



Mark Brown, Untitled

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Our Long Poem of Walking (The Six Towns)

Stoke on Trent. The six towns – Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton and Longton.

Each a town hall, a concert hall and a park
invisible inscriptions of walking translated into concrete composition
poems are fragments images glimpsed on railway arches, factory walls, on
municipal and abandoned buildings
our own long poem of walking

Tunstall the long-defunct 'Manchester and Liverpool District Bank' in terracotta tiles as nature begins to reclaim the abandoned structure. Glimpsed beyond are warehouse stores.

the park an impersonation of nature a corrupted arcadian vision inhabited by the ghost of the industrial past.

a pottery shard found with the fingerprint of its Roman maker impressed into the surface

the unbroken history of pottery workers who have shaped the clay and shaped the landscape

Burslem town square filling up with football supporters. Their 'long poem of walking' invisibly inscribed between terraced streets and Vale Park
communal histories, hopes and disappointments, a shared identity

Burslem is the Mother Town

An alleyway of mostly abandoned and decaying buildings

fading artwork celebrating the 'MOTHE TOWN'

sites of 'industrial ruination' foliage growing from walls and windows

the ridge from which Bennett surveyed the Potteries towns

potbanks remain as poignant reminders

Hanley the ring road that doesn't quite ring the town

a sculpture celebrates the fires that fuelled the city's industries. Now those fires have been extinguished

concrete walkways and staircases provide shelter for the homeless

The footsteps of the abandoned inhabitants tell a different story

the Cultural Quarter, Museum and Art Gallery, a brickwork frieze depicting the city's industries (an emerging theme)

statues of Arnold Bennett, Reginald Mitchell and a steelworker (in shiny stainless steel) celebrate a masculine history less able to speak to its future.

Stoke upon Trent
 railway, canal and A500 separate railway station from town
 Outside Josiah Wedgwood holding an example of his language
 pottery
 his support for the abolitionist cause.
 go under and over
 links
 London to Manchester and Glasgow.
 radical change isolated on an island between the road and the railway.
 a wedding at the town hall and the guests are forced to scamper across the one-
 way system, clutching the hands of small children, for photographs in the
 grounds of Stoke Minster.
 A church has occupied this site since the first millennium.
 in the new city new names were given, but the ghostly residues of earlier forms
 remained.

Fenton is the least remarkable why Bennett* left it out
 it feels like the edge
 a strip of warehouse stores and fast food outlets
 The town hall with high, arched windows rescued by the grandson of the pottery
 philanthropist who gifted it to the town emerged from the shadows of history
 King Street feels like a black and white photograph of the 1970s or the 1870s.

Longton bottle ovens crowded
 Vacant and half demolished buildings re-colonised by nature
 the fragile preservation of craft skills
 the work of the maker anonymously embodied in the object the name of the
 factory carried by the 'bottom stamp'.
 someone from the Potteries will always look at the stamp on their crockery
 before drinking the tea handed them.

the clock towers institutes and park gates
 landmarks of the personal imagination.
 our own long poem of walking

* Arnold Bennett's best-known work is *Anna of the Five Towns*, which fictionalises 5 of the 6 towns (Burslem, for example, becomes Bursley). The town that he chose to omit is Fenton.