



Flotsam & Jetsam of the Bay

new writing

Cover image by Kirstie Gorman

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Writings come from workshops run by
Morecambe Bay Partnership,
facilitated by Sarah Hymas

Thanks due to The Reading Room, Sunderland Point,
February 2016

<http://www.morecambabay.org.uk/>
2016



Writing the Flotsam and Jetsam of the Bay

East to West

Hard, damp, safe sand.
Patted into buckets.
Tipped into castles.
Fenced by breakwaters.
Long expanses of sand and summer
Safely contained.

Toes wiggle in the sand
Washed by breaking waves.
Hissing of water on the shore.
Bored with this thing
Waiting for the next thing
Looking for distraction.

A pool at the end of the breakwater
Bulbous, swollen slippery pods
Black and brown shiny threads
Slapping the sand
As my hand stirs the water.
Bottom of the food chain.

Dimpled fingers rip it free
From inadequate feathered roots
Pods squeezed by little fingers

Seeking a satisfying pop.
Pierced by milk teeth
Salt and iron drench my tongue

Driving past the final house
Ruddy faced boy staring open mouthed
Seeing if I will keep to the road
Sand and mud blur its edges
And lie brazen in the middle
Birds walk with confidence where I watch my step

The sand is in charge here
The sea can outrun and humiliate
The fences and walls are decorated
With black and brown strands of bunting
The grass of the sea
Telling tales on where it's been

Is the bay the same bay that the Vikings saw?
As they buried their dead.
Humans and their endeavours
Washed away or pulled down and down
Unimaginable fear cradling them
Until their end.

Voices Caught in the Wind

The Facts

I brought to this writing workshop two images depicting journeys across and out of Morecambe Bay.

A postcard of the painting by David Cox, which hangs in Lancaster Museum, titled 'Market people crossing Lancaster Sand, Morecambe Bay'. 1839. The scene depicts coach and horses, horse and cart, horse and rider, panniers on horses, adult and children walkers and dogs. They travel in both directions and their journeys obviously would be undertaken between low water and the next incoming tide.

A photograph of my grandfather, Albert Wannell, taken circa 1910 showing him in uniform when he was the Bosun on SS Antrim. She was the first ship to dock at Heysham Harbour on 31st May 1904 for services from Heysham to Belfast and the Isle of Man.

Seventy one years separates these images but the purpose of the journeys would be similar; for business or legal reasons, to trade, for pleasure, to visit or leave families, for weddings, baptisms and funerals.

I am the observer, the one who looks at these images of people and wants to acknowledge and celebrate the existence and importance of ordinary journeys across the sand and over the water out of the Bay. The words of people who travelled this way are now unheard but I write about them as 'Voices Caught in the

Wind’.

The walk back to the car park from the Reading Room at Sunderland Point after the workshop was in the darkness of early February. The wind blowing in and around the estuary made talking to my companion difficult, this inspired the title.

These facts I have written about briefly. Here is the fiction, both presented as introductory to a longer piece of work.

The Fiction

On their journeys people meet, crossing the sand or sea.
Between the tides they stop, to greet,
share, argue, and agree to meet again.
The journeys length depends on weather,
walk in daylight, dawn or dusk, sail depends on tides.
They hurry or linger, enjoy the view, the danger,
or ignore, ‘we have seen it all before’.

Over here, over there, east to west and east.
In the wind on this great bay, voices caught
from rippled sand or deck of rolling steamer.
Words taken away, flotsam lost by accident,
or jettisoned deliberately to avoid rebuke.
Not gone forever but whirling, wambling, waiting,
found by someone else and written.

Tina Smith

Bay Sky

Only now do I understand what people mean when they talk about 'big skies'. It's all sky here, even with the tide and the hills it's the sky that's something to behold. From every direction the bigness of it strikes you at once. What things this sky must have seen, what tales it could tell.

The sky's the thing; the very heart of here.

The Cockle Gatherers

It's early morn, before dawn. The only sound to cut through the air is the rattle of the cart's chains against the horses harness. Bob and Elizabeth Wilson, or Katty and Lib as they are known to most, look much older than they really are. Creased necks, rosy cheeks and a lifetime's hard work across their brow. "What's the weather like today, Katty". "Ooh fresh and wet" comes the reply.

It's a mizzly morning with a rough wind, the sort that gets right in between your ears and cuts along the very tips of your ear lobes. It's an icy cold, vibrating sensation, one which the hardy cockle gatherers have gotten used to. The kind that pulses when you're back in the warmth.

Katty and Lib hold no conversation on their way to the shore. "There's no point making tittle tattle" says Bob. "It strains the mind and just makes the day more endless". These fishing folk, armed with jumbo and craam, have the bay virtually all to themselves. Working hours set by the tide. A swan, resting by the side of the silt, plucks its feathers, looking regal. Lib takes it all in, enjoying the motion of the cart, as it rocks away and settles itself across the sands. She can feel the grit of the shore resting between her teeth. "Some years are good, and some are just plain rotten" she thinks to herself, ready to begin another day.



Photo: Maggie How

Maggie How

Flotsam

He comes back to the Bay,
knowing he'll find something;
two rings rusted together.
High tide due, he picks up the key,
bitter, tart, metallic.
The tag, dull yellow, flaps against his finger.

A glint of sun through clouds dazzles the road.
He should be going the other way.
The prevailing wind ruffles his hair.
He's not sure what the birds get up to at night.

He drops the now useless key,
metal and stone silenced by water,
a curlew picks up his lament
tugs his heart across the shoreline,
leaves it stranded, beached, achingly alive.

The sound of the sea wipes out words,
licks them clean away.
Raw, salt air tastes of pebbles - scintillating.
He thinks how the sky is the biggest thing of all.

Lorna Smithers

A Seaweed Charm

to cross the treacherous path.

You told me
I could walk on quicksand
and be safe.

As the lights go down
at Heysham

I stand alone
twisting fronds
through my fingers
counting slippery
black beads.

An oyster catcher walks
where ghosts walk.

I carry a cockle shell
on my back.

I cannot ease my burden
because the tides
are washing
in.

Your charm
will keep me safe tonight
when I walk on quicksand
though I cannot leave
this place.

Ginny Newsham

Unseen.
You are not there,
my pot of gold,
at either end of the shimmering arc.

Mast wires sing of
beached seals and
broken bird wings.

What songs do you sing now?

Plover scar.
Rooted in sand
and mud,
a bare-branched, blinking light.

You taste of salt
and
starburst love
on my mouth.
Gone.

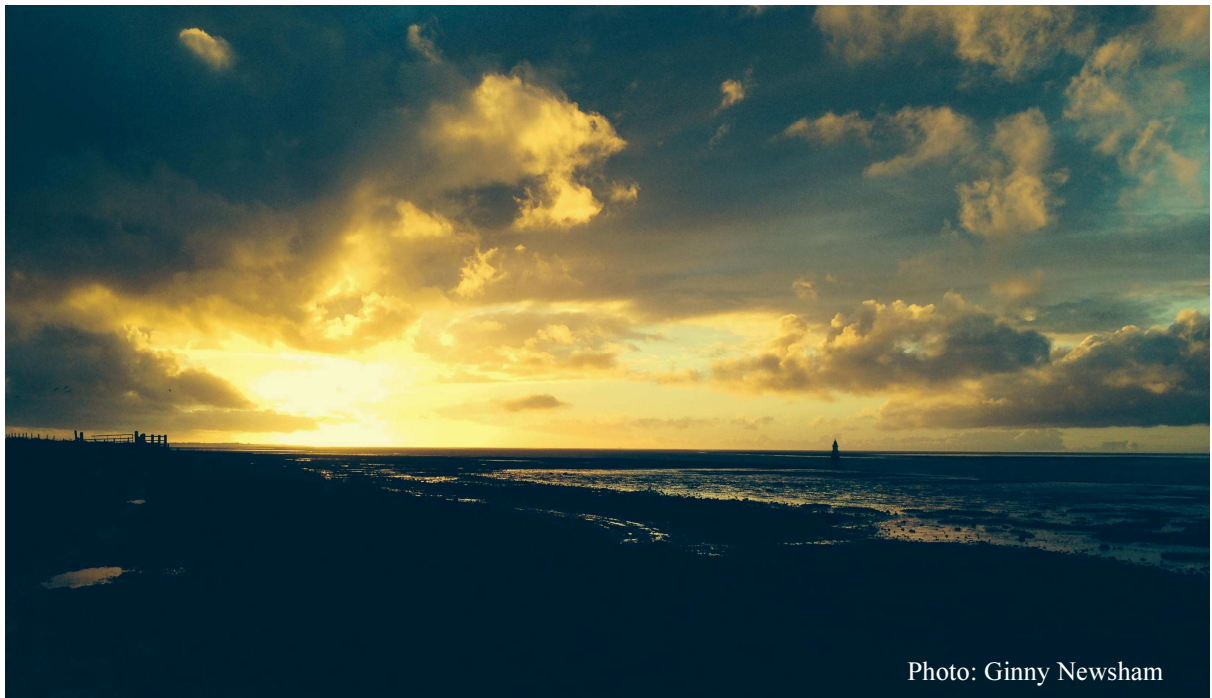


Photo: Ginny Newsham

Kirstie Gorman

Flooding

I don't trust you enough to let you submerge me
Come close and I'll back away, keeping myself safe.
Living here, near to you, I'm vigilant.
Keeping you in sight every waking, every sleeping moment.

No taking my breath, no stopping my heart mid beat.
No finding you have quietly crept up. Just outside my house.
Standing in my kitchen, hands plunged into hot water,
Steam swirling around me, droplets racing down the glass.

One momentary lapse of focus is enough. You're in.
Pouring into my home and life.
Feeling you covering my toes, I want it to stop
But I don't know how.

I run away. Running upstairs. Gasping midstride
to see you crashing against the bottom step.
I run into my room, my bed.
If you make it up here, I'm lost.

Sunderland Point

The girl is from the point. The school children know this. They see water imprinted on her skin: otherness in pale light. She carries the weather in the set of her shoulders.

This is the scent of her home: coal on an open fire. Smoke thickens her hair and weighs down her clothes.

The water comes in 1935. Until then, the girl draws it from the well for drinking. Her mother collects rain for baths –walking out into the yard, bending to heave the tub - that gritty sound as she pulls it along the silty ground - the glug and glop of the water, tipping... the clenching of muscles; the tensing and turning; the slosh of it into the bath in front of the fire.

Plait over her shoulder, careful sighs - Mother shushes the girl's complaints like a wave. Always this, every Friday: the pouring from the jug; the fresh water diluting salt on skin, rinsing grit from under fingernails.

Tidal Curve

13:12

Low water

This place does not
belong to you.
It tastes you –
reaches out its tongue to find you
thickly lined in its salt.

Time here
is fixed;
here you
are unfixed.
In the vast space
you become invisible.

What is my name?
you call to the rippling surface.
What is my name?
you call to the empty sky.
What is my name? as you wrap
yourself around the boats, beached
on damp sand, anchored,
like an empty faith.

19:06
High Water

Clouds glow,
their edges precise.
Wind billows you out
across the waves,
easing your creases.

The water has exhaled, deeply.

Nothing is left
but the cold black
that holds you;
above you, the moon
is expanding.

01:55
Low Water

The Point End

Strangely,
today,
the plover grey sky unsettles me
threatens to dissolve me,
mould me into
this pressed down
flattened
brown
unpeopled place
of mud flats
and tidal bracks
and a salt-washed track that, somehow,
still,
draws me on
to the point end.
Where, once, you drew drinking water from the
still
fresh
well.

Tina Smith

Night

It was big, the night, out in the bay.
Out where the waves ran dark and ran fast.
When the winds were up and
the gusts blew hard.
And the dawn was a long time coming.

Karen Lloyd

Dorothy – Born Sunderland Point

She came into the world in darkness,
leaving behind her watery interior

but found another
where water was lacking

and ever-present.
The burden of fetching

and carrying from the well
down at the Point.

The business of the tides,
of treading down and down

the causeway road or the fields
to the school, stockings and skirts

hung out to steam by the fire,
the fug of wet woollens, gabardine.

On the seventh day, walking the hard
road to the church of the 3 tides.

The day the flood came in '27
like a drunk, uninvited guest,

barging through the front door with its brazen
swagger and slop, climbing the wooden stairs

to the fourth tread, where it stayed
til dawn, and drained away.

Her mother sat alone on the step above,
the only witness to that tidal disobedience.

Karen Lloyd

Relic

Caught in the moon's winch
cast of sand and water
shone aquamarine
once jade
a shard of bottle-glass.
Sea-polished and pearled,
released to the cobble-bank
above a litany of fibreglass hulls
and the woodblock print of tyre on sand.

Notes on some of the contributors

Kirstie Gorman grew up playing on the beaches of the Essex coast. She has lived in Lancaster for almost 6 years and loves and fears the Bay in equal measure.

Currently living in Grange-Over-Sands where her late parents retired 35 years ago. **Maggie How** completed her MA in Creative Writing at Lancaster University with a merit in 2015 and is currently studying for another Masters in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes at the Metanoia Institute in London. She has recently been a volunteer with the Morecambe Bay Partnership advising dog walkers at Bolton-le-Sands on the importance of not raising roosting birds at high tide during the winter months.

Mavis Lee lives in Morecambe: I spent all of my childhood and part of adult life here with my back to the sun rising so I can see it setting and the ebb and flood of the tide

Jenn Mattinson recently connected to the bay through facilitating Morecambe Bay Partnership's oral history fishing project. Her writing was inspired by a photograph of Bob and Elizabeth Wilson, cockle pickers in the 1950s

Lorna Smithers is a Penwortham-based poet. Her first collection *Enchanting the Shadowlands* was published in 2015.

[Clare Proctor](#) is a teacher and poet living in Cumbria, though relatively new to the area. These pieces were written in response to her first visit to Sunderland Point and to the opportunities that the workshop gave her to listen to its landscape and its history.

[Ginny Newsham](#): 'I have lived in this area for over 30 years now and am a frequent visitor to Sunderland point but more often to Cockerham Sands. I love the view across the river towards Sunderland point even with the squat presence of Heysham power station as a backdrop.

[Tina Smith](#) grew up in the North West, moved away for a good few years and came to the Bay area in 2008. She thinks it's a fantastic place to live and how the Bay itself seems to present you with different images every day.

[Karen Lloyd](#) was brought up in Ulverston and has lived close to the bay for most of her life. In 2013 she began to walk the coast from Sunderland Point to Walney Island, and in 2016 her book describing her journey, the landscape, wildlife, history and memoir, 'The Gathering Tide; A Journey Around the Edgelands of Morecambe Bay' was published to critical acclaim.'