

Meet Me at Museum of London Docklands trip - 27TH April 2023

The poems enclosed are an array of writings inspired by discussions, thoughts, and speeches by participants at Meet Me, Entelechy arts staff and volunteers, and the staff from the Museum of London Docklands. In most cases, long direct quotes have been used, or in places put together from the same speaker. I have made note of the name of each person contributing their words, although I've edited some moments for clarity and to fit the verse, although I've always tried to maintain the meaning and intention of what people have said.

I've created titles to go with the poems, which appear in long form or in poetic fragments, to keep true to the way the words were spoken.

It was fascinating to hear Iona's wonderful tour of the Museum, and so important to hear the responses of all our Meet Members to the gallery, exploring personal histories that this space and its materials evoked, delving into elements of shared and individual history.

Some of these poems explore objects and questions around the docklands, considering family legends and the importance of naming. Some poems address the legacy today and historically of slavery, and the systematic racism faced by people of colour in England, particularly Black people coming from the Caribbean. These words speak to the histories that have not always been acknowledged – and have not been recognised or actively erased by the powers that be.

Meet Me members: Grace, Jeanie, Valda, Rita, Ron, Pauline, Daisy, Gerry, Rosaline, and Una

Meet Me Staff: Roxanna, Sophie, Zarah, Henri

Volunteer: Frankie

Museum Tour guide: Iona Museum of London Docks Staff: Jemma, and Victoria

Museum of London Docks Volunteers: Cyril, Karen and Carol

Poems shaped from the words of participants by Annie Hayter

THE HISTORIES WITHIN US

WHAT RON DOESN'T KNOW, ISN'T WORTH WRITING ABOUT – Ron's words

PAULINE'S GRANDAD WORKED FOR THE KING – Pauline's words

HOW TO GENTLE THE WORLD WITH YOUR COMPASSION – Gerry's words

THE MORNING POT – words by Henry and Ron

MEMORIES EVOKED BY THE SAILOR'S HAT or BACK HOME, WE USED TO CARRY
WATER ON OUR HEADS – Pauline's words

WHAT'S IN A NAME / THE SWEETNESS OF A ROSE– Rosaline's words

ON THE DELIGHTS OF THE SAINSBURY'S ARCHIVES – Grace's words

ON GOING TO SAINSBURY'S – Annie's words in response to Grace

CONVERSATION BETWEEN UNA AND ANNIE ABOUT LIFE AFTER A STROKE

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EXAMINING LIFE IN THE DOCKLANDS

FACTS ABOUT THE CONEYANCE OF WASTE – Cyril's words

EYE– OPENING UP THE PAST – Gerry's words

QUESTIONS OF AN EXISTENTIAL BENT – Rosaline and Iona's conversation

THE NAMING OF THE DOCKS – Iona's words

ON SURVIVING AND TRANSPORTATION – Rosaline's words

COMMERCE – Valda's words

THE SHIPBUILDING – Valda's words

ON PHYSICAL MOMENTUM – Rosaline's words

ON DOCKLANDS' EMPLOYMENT – Rita's words

ON THE DOCKLANDS AT ITS HEART – Iona's words

WHAT HAPPENED TO IT, THE TIGER? Gemma's words

HOW MIGHT WE SPEAK OF INJUSTICE?

A CHAIN THAT WEIGHS HEAVY– Rita’s words

ON SLAVERY – Pauline’s words

ON THE WINDRUSH GENERATION – Jeanie’s words

A LOT OF HISTORY HASN’T BEEN WRITTEN – Valda’s words

ERASURES OF HISTORY – Rita’s words

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ON THESE MOST CURIOUS OBJECTS

HAIKU ON THE GIFT THAT IS A MILKY CUP OF TEA – Gerry’s words

HAIKU ON HUMAN INGENUITY – Rita’s words

HAIKU OF THE MYSTERIOUS FEATHER – Rita’s words

HAIKU OF THE SAILOR’S HAT – Rita’s words

RIDDLE ME A SAILOR’S HAT – Gemma’s words

CRINOLINE IS A FINE THING– Pauline’s words

A MYSTERIOUS FRONDY OBJECT – Gerry’s words

THE BONES BENEATH THE SKIRTS – Valda’s words

WHAT WONDER – Pauline’s words

TAXIDERMY AND HER SIXTH SENSE – Jeanie’s words

THE MIRACLE OF A GOOD WOODEN FLOOR– Daisy and Pauline’s words

TAKE CARE, MY DEAR – Pauline’s words

THE HISTORIES WITHIN US

WHAT RON DOESN'T KNOW, ISN'T WORTH WRITING ABOUT – Ron's words

My grandad and uncle worked on the docks,
As stevedore. It was very hard work.
I didn't know my grandpa, but I knew my uncles,

they never said much about it at all. One of them,
was working right till the last, he was a checker,
used to check the stuff coming off the ship,

and make sure that no one would nick any of it.
That's about all I know about Surrey Docks,
except that they used to go down, like she said

and wait outside – the foreman would come out
and say YOU, YOU, AND YOU COME!
Once they got paid, they'd go straight into the pub!

PAULINE'S GRANDAD WORKED FOR THE KING – Pauline's words

A few years ago, I got to find out that my Grandad worked for King George V. My grandad just lived up on Shooters Hill. I came to England and I'm living near my grandad, and he was 28 years old –

I would really like to get a picture of my grandad. I met him as a child, but when you meet a person as a child, you don't take it that seriously – he was tall and handsome.

Now, I'm 80, I come and live so close to my granddad. I think he was born here or maybe. In WW1, to be working for the king! And I felt so special – it's a feeling that came over me.

My mum had eight of us alive and I'm the only one that came to England – and one of the only ones who met my grandad in the flesh. He was so nice to me as a child, I was about 16, he took me to his property in Jamaica.

I've got the letter at home, that one of my uncles, my second half-uncle sent it to me, with his name. I've got the letter of the interview, stamped – it's either to do with his horses or the king himself,

I can't remember, I'm so emotional, if I remember before I go – I'll tell you.

HOW TO GENTLE THE WORLD WITH YOUR COMPASSION – Gerry's words

Born in the North, a mining town. Been in London for 50 years.

On the docks, sweaty people
Slogging away, pleased
They'd be chosen to do it.

It's awful. Makes me feel guilty
about when I moan - when I think
poor me, but poor them!

/

I was amazed how good
the schoolchildren were
in the exhibitions, thinking
how could they do it!

I used to teach well-behaved
school children – maths –
but my chosen subject was art.

/

I started out as an art teacher,
but the maths teacher had
a nervous breakdown.

I went in on Monday morning and
they said you'll be teaching maths –
I couldn't get out of it!

Art teachers were ten a penny,
but hardly any maths.

Couldn't be more different to art,
Where you go in enjoy, be free!
It took my brain a lot of time.

THE MORNING POT – words by Henry and Ron

Grandpa's pot
was preferred to a toilet.

Otherwise known as
Goes-under-the-bed.

Old chamber pots
are worth a lot of money

MEMORIES EVOKED BY THE SAILOR'S HAT
or BACK HOME, WE USED TO CARRY WATER ON OUR HEADS - Pauline's words

We used clothing, like a big cotton thing.
You roll it out till it can fit on your head,
You tie it and then you rest it, and then

You put a bucket of water on your head.
I did it as a child, but I fell once, and I cried,
I lost my water because it was up a hill!

WHAT'S IN A NAME / THE SWEETNESS OF A ROSE – Rosaline's words

I don't like my name being shortened.
People call me Ros – but I like my name.

I'm telling you, this terrible story.
My name is Rosaline, but this woman
She kept calling me Doris!

And I said, in the end I just ignore her
Rosaline is an English name,
and you still can't pronounce it!

It's awful, I did not like it at all.
I like my name, don't like it being shortened.

ON THE DELIGHTS OF THE SAINSBURY'S ARCHIVE – Grace's words

Sainsbury's?
Ah – I shop
with them!

ON GOING TO SAINSBURY'S – Annie's words in response to Grace

It is no small thing,
To build a relationship
With a shop over many years.

To visit often, like a friend,
Moving gracefully between
The aisles to find the finest

Of ingredients to bring delight.
The best of materials to cook up
A feast for the eyes and belly.

To wait in the queue, for your turn
To pay good money and carry
These special things home.

And to know that soon
You will be returning
For more gifts of plenty again.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN ANNIE AND UNA ABOUT LIFE AFTER A STROKE

UNA: Sometimes everything, I think cos I've got a bit of a stroke sometimes, I can't come – that's my – yeh, yeh, you see people there, it's very good, everything is lovely – to sit and watch everything, you know, look around and everyone else help each other.

ANNIE: It's a lot of information to take in, isn't it.

UNA: Isn't it! It's a lot – sometime my head sometime, that's just my problem really, I am good sometime, and I have to say thank you that I can – to come in look around you, look about you, hear, it was really nice, and talk about all the –

You see sometimes, if you picture it – it's because I did get the stroke, - so that's why my problem is sometimes, I can't –

ANNIE: Yeh, it can't come out.

UNA: Nothing – exactly - comes out, sometimes I will be able to talk for a little time, then something.

ANNIE: Actually, Una, it's interesting you told me that because I'm not sure I would have noticed that straight away.

UNA: I had a little stroke, I am ok, sometime, I have to stop, I want to go off to go and talk to someone and as I'm ready to speak or talk, I'm like OH I think, I feel as if that, I feel bad because if I say the wrong thing –

ANNIE: We all say the wrong thing sometimes.

UNA: Yeh, it's life, you know, for me. But it was really nice. But everyone, but I could hear everything but, it's just the speaking.

ANNIE: And it's hard to find the words sometimes!

UNA: Isn't it!!

ANNIE: Isn't it! I mean, it's, that's life isn't it.

UNA: Lovely to talk to someone a little time, and we are talking today, really good.

ANNIE: But what I noticed about you Una, was like you saw Gerry sitting quietly, you said are you alright sweetheart, and I thought that was so lovely you were looking out for other people as well, that's a beautiful thing – so sweet, I was like so lovely!

UNA: Yes, thank you. I look about everyone, yes yes. Because I was a talking person, in catering, it's lots of talking, talking, but now, lots of people talking. But now! It's life isn't it - what can you do, thank you so much – a smile!

EXAMINING LIFE IN THE DOCKLANDS

FACTS ABOUT THE CONEYANCE OF WASTE – Cyril's words

I'm an autistic adult.
I know lots of facts.

Sailor Town is an original street
From 1840 – very narrow.

First thing you do is look up –
People chucking it down
(you-know-what)

And you'd be covered in it!

As a sir, you'd open your cape
Onto the third wheel

Ladies visit the water closet
A chair with a pot.

The first public toilets in 1851
At the great exhibition.

EYE-OPENING UP THE PAST – Gerry's words

No retail therapy from those shops
in that exhibit, *Sailors Town*.

Looking at that, you feel
you've experienced the Victorian life.

You realise from films and tv shows,
the actual reality. I bet if people from
those days came here, they'd look at it
and think "Magic! Oh amazing!".

QUESTIONS OF AN EXISTENTIAL BENT – Rosaline and Iona’s conversation

What was the original use of this building?

A sugar warehouse, it’s all about wealth generation for somebody.

The same people who owned the plantations owned the buildings

Can I ask one question – about the pirate ships, how did they come in?

What was piracy was stealing off a boat – so you could be a Thames pirate

And be based in London. If it was on the shore, it would larceny or theft.

Both of these things had a death penalty.

If one of the workers fell in the water, would they lose their job?

If you just fell in the dock, they said it was your own fault.

It was in the favour of people with the money.

THE NAMING OF THE DOCKS – Iona’s words

They call it a quay because it sounds fancy
They can charge a lot more rent.

You’d have to swim across,
To get to Surrey Quays

ON SURVIVING AND TRANSPORTATION – Rosaline’s words

*That’s how people used
to survive, they pinch it
Got to do it, a piece of bread,
you go to Australia.*

COMMERCE – Valda’s words

a trade of anything /
you can think of /
to make money /
always a way /

THE SHIPBUILDING – Valda’s words

Good engineers weren’t they.
Everything done by hand.
No machinery like today,
Not technology like now.

ON PHYSICAL MOMENTUM – Rosaline’s words

Hook the heist
and carry it along.

ON DOCKLANDS’ EMPLOYMENT – Rita’s words

was it a scheme
where certain men
lined up for a job

ON THE DOCKLANDS AT ITS HEART – Iona’s words

The underlying story
is a story about struggle.

WHAT HAPPENED TO IT, THE TIGER? Gemma's words

Different kind of shops
you would have had
around the dock.

Shops to do with things
that sailors brought back,
peer through the window.

Camels and monkeys,
they would sell them live,
or things like ivory.

A big trade in exotic animals.
There's a story of a tiger
It got loose round here.

And it terrorised a young child,
It didn't eat them, but the child
was never the same again.

HOW MIGHT WE SPEAK OF INJUSTICE?

A CHAIN THAT WEIGHS HEAVY– Rita’s words

On the wall – in the gallery
about the slaves.

The chain. The pain of it.
The weight.

You should see it. I touched it –
horrible.

ON SLAVERY – Pauline’s words

We know it happened /

to see the names /

it’s very sad.

ON THE WINDRUSH GENERATION - Jeanie's words

Took us to this country –

To do the dirty work.

Then tried to send us back.

A LOT OF HISTORY HASN'T BEEN WRITTEN – Valda's words

1.

When I was at school, I learnt a lot
about British history. Back in them days,
if you asked about dates and names,
I could tell you. Now I've lost it a bit.

If I come across books, I just love history.
I watch history programmes.

Certain programmes on TV that tell you
about areas in London and England,
and what changed.

2.

Back in the days, there was
an argument about rent.

Central London, full of poor people.
Council pushed rents up, poor people
can't afford the rent and got pushed out –

Rich people moved in.

3.

The West Indies – named by
Christopher Columbus – but
he got it wrong didn't he.

4.

Lot of Jamaican music back in the days,
is all about our history and what went on.
If you don't know, you don't think.

5.

During the World War, people from
India, the West Indies, and all over
came to work – it's not talked about
when they talk about the War.

6.

When I was a child in this country –
I don't know if you guys can remember
a politician called Enoch Powell,
in the late 60s, early 70s.

The politician said: '*send them back home*'.

7.

A lot of history hasn't been written.
People say you're showing your age –
But you can't escape history.
No. I'm showing my knowledge.

ERASURES OF HISTORY – Rita's words

This goes very deep,
a big gap is left out,
what happened between
the wars with people,
between WWI and WW2,
a deep history.
theres some things
have not been
explained and told,
and facts.
The last Black pilot
who was involved
died last month.
I don't think
they found his family
Everything that man
Enoch Powell said
has come to pass.
He prophesied everything.
How can this be?
A Christian country
when they were very barbaric.

ON THESE MOST CURIOUS OBJECTS

HISTORY IS IN OUR BONES AND IN THE BUILDINGS – words shaped in collaboration with Annie Hayter

HAIKU OF THE GIFT THAT IS A MILKY CUP OF TEA – Gerry's words

Oh, it's lovely!
I appreciate that –
Thank you.

HAIKU ON HUMAN INGENUITY – Rita's words

really clever people
if it was done
by hand

HAIKU OF THE MYSTERIOUS FEATHER – Rita's words

not a domestic feather
looks like
a forest bird

HAIKU OF THE SAILOR'S HAT - Rita's words

something horrible
hiding under
that hat

RIDDLE ME A SAILOR'S HAT – Gemma's words

Who might have had a hat like that?

Someone that would have worked around the docks.

Someone carrying things on their head.

What we've got along there is billingsgate market

People carrying big boxes of fish on their head,

This rim stopped it dripping on their head – the fish smell!

Let's see what it's made of – very shiny.

CRINOLINE IS A FINE THING– Pauline’s words

I’ve got one.
Keeps your clothes nice.

A MYSTERIOUS FRONDY OBJECT – Gerry’s words

The fluffy thing,
I don’t know quite
what it’s going to become

THE BONES BENEATH THE SKIRTS – Valda’s words

They used the bones
to make skirts
back in the days

WHAT WONDER – Pauline’s words

what beauty / the mother of pearl
what bird is this / cockedoodle, it could be a hawk
thank you, thank you / for a lovely day

ON TAXIDERMY AND HER SIXTH SENSE – Jeanie’s words

Mouth wide open, the bird.
It’s scary, I can see,
I can see things like that you know
It’s frightening – people don’t believe me
I can see them, it’s scary

THE MIRACLE OF A GOOD WOODEN FLOOR- Daisy and Pauline’s words

Real good old wood.

The floor – they call it
the real McCoy

TAKE CARE, MY DEAR – Pauline’s words

Watch out
If anything,
Drops on
Your foot.