorter, rather than medically lengthened?

For whose sake was Ben being kept alive? Mum asked.

We left, issues unresolved, wishing Mum well.

Heading for Hanover Square, our lives, once again, put firmly into perspective.

Malcolm Henshall

Marching on together

Saturday afternoon 35,000 sing Marching on Together, we're going to see you win

They sit, they stand, exercising their vocal chords,
in solidarity against the enemy.

We've been through it all together, we've had our ups and downs
We're gonna stay with you forever, at least until the world stops going round

On the pitch, players from Germany, Cote D'Ivoire, Nigeria, USA, Japan, Brazil, Slovenia, Bulgaria,

St. Lucia, Wales, Sweden and, oh yes, a couple of English men.

An international squad, cheered on by a mainly white male English crowd.

On all 4 sides of the ground people sing together with a religious fervour,
urging those they love, their heroes, on to victory.

The thousands leave the ground happy.

The following Thursday, some that were there go to vote.

The fellow in the Kop, who sang his swearing heart out,
an accountant, lives an affluent life in Adel,
mutters about immigrants as he puts his cross next to 'Reform'.

The man in the Norman Hunter Stand, hesitates,
a good union man but feels he must, now, vote Green.

The vicar, who takes his 10-year-old daughter to the Jack Charlton family stand,
worries about the swear word she heard, repeatedly, on Saturday afternoon
and then shouted it out loud during his sermon the next day.

He wishes his sparse congregation were as enthusiastic as the Elland Road crowd.
He plumps for neither left nor right putting his cross next to the Liberal Democrat.

A woman, who now sits, where she once stood in the John Charles stand, having supported the team

for 60 years, through the ups and downs of the song, cannot desert the party she has always voted

for, Starmer notwithstanding.

Marching on together? ... I think not...

Malcolm Henshall

Rise

Let the lions rise from their plinths,
shake soot from their limestone fur
and descend the Town Hall steps.

Let the marble dogs yawn from the handrails,
stretch away one-hundred years of sleep
and pass unseen through the Library's doors.

Let them stalk the city's streets in freedom,
their claws clipping on the paving slabs
as shoppers scatter along The Headrow.

And let you and I ascend the vacant plinth:
this look, this touch, this kiss being petrified
in alabaster until all of yesterday's tomorrows.

Susan Darlington

Previously published on Leads to Leeds website

The Birdman of Adel Woods

Boot prints in mud and a snapped
birch twig are the only sign
that birdman is here, silent
with listening to the ripple of robin,
the natter of nuthatch
in its outlaw mask. I want to reach out
but am afraid his jacket will crumble
into moss in my clumsy fingers,
the hem of his trousers will root
into the cushioned, pine strewn earth,
that his hat will unravel with spider silk
and spin out on the breeze. Be caught
on words that are pellet-hard,
coughed up in fur and bone. A tongue
I can't comprehend as I crash
through bramble, the screech of birds
telling me I don't belong.

Susan Darlington

Previously part of Leeds Lieder project

City or country

As a child in Leeds, life in the city seemed hum drum at times with rows of the same houses and high rises terraced back to backs and buses to school full of smokers' smoke and a notice asking you not to spit. At school some children smelt. The outdoor toilets smelt, of course, sharp and repelling. And inside in the afternoon there was the aroma of the green vegetables which laid uneaten for long quarter hours on the plates of their potential eaters who refused to eat and as the time ticked by, their resolution was not challenged by the congealing mass on their plates. Shopping 'in town' meant a brisk walk down Boar Lane, Albion Street, the Headrow and Briggate, to go in Littlewoods and Lewis's and walk past Schofields, and Matthias Robinsons. You'd see buses to Belle Isle, Pudsey, Hunslet and Wortley and there were queues at the bus stops, of the waiting, with small children smacked and bawled at, so they cried even harder. When summer came and we travelled to Cornwall to holiday with our cousins who lived in a rural idyll near places called Mevagissey, St Just in Roseland, Pencallenick, Tresillian and we spent days on the beaches of Perranporth and Kynance Cove and the smell when you went to the farm at the bottom of their garden, was of pigs which hilariously made me sneeze forever, and of fresh hay - I thought I would like to live in the countryside. Then much later, I did – in the heart of the Cotswolds, deeply rural, untouched by the hand of human progress. Minchinhampton, Nymphsfield, Woodchester, sounded beautiful. But after one year living at a Field Centre there, I realised, No, it's city life for me. It's the busy-ness, its people coming together to make things happen, theatre, cinema, art galleries, lunch clubs for the elderly, food banks for the hungry, libraries, universities, tennis clubs and matches, football, rugby and cricket. It's people who think and challenge and have new ideas. It's embracing different ways of living and of being and ... there's a choice of friends.

Rosie Cantrell

Collecting the parish magazine subscriptions

We walked, full of purpose, among commodious villas with deep green gardens
Where the latches on the iron gates clunked,
and heavy with hesitant greeting,
the gates grated and squeaked
sending a warning signal, probably on deaf ears.
Up the drives there was moss
in the cracks of the flagstone paths and
dandelions pushing up
through impossible
small gaps
and the ladies who took the church magazine
would take their time in reaching the door with its insistent bell
requesting the subscription in April.
The loose-limbed legs of their youth now slow and heavy,
they would open the door with a shoosh on the patterned tiles of their numbered
flats.
There'd be a faint fusty scent as they gathered their purses and opening them
with care
fished out a pink 10 shilling note to pay,
then returned to their rooms with framed men in their khaki
and family groups round Victorian chairs.
Back on the Otley Road cars, all black, made a drone of busy-ness
and the blue Samuel Ledgard bus laboured up the hill,
green buses plied to Cookridge, Ireland Wood and Tinshill
and a red bus stopped on its way to Ilkley.
They filled the air with dark fumes, that mingled with a hint of Bryan's frying on
the mist.

Rosie Cantrell

The Bear Pit

Many times, I had passed it on my walk
This stone castle folly or so I thought
I had read on its heritage plaque outside
A bear in a zoo in the 1840's here did abide.
But never 'til now had I entered its iron gate
to look down that pit
And saw the beast in my mind's eye
Heard its roar of fear & despair
A cry for freedom and release
As children rained down Sunday Buns
Cruel it seems to us in modern times
That a noble bear should be so confined
Yet more cruel it was in those times
Sending children to labour in danger
In mills and mines.

Gary McGreal

Four-Four on The Headrow

In the eighties, school was strip-lights,
balloon-squeak chairs on lino,
voices ping-pong off painted breeze-block.
My name sat in the margins:
drifts, won't settle,
a forecast, not a person.
At home: Mum's mouth held shut
like a purse. The kettle's hiss.
Dad at the sink, toolbox open,
metal shining its opinions.
If my mouth started flapping
he'd make the house need fixing:
hinge, latch, tap,
anything but me.
The estate ran on slammed doors and barking,
names booted like cans,
mopeds sawing the evening in half.
No dial.
Just off / on,
and on meant stay ready.
By '91 I'd learned the way out:
West Riding bus easing off the ring road,
a Day Rover sweating in my palm.
Rain turned the windows to VHS snow;
Leeds arrived in edits,
cemetery, gable, crane,
a line of washing practising flight.
Then the station: the Queens Hotel
squatting, grey-jawed.
The concourse clock,
a pale pupil,
always watching, always correct.
I slid through carrier bags,
through perfume and hot fat,
down the Headrow
to where the pavement changed its mind.

Crash, wedged between church and chip shop,
window armoured with gig flyers,
neon leaking like a wound into rain.
Inside: cardboard, wet wool, vinyl,
the week unbuttoned, hung up,
filed by tempo.
Sleeves pressed together
like terraces in winter,
spines tight as kept secrets.
I lowered my gaze into the dividers:
SOUL / INDIE / US IMPORT / HOUSE.
Trax. Dance Mania. DJ International
logos like tiny warning signs
for somewhere safer.
Under the floor the bass
didn't sound so much as insist,
a grid the world could sit on
without sliding.
The lad behind the counter, hair
curled like a question, clocked me.
You wanna hear it?
Marshall Jefferson, pink on black,
needle down
and the room went clear,
as if someone had wiped a thumbprint
off the air.
Four beats to the bar:
kick, hat, clap, hat,
the only counting I'd ever done
that didn't drop me.
Chords rose, concrete at dusk,
warm windows switching on
in a city I wasn't chased from.
A voice kept asking, Can you feel it?
and the answer
moved out of thought
into bone,
ribs, teeth, soles.
In the listening booth
the world blurred beyond thick glass.

909 kicks drilled my chest
until it answered back,
until my breath learned a pattern
and stayed there,
bar after bar,
brick after brick,
a small, reliable architecture.
Later, when the estate went off again,
telly-light leaking through party walls,
next door revving nowhere on a stolen bike,
I lay with the light out,
face to the speaker turned low
so only my heart could hear it.
In my head, Crash's window
still burned on wet pavement
a rectangle you could step into.
Somewhere in Leeds a record turned,
stylus taking its thin, invisible road
to whoever needed the order next.
Under the duvet, my fingers
kept the beat without asking
kick, hat, clap, hat,
until the night clicked into place,
and my heart, gritty as West Yorkshire,
stayed in time.

Tim Brookes

Return by

Saturday.

The village still in its indoor voice,
gas fire hissing,
a mug furred with cold tea,
the telly's grey-blue glow
making everybody look unwell.

You ease the latch
like it's wired.
Don't wake it.
Don't wake him.
Don't wake that hallway weather
that turns if you step wrong.

Coins in your fist,
bus fare, hush money.
Copper and nickel
slick with heat from your palm.

West Yorkshire Transport,
green-and-cream,
breathes at the stop,
doors wheezing open.

The driver tears a ticket
without lifting his eyes:
a thin receipt
for leaving.

Past fields rubbed pale,
pit-tips and pylons,
estates with broken bikes
left to rust into themselves,
smoke from somebody's early fag
caught in a hedge.

Leeds comes up
soot-black, scaffold-bright,
The Headrow damp with morning,
Briggate already clacking
with shopping feet,
Woolies humming under strip lights,
WHSmith stacking paperbacks
in strict, hopeful rows.

City Square: pigeons, suits,
a man with a Day Rover
folded like a shield.

Then Calverley Street
steps, stone,
a face that doesn't flinch.

Leeds Central Library:
not a shop, not a pub,
not a lesson, not a warning,
just a hush with a roof
they built and forgot
to lock.

Inside: wet wool, polish, paper,
heat that doesn't argue.
Coats steaming slightly.
Carpet taking your footsteps
and keeping them.

The date stamp comes down,
THUMP,
ink and pressure,
and your chest answers it
without thinking.

Card catalogue drawers
with small brass mouths—
index cards, neat hand,
your finger running A–Z

as if the alphabet
might spell you a door.

You pull Methuen Modern Plays
from the tight, stern row,
black spines, plain type,
no picture to soften it.

A stage direction catches,
pause,
one small word
and the whole scene leans.
You feel it in your own house:
how the air can change
without a sound,
how a silence can be a hand
hovering.

Then Salinger,
paperback creased at the spine,
Catcher, Nine Stories,
a boy across an ocean
talking like he's sat beside you
on the same hard chair,
smart-mouthed, scared,
still trying to keep things
from going bad.

You read him like contraband.
Like proof
the mind can be a place
you can enter
and not be followed.

All day at the long tables:
students chewing pens,
old men dozing in coats,
a librarian's soft shoes
making rounds
as steady as checks on a ward.

No one asks your name.
No one wants your trouble
to pass the time.

Only the radiator ticking,
the microfiche machine humming
in a corner like a distant TV,
and rules printed small
as if kindness has to whisper:

SILENCE.
RETURN BY.

You stay till afternoon dulls,
till outside light goes flat,
till your stomach remembers
it's a body.

At the door you look back once,
stone, lamp-glow, calm,
and think how they set this place up
for anyone who can read,

then send lads like you home
to be measured in wages,
in what d'you want that for?
In keep your head down,
in don't get ideas.

You walk back through town,
Kirkgate smell on the air,
chips and oranges, damp coats,
to the bus stand,
book in your bag
warming your ribs.

On the ride back
the same hedges, the same shut doors,

the same low sky
that knows your postcode.

And when the front door goes,
that sound like a dare,
you don't make a scene.
You don't answer back.

You go to your room.
You open the book.
In your pocket
the slip with the stamped date,
RETURN BY,
presses your thigh
like proof
there's an end-date
to the way it is.

Tim Brookes

City of stone

Yorkstone, millstone grit,
Rough Rock cut from Bramley Fall.
Carboniferous sandstones topped by
immigrant Portland stone lions
weathered away by time
like the ancient underground
tropical forests crushed
to coal to cast the
fireclay, burned into
redbrick rectangles
to build redbrick
terraced houses
back to back,
tumbling down
cobbled streets
like ridged red waterfalls,
between the woods of Bramley, Middleton,
Roundhay, Horsforth, Ireland Wood, Adel
humming with beech and birch
and hazel and hawthorn
and bramble and berry
like fragments of Elmet
falling gently between the stones
and the streets, washed by rain
peeled open like
the cherry trees in April.

Eileen Neil

Turner in Leeds

He was nowt but a lad from the hairdresser's shop.
Travelled north on his lofty pilgrimage.
It's a no brainer at twenty-two.
Abbeys, castles, cathedrals abounded up north
He set out with his great coat, top hat,
sketch book, a box of paints
into the green wetness of Kirkstall
to shelter where a group of cows
shelter in the ancient dormitory undercroft
arched like a Moorish palace pierced by yellow sunlight,

flooded by cobalt blue
then sketch after sketch and the abbey was embalmed
in light strokes of graphite and brush strokes of colour.
Scintillating blue and gold tumble
from abbey to river weir. Ruined walls clothed in ivy and light
and the church tower glowing impeccably white
like the finger of an angel pointing to the sky
Here cows graze innocent fields.
Later will come wool, coal, industry, wealth.
He came with a box of paints and a dream.
To be an artist.

Eileen Neil

Legacy

You wanted a quiet life
To be left alone
They wanted to hound you
To make their presence felt
To make you disappear.

Doorways gave you shelter
They always found you
Moved you on
That did not satisfy

Fear being the father of cruelty
Concocted a plan
They would chase you
Chase you until there was nowhere else to go

Across the bridge
The River Aire beckoned
Into the water you would go
Further and further in you'd go
A homeless black man
Until...

Drowned
Murdered was the decision
Leeds City Police Force
Produced a first!
The first successful prosecution of British police officers
for involvement in the death of a Black person.

Your name kicked its way into Leeds United Fan repertoire
The River Aire is chilly and deep -OL- U-WA-LE
Never trust the Leeds Police force -OL-U-WA-LE
And
Never trust the Leeds Police Force
Oluwale
Get in the van and don't dilly dally on the way

Reggae Dub poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson
Drummed the story
The pattern was clear

Your legacy has ebbed and flowed
but you are immortalised
In books, songs,
Plaques
Sculpture, Memorial Gardens
A bridge over the River Aire
Bears your name.

They wanted you gone
Instead
You are forever a part of Leeds.

Myrna Moore

The Way We Were

Past blackened buildings
Telling another story
But this was the swinging 70's
Or maybe not so swinging more swingeing.

The Headrow beckoned
Debenhams, Lewis'
Schofields
Littlewoods, Stead and Simpsons
Past Dolcis, Clark's, Dunn & Co
Tobacco shops aplenty, Capstan and Players
Leeds Permanent Building Society
Dyson's Furs
The David Oluwale scandal bubbling underneath
Conveniently forgotten during the 80's and 90's

But
Change was afoot on the Headrow
The Town Hall had stolen a march
Now cleaned and gleaming
Its sandstone splendour breathtaking

But we were heading for the Ceylon Tea Rooms
Modern

Cool
Airy
And Leeds answer to the Rococo high faluttin glory
Of County Arcade's Lyon's Tea Room

But before we enter the doors
What about the people?
Young, old and everything in between
Of course, 'old' to me then was anyone over forty!
Transcending eras rubbed along sort of
Older women in smart suits, collars lined with real fur
And of course the ubiquitous head covering,

small hat or scarf
Men too,
cloth caps or Trilbies.

Younger people, teens anyone under forty, mini- skirts
maxi skirts, floral dresses
flowing skirts
Flowed for men too
Bell bottoms prevailed accompanied by robes of one sort or
another.
Hair long sideburns architectural arrangements
big hair.
All this and more

But here we were

At The Ceylon Tea Rooms
No exclusivity here
Airy, glass emporium
Tea chests from India
Lined the walls
Some open, some shut

No deep pile carpet
Shiny floors
Bright lights
No hushed voices

Posters of tea pickers
Enjoying their work
Menus stuffed with Empire Tea
Darjeeling
Gun Smoke
Earl Grey

And to eat
Quiche, Quiche and more Quiche
Change hovered
This was the new normal
For the way we were.

Myrna Moore

Chapelton

Chapelton 1955/56, a hive of ethnic diversity.
Jews, Irish, Poles and a scattering of others
dwelt in large Victorian terraced houses,
many of which had been converted into flats.
This was a whole world away from the life
I'd lived in Dublin, exotic and cosmopolitan.
In the flats where we lived, an Italian
lady resided in the basement and on the ground
floor a Hungarian man and his English wife.
My family lived on the first floor of what
the locals called Mulligan's Mansion.
The sheer variety of the ethnic mix was
exhilarating --- there were two synagogues,
a Catholic Church, a Kosher bakery
and a Polish club within striking distance.
We lived in this magical world for a year
or two until we were offered a council
house on the Miles Hill estate, but it could not
hold a candle to the exotic mixture
of cultures in Chapelton.

Bill Fitzsimons

Hearts and minds

They glare at each other
across the wide expanse
of Headingley Lane – two brick-armoured
behemoths ready to joust in defence
of pecuniary gain and student thirst.
Sturdy knights of alcohol, they will
contest the field of honour to the bitter
(or even lager) end – The Original Oak
and The Skyrack, each with their loyal
clientele, casting their nets wide
to haul in the stray fish of the uncommitted.
Their pennants flying in the field,
each one determined not to yield.

Bill Fitzsimons

Outsider syndrome

I'm born into the Cockney tribe, known mostly for
Pearly Kings and Queens, rhyming slang,
and possibly dealing in things that fell off the back of a lorry.
As a family we have zero to do with the royals and not a lot of
contact with stolen goods. We do use phrases like give us a
butchers, frog and toad and me old china but that's about it.

For six decades inner city London is my home
until I swap it for Leeds. It's not so much culture shock
but the drop in temperature that affects me most. I arrive in
September and wear my coat, hat and scarf indoors for the
first autumn and winter. Amusing for some, no joke for me.

What I first enjoy about Leeds is how easy it is to
get about and you can get a cab home without having to
take out a loan. But I did and still do miss the Tube.
A rapid transport system wouldn't go amiss
or even a train that turned up and went where it said
it was going would be nice. But maybe I'm asking too much.

I've since found that Leeds appreciates creativity and there's
lots of opportunities to start projects, have an outlet for them
and find an audience willing to support them. It's not a city
where only the rich are allowed to express themselves.

There's a lively mix of free thinking, friendly residents,
including those who came as students and never left,
who help make life interesting and feel like a home.
I think I can say with some confidence it's been a good move.

Jackie Parsons

Children of Khnum

A spot of Egypt lives in Holbeck
where once godlings of Temple Works grazed
on high trimmed its top
the thatch that kept the inside humid
preserved the flaxen stuff indoors
the line between bustle within
and calm outside
Quiet hydraulics ran the lift that raised them
to their top spot
their space of grace and favour place

Long gone now the fringe on top
and its casual croppers
the mill building listed
as it falls apart
a green evolution ahead of its time

Joy Lebof

Tetley's best

Houdini nearly died in Leeds
a stunt gone wrong
when milk was not the medium

Escapist's skills faced defeat
as barrel of Brewer's best
skewed teetotaler's senses

Sunk in the arms of its charms
he drifted off to insensibility
before his saviour broke death's grip

Joy Lebof

Motorway City of the Seventies

Memories of a French 20 something, 1972

Motorway city of the Seventies.
That is what it said on the envelope.
So, I found out I would be off to Leeds,
And I wondered how I'd manage to cope.

But Yorkshire was friendly, I quickly found.
The skies were grey but the people called me love
When I bought some milk and gave them a pound.
In the bus queue never was there a shove.

No mountains to be seen but streets were steep.
The pudding was a food you ate with beef
Sundays were so quiet, all must be asleep.
Meals had odd name like "tea" and were very brief.

Forty years have gone and I am still here
Glad to call it home and send out a cheer.

Marie-Paule Sheard

Ermelai

Look up to where
The Grimshaw skylines
Sit above the coffee bars.
By the city station,
Venetian towers of catalogues and wool
Stand over the Aire as it pushes to Hull.
Take the slow canal west towards Liverpool,
To the mansion on the hill,
Where Gott housed his Caravaggios,
And countless brothers made square cuts,
Ran tries or scored goals
As proud grandfathers
Watched over Farmer Brown's field;
The cobbles still run uphill
To the back-to-back Moorfields;
And the grand old school
(Where my education has since been rubbed out)
By the park where Charlie sold cakes.
Sunday morning still wakes
To the bells of Christ Church,
Now the tribes of Briggantes
And the Romans have gone,
But Leeds will continue to feed on the Aire
Springing forth from Malham's cathedral Cove.

Howard Benn

Roundhay – social mobility

The Roundhay foxes shun me,
make it obvious I'm not one of them,
a bit naïve, or perhaps obtuse,
just not there in terms of cunning.
They slyly suggest a move to Gipton Woods
or the rougher urban Harehills beat,
back yard chicken tikka, exotic meat –
I'll fit in, they repeatedly assure me.
But I like the asymmetric lakes,
mother, daughter and the deep ravine,
the wilder smell above the city,
broad sky, dark woods, and every freedom in between.

Colin Day

Jury service

The briefing was very clear,
it was an important civic job,
each person sitting there equal to their peers
twelve united in reason, not a mob.
Justice required an open enquiring mind,
logic enhanced by the experience of life,
the evidence sifted to see what we could find
from accused, the police, the victim and the wife.
We listened, we concentrated, we tried
to evaluate, piece by piece, the tale.
We began to sense who was truthful, who had lied
and why the defendant hadn't been given bail.
We had to acquit, short of facts, reasonable doubt -
of course he was guilty, guilty as the darkest night.
The policeman hissed, "you fools it's a villain you're letting out,"
in broadest Yorkshire the foreperson replied –
"we know flower, but your case were shite."

Colin Day

Lockdown on Chapel Allerton Allotments

Those first few months were best;
when traffic stopped and birdsong
took your breath away.
And every day the sun shone.
Those of us who live alone
talked to our seedlings,
grumbled at the pigeons
and managed friendly, distanced chats
with fellow gardeners
leaning on our spades
in time-honoured way,
exchanging tips and seeds,
anticipating the summer's growth;
knowing life goes on
and nothing lasts forever.

Tonnie Richmond

St Matthews Churchyard, Chapel Allerton

The old church has gone, demolished long ago
but the graveyard remains. Gravestones lie toppled,
some hanging on, aslant like drunks
wobbling from the nearby Nags Head pub.
A little sad, neglected, most of the year,
but in spring it huffs and puffs with pride,
puts on a show that makes you pause
as it assaults your nose and eyes.
A heady blanket of wild garlic, lush and dense,
a green and white embroidered spread
fails to muffle voices from the graves below—
We're still here, they whisper, not quite dead.

Tonnie Richmond

Ilkley Moor. November 2020

To Uncle Felix from Steve.

The card's cellophane wrapping
already clouded in the mist.

Never forgotten. 1st September 1944.

The rough-hewn stone pillar, quite short,
might have be a milestone among
the winter skeletons of heather and crowberry;
the only brightness in the sullen light

a slash of crimson roses, two scarlet poppies
and the turquoise puffa suit of a small child,
puddle-hopping past with her Dad.
At the foot of the stone a clutter

of Remembrance Day crosses,
dark with algae, and last year's wreath
faded to pink. Up ahead the child shouts.
A grouse flies up out of the heather

and in my pocket my phone grumbles.
A photo from my son on another moor,
blue sky and starch white clouds
fanning out above the horizon.

Sue Butler

Friday night

after Frank O'Hara

the five-day weight of my backpack
settles against the knuckle of my collarbone
as I hop off the train opposite The Ticket Office
where the waitress is at your table before you
can get to the bar and brings pale popcorn
we think it's organic in a mug with a kickdancing
rabbit on it and somehow the waitress
the popcorn and the gin and tonic add up
to a bill that smacks an edge into the evening

so we walk out into the jaundiced sodium light
past the woman who begs beside the dress shop
where the prices are never displayed, she has
black hair and an accent when she talks into
her smartphone or wheedles pleeease
I think of modern-day slavery but because of
the smartphone and last week the accordion
I don't give her money but buy a Big Issue instead
from Jack who has a spot outside Betty's teashop
and keeps his sleeping bag in the Methodist church

when sleet starts pattering on the pavement
like ranks of bustling crabs he just pulls down
his hat so a shadow falls on the beaten in
bridge of his nose and we hustle on to
the Winter Gardens where Simon Armitage
is reading and next week there will be
a Buddy Holly tribute band which might be
more fun and later a friend tells me that
his patter was word for word identical
in Cornwall and they laughed just as much when
he took a dig at Doncaster but this evening
we sit on our hard hooked together chairs

Ah the good old days

Not on our council estate
over in a poor part of Leeds
in the 50s and 60s.

You could see it all:
drunken fights on a Friday night,
Mondays, wives with black eyes.

Kids not taking their vests off
in the hall for PE
to hide the bruises,
the marks from the belts.

The old lady down the street
stopping the rag and bone man
buying a dress or coat from his cart.

The young housewife next door
paying off arrears from the tallyman in kind.
No judgments made.
It had to be done.

Ah the good old days.
Maybe if you lived in Moortown
or some other posh place
but not on our council estate.

Paul Hicks

This town I used to know

is no longer mine.
I'm not complaining.

After all, after time
everything must change:
like us all it will grow.

Like kids these days
it will get bigger than us.

My only hope for Leeds;
it keeps the things I love

like its kindness
its humility.

No hatred please

Paul Hicks

By ginnel

I came by ginnel and left by ginnel. It's the preferred route for introverts, those of us who want to traverse the city unseen. Enter through ancient portals, under a canopy riddled with squirrels, between walls mossed with velvet. Feel footfalls padded by brackened loam, shins nettled, and fingertips brushing stones laid two hundred years ago, by long-gone loiner labourers. Flags crazed, patched, poached or polished, split by dandelions, yellow poppies, trip hazards of bramble and ivy, pirate ferns and sudden sparrows. Sly shocks of graffiti are already half-consumed by wildflowers, ragged tags surrendering to legendary wynds. Urban interlocking with ancient, via a seamless tracery of nerves. The city, sequinned diva that she is, still celebrates her inner witch here.

Su Ryder

Trafficked

Dad waited outside the market in Kirkgate
while we hurried inside down the Fish Aisle
where eyes, entrails and fins slipped from piles of gleaming fish
a day earlier leaping in cold currents passing cod and haddock
skate, squid and majestic salmon in baskets
or slapped on trays strewn with ice and going on
under strings of rabbits, quail and partridge
limp and broken and twitching
we arrived at the terraced flower stall
in the bottom, far corner where a crowd gathered
pressing from opening time
and here Auntie Elsie held the centre
in head-scarf and heavy, red lips
gorgeous like the blooms she dealt
calling out to the punters
composing and showing bouquets
adding sprays to offset raking the stems effortlessly
vocal and full on as her younger sister, my mother
lit up a ciggie, passing it up via the apprentice girls
while I slunk behind her skirts alarmed at my aunt's edge
till we turned away with a gifted bunch.

Usually, on my prompt we went out via Pet Row
eyeing the pelted, feathered and scaly exhibits
rodents from thicket, field and burrow
breeds of mouse and rat reptile and amphibian
fabulous parrots, paradise birds canaries, budgerigars
and chirpy finches and their overcrowded 'quarters'
pens, coups and cages and sudden, feisty squabbles
couldn't spoil my delight as a wide-eyed junior
thrilled by the calls and shrieks
the flashes of colour, tooth and nail
and the scent of litter, sawdust and feed
though it was noticeable
even to a young lad from south-Seacroft
how the stock was manhandled roughly.

Just inside the narrow entrance
the arcade featured a prize bird
an eye-catcher and finer than the magpies
that turned my head at home
he was dusky, liveried in black and scarlet
splashed at the neck and crown with gold
and I imagined him netted carried there as a fledgling
from a steaming forest or gorgeous, scented garden
backed by a smouldering volcano
overhung by a full, silvery moon
then made to perch by a gruff trader and eventually
browsing a compendium.
I identified him, learned he nested on a high range
in Madagascar where he flitted and swooped
whistling and whooping night long
all puffed out serenading his harem of giddy sweethearts.

As years passed glancing up I still checked him out
but observing his fading vitality
I guessed he'd never be sold on
and sensing his hopelessness
I grew to despise the ageing couple who kept and exploited him
clipping his wings stopping his whistle and his heart's desires
and then I couldn't bear to look his way at all
or pass carefreely along that awful arcade
where so many trapped creatures waited
week after week to be bundled up and trafficked on
never marking out their own patch or risking all in the wild
and taking stock of him bit by bit I saw he'd become a drab creature compared to
that other 'paradise bird'
my energetic Aunt Elsie who free, feisty and lustrous
had never been held back or cowed.

Richard O'Donnell

Cheered up

Long back
Mary could knock up a Sunday roast
with all the trimmings
or a handmade garment to suit
like nobody's business
when over fifty years ago
just a youth
I hurried across town
and up the hill
from Gledhow Valley Road
to the Pastures
to call at her door
courting her bonny daughter
who soon gave her hand to me to keep
neath confetti
and that Lady's statue
off Harrogate Road
but long since our vows mellowed
and her grandchildren sat on her lap
or played at her feet
and ageing ourselves by now
after the usual rounds of ups and downs
we started together on the hardest lap
'downhill'
looking on as she declined, alone
in a cold house by the Nags Head
where she'd revelled once
on her own wedding day
and when matters came to a head
somehow, desperately
we brought her higher up
by Allerton Hill to the Greendown Trust
at Dyneley House
near to St Matthews
her old workplace
and here as they minister to her
she's started to 'mend'

uplifted and warmed
by their kindness
and cherished by their company

so much so
she's lit up, heartened again
to our relief and delight.

Richard O'Donnell

Leeds Bus Station

We sit in a queue beside the gateway.
An elderly couple approach,
walking slowly, a man supporting
a woman on his arm. They settle beside us.
He smells unwashed; she is bent
and wasted, her face translucent.
She says they have been to St James's,
heading now for Malton.
Her worn grey eyes look out
past the glass portal, see her mother
waving her off to school at the stop
in the Crescent, her little brother too,
cap sideways, socks already slipping;
and the bus she and Wilfred caught
to Scarborough after the wedding.
Behind is the one he stepped off
when he came back from the Falklands,
swept John from her arms and whirled him
round their heads before they put him
onto the 17 from the end of the Avenue,
which stopped at Green Lane School,
then the University and went on to Australia.
Home, she adds, with a long vowel,
and in the air, it becomes safety, finality, love.

William Coniston

A quickie

Arriving early, I put my name on the list hoping not to be missed
And so, the open mic began and after what seemed an age
Nearly three and a half hours later I was finally called to the stage,
For my five minutes of fame, on last it is normally a blast
But I didn't have time to do my full repertoire of rhyme
Knowing how long it would take to get home, having to run
Through the roadworks on the M621
So thought as was my accord I'd go for a record
The shortest performance at Outspoken,
So short a record that may never be broken
So to make it my shortest ever I began with "Hi I'm Trevor"
And then it seemed just right to end with "Thank you and good night"
All I had time for I couldn't do more
The audience seemed astounded as from the stage I bounded
Thinking I'll have to scurry but they'll not forget tonight in a hurry
Had I cocked up I doubt it, cos' when I told a friend about it
With laughter he roared saying look on the bright side
At least the audience didn't have time to get bored

Trevor Wainwright

Taking the gravy

The competition I'm in it to recite a poem in a minute
The first night went like a dream then someone suggested a theme
They suggested gravy saying write what you like it's an open mic
Rhyme it with wavy, rhyme it with gravy, don't bother to rhyme it at all
Think gravy then get your pen and take it, write down how to make it
Whether from beef pork or chicken and how to make it thicken
Or how granny used to make, what a treat wi' juices from t'meat
Pour it on meat, pies or mash, dip your bread in it in corned beef hash
You can make it in a jug or gravy boat, sprinkle herbs on it an' watch 'em float
Make it your own way
And do you know you can wear it but that's for another poet to say
So he can't object, it's another gravy subject
The competition I'd won it, I couldn't believe done it
I'd been in it, to read a poem in a minute
I was in the top 3 Phil did tell and thought "Bloody hell"
Then came the moment I'll remember forever
When Phil said "and the winner is Trevor"
I'd only done it, in fun and now I'd won
Not the same prestige as a pub meat raffle
But more alive than a weekly whist drive
So it may seem nowt, but it's the first time I'd won owt
Now sit back and remember what has been
The inaugural SWALK poem in a minute winner November 2017

Trevor Wainwright

You can't find elastic in Leeds

after You won't find a bath in Leeds by Sophie Hannah

you will find
all kinds of nail bars
beefy kebabs
chicken nuggets in batter
disappointed street people
eviscerated shops
forlorn cranes bending over bricks
glass glass glass glass glass glistening
hairstyles for gents
indignant tattoos
Jehovah's Witnesses avoided by passers-by
Kindles clasped with thief-proof locks
legs - scarred, pimpled, pink, brown, bare, trousered, skirted, sore.
multi-coloured mobile phone covers
noises - clangs, hammers, sirens
Oluwale bridge, to remind us*
plenty of takeaways
queues waiting for buses home
ridiculously priced shoes
shutters blanking market stalls
thousands of shopping bags for life
unreadable graffiti
vaping odours - a burlesque of false fruit
worried faces
x-roads going downhill
yellow, half-hidden parking lines
zapping black-clad bikers but you'll be lucky to find elastic in Leeds.

Moira Garland

*<https://rememberoluwale.org/>

Splitting Up in Meanwood Park, Leeds.

Here, a great tall oak tree grows.
Its trunk gnarled, nobbled and thick,
Spreads its branches far and wide.
The ground below, unsteady slope,
And tree with majestic shadows, mope.
Can it know what perils await?
What fate?
Then suddenly, not long after storm,
It splits in half
And in between, a deep dark hole.

Now the oak tree left thin and grim,
To weave its branches to the sky.
As now its other half
Has gone to earth.
No one can doubt
That in the end,
We all fall apart!

Maria Sandle

A Moonlit Lane by John Atkinson Grimshaw

Cold moon-gaze through December trees
invokes an uncanny ambience in a wet lane.

Lunar light reflects from mud for carriages
and the poorer sort - a woman and child

who avoid the pavement - afterthoughts
smudged in to go with signature shadows

by a painter who began with photographs
to guide perspective and proper proportion

then moved on to create what he hoped
would sell to the wealthy with drawing-rooms

like museums - dark wood and objects d'art -
where his nocturne might impress on a wall

at a soirée while a daughter in floor-length silk
tackled Chopin on a gleaming grand piano

or to clients in touch with the passed-on
who summoned spirits at suburban séances

which emerged as ectoplasm from the gloom
and sent strange messages from the other side

because this painting with eerie moon-lustrous
others touches on times of grief or mourning

for friends and relatives no longer with us
in the flesh but framed to peer down from a wall.

Stone and bricks solid in now asphalted lane
of villas fragmented into flats where long–dead

denizens could still linger – tap to agree?
Once for Yes or twice for No or thrice for Maybe.

Richard Wilcocks

Shrapnel ball stuck in my heart

After the ether when time unfroze
I pictured us laughing and petting.

Shrapnel ball stuck in my heart -
lead bug in muscle. I said after X-rays
that if I could stand gagging on gas
I would not be too inconvenienced
because surgery might finish my luck.

Stayed plucky. Discharged with bug
still there when we wedded at last.
Slogged for a year until it crawled
making me fall in a field where I heard
birds above me talking - ventriloquists
for fallen pals telling me I had to pray
for a miracle or join them very soon.

Army found me Moynihan at the LGI
who used scalpels made to match
his fingers. He was not just a hewer
of flesh but an artist who caressed it
as he eased out the ball. When I awoke
he gave it to me smiling and wearing
green rubber gloves. I loved the joke.

Richard Wilcocks

From the story of Corporal Robert Leyden. 1918, in *Stories from the War Hospital* by Richard Wilcocks

Meanwood Beck, Leeds

You have many names. Adel and Carr Beck,
Lady Beck, Mabgate, Sheepscar,
Timble and Wortley Beck to name a few.
They mark and claim the places you travel
wet through. Stream sprung from Chevin marsh
to city river wide and then, the ocean too.

Meanwood Beck is how I know you best,
wagging over rock wier and sandy silt,
burbling and babbling from Adel way.
In summer, your liling ripples sing
with birds at dawn, until darkening
dusk you trickle down their murmured day.

Winter you rage through valley and glen,
crack bridges, uproot and sometimes flood,
rush down from the harsh cold of deserted moor.
You freeze still in white-washed parks
as sledging children play in flurried snow,
and dare to skate on your ice-locked floor.

You bring presence to a past that has gone;
the grain mills, tannery, farms, quarried clefts,
monk trod steps and their ginnel pathways.
You are goits, weirs, ponds and workers homes
planted shrubs and monuments of stone,
from, what some might say, were grander days.

Home and sanctuary to cray and bullhead fish,
frogs, flying bats, kingfisher, owls and ducks
that thrive among your river plants and weeds.
With coloured dragonflies, pond skaters,
nymphs, boatmen and myriad insects you flow,
heart and artery. Meanwood. Then down to Leeds you go.

Doug Sandle

There are always trackies by the market, no matter how gentrified the food court gets. With broad accents and hair product and gold chains. I did my four years as one, before my emo Corn Exchange phase, before there was enough space between me and my background for change. I did my walk of shoulders-and-waft, wore knock-off Burberry and a lanyard for my mobile. I paid for my Richmond Superkings and Four Cousins' steak canadian with copper, and I told everyone to fuck off.

There will always be the anthropology of the trackie, a postcode of clothes; we were litter in the city gutter, pineappleweed through concrete. Branding this city harder than suits, harder than heels and a reusable coffee cup. There will always be trackies by the grave of the old NCP phone box, every hour, any hour, Leeds' three-striped beefeaters. You avoid them, you judge them. And still find comfort in them, like you love Arden News and the bus station, the old buildings, The General Elliot. Or else, this city is not home.

Holly Bars

A Tribute to Ward L16, LGI

It's hard to wax lyrical
About matters surgical.

There's no beauty in waiting lists
Blood tests
Catheters
And bedpans.
No poetry in X rays
IV lines
Cannulas
CT scans.

Only notice the nurses

Society's sponges
Absorbing the fragility of broken humanity
Easing the pain
Plumping the pillows
Taking the strain
Bearing the burden of our ageing decrepitude
Endlessly caring
While the suits mutter platitudes.

Consider the nurses.
There's beauty there.

Tracey Race

Lamplighter

Hail the Yorkshire moon aglow
All thanks to Atkinson Grimshaw
But what I'm really keen to know
Is did he paint the Leeds he saw

Unmatched by none to imitate
Bright strokes bring lunar light
As many a landscape or portrait
Are better viewed by night

Park Row lamps of feeble gleam
Clouds break for horse drawn coach
As steeple points to heavens beam
Lighting a safe approach

His mystic skies and golden streets
Cobbled glare and windows grand
As night arrives and day retreats
Dusk immortal by his hand

He seemed to have a special gift
His landscapes made ideal
And gives the scene a pleasing lift
Though somewhat short of real

Friends of Leeds for short or long
To learn its past, I guess
Try not to get impressions wrong
Gaslit no, but moonlit yes.

Tony McGeachie

Dear Leeds. Community Poem

You're the footpaths I follow now the smoke has gone,
you're the ginnels, the cobbles, the Otley run.
You're fish and chips on a cold wet street
you're an open cupboard, you always 'make it reet'.
You're the prayer that's said at Amen Corner,
you're the number 46 that's late in the morning.

You're fruit and veg and fish and bread
bought from the corner shop with your last few quid.
You're a trumpet playing a bold brass rhythm,
you're the constant sound of beating drum.
Grab a daily matcha, or builders brew,
escape from all the boring, enjoy iconic views.

You're a stage, a magic show, exotic dances,
you're the City Varieties, but 'now't too fancy'.
You're leather kissing willow, the bowling greens,
you score a one-all-draw or a five-nil win.
Meet cracking neighbours, catch playground fun,
then come round to mine and put the taties on.

You're The Grand, The Civic Hall, Oluwale Bridge.
The Calls, Little London and Armley Ridge.
You're a place to explore, discover secret treasure,
uncover fascinating stories, whatever the weather.
Find Vikings, Saxons, Romans below the streets
where, under all your gloss, lurks real Yorkshire grit.

You're a high rise flat and a market stall,
you're the hands that catch me when I fall.
Drop into bars and cafes, crawl the bustling pubs
– join us for a gig at The Brudenell Club.
You're that busy friend who always makes time,
wraps us up in hugs, come rain or shine.

Marching on together, wave the yellow, blue, white
of United, the team we're proud to support.
Wear the cloth we weave, sup the beer that's brewed,
drive the City Centre Loop and the Inner Ring Road
Hear the owls hooting, pigeons in the trees
be a honey-loving bear, watch squirrels running free.

You're Burton's, Hepworth's, the textile trade,
you're Towler's Engineering, you're Middleton Railway.
Find your first love in Potternewton Park,
join a midnight conga, go dancing after dark
As civic lions roar, spot an urban fox,
you're a phoenix rising, you're raining cats and dogs.

Climb weathered steps, hear countless voices
– heritage and history's endless chorus.
You're a working week and a weekend rest,
wearing trackie bottoms or your Sunday best.
You're kids soft play, you're a sanctuary,
you're the very best city for poetry.

You're Yorkshire tea in a big pot mug,
you're a pint of Guinness – sup it all up.
Hire a rowing boat on Roundhay Lake,
snatch a deep inhale as you take to the stage
You're The Rhinos scoring a last-minute try,
you're top of the league at Headingley.

So much has changed, yet stayed the same
– still waiting for a tram that can take me home!
Inclusivity, diversity, community, together,
a great big vibrant family all under one umbrella.
We sense your strength in every step,
so Leeds, take us by the hand and let's all say it –

You're knees-ingly, toes-ingly, eyes-ingly,
Guiseley and Bramley and Burley and Headingley.
You're ears-ingly nose-ingly, living-ly, loving-ly
Calverley, Armley, Farsley and Cottingley.
You're Seacroft and Tingley, Wetherby, Lofthouse,
different folk, different lives in different places.

And you make us proud by showing hate the door
- remember Mosley's thugs, chased from Holbeck Moor.
There's joy in laughter and warmth with friends
the important thing is that we're all human beings.
So, let's raise a cup or a glass to our favourite city, please,
the best place in the world is Leeds, Leeds, Leeds!

Poem curated by Liz McPherson and Heartlines Writers for Leeds Lit Fest 2026.

Contributors - in no particular order. JL. Harry Rose, age 5. J Walker. Jemima. Ada. Charlotte. James Lyon-
Joyce. Harshi. Jean Arputharaj. Malcolm. Cllr Abdull Hannan. Catherine. Maryanne. DWN. Roche. Lis.FJ. Amy.
Tillee. Anusha Walia. Eduardo Orduz. Emily Horsley. Freya Rose, age 4 1/2. Carolyn Bligh. Jane. Emma.
Daisy.MM. Demi A. CD. Wycliffe Likara. Johnny Monroe. Julia. Emily. Rory O'D. KE. Bethany. FJ. Yvette
Clarke. Myrna Moore. Jeevan, age 5. Joy Lebof. And , of course, ANON.