The Honicknowle Book of the Dead
The
Honicknowle
Book of the Dead

Kenny Knight

Shearsman Books
Exeter
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lessons in Teamaking</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Queue</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Honicknowle Book of the Dead</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Met My First Girlfriend</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at a Bus Stop on Honicknowle Green</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Four</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comeback</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hummingbird</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back in the Days of Pounds Shillings and Pence</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skinny</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mod</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Don't Know Much About Cars</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorry</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scorpio</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haven</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laudanum</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Left Eye of Mae West</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth Padel and The Dalai Lama</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cold War</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the World Needs Now</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furzeacres</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treehouse</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blush</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guthrie to Ginsberg</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Dern</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shadows off the Wall</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Rough Guide to Birdsong</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headbanger</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogbite</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Second of November Nineteen Fifty One</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangerman</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairnet</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodland Wood</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking with Lorna Doone</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen Log</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hometown Nineteen Fifty One</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The House on Honicknowle Lane</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dark</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mythological Honicknowle</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundown</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Hill</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanstead Grove</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for Angie Wickenden
Lessons in Teamaking

When I first learned to
pour tea in Honicknowle

in those dark old days
before central heating

closed down open fireplaces
and lights went out in coal mines

and chimpanzees hadn't yet
made their debuts on television

and two sugars
was the national average

and the teapot was the centre
of the known universe

and the sun was this yellow
thing that just warmed the air

and anthropology's study
of domestic history hadn't

quite reached the evolutionary
breakthrough of the tea bag

and the kettle was on
in the kitchen of

number thirty two Chatsworth Gardens
where my father after slurping

another saucer dry would ask
in a smoke-frog voice for
another cup of microcosm
while outside the universe blazed

like a hundred towns
on a sky of smooth black lino

and my father with tobacco
stained fingers would dunk biscuits

and in the process spill tiny drops
of Ceylon and India

which I would wipe with a tea towel
from the corner shop

I read the tea leaves
as if they were words

left over from a conversation
between two cups.
The Queue

The queue is an institution,
I’m in the middle of one right now,
part of the consumer snake,
slithering across the Post Office floor.

I’m here to pay my rock and roll bill.

If it wasn’t for rock and roll
I’d save a fortune on American guitar bands.
If it wasn’t for rock and roll and sex
and the daylight in your eyes.

The queue is an institution,
one of those cultural,
social and economic oddities,
the bus queue, the supermarket queue,
the queue in your rear view mirror.

Marriages begin in queues and sometimes end there.

The queue is more popular than religion.
The queue as symbol and organic artefact.
The queue is a sober adaptation of the conga.

The queue is a human invention,
up there with the alphabet, the wheel,
the paper clip, the safety pin,
rock and roll, contraceptives.

If it wasn’t for rock and roll and sex,
and The Honicknowle Book of the Dead,
I’d probably convert to nostalgia,
stand on a street corner and form a queue
of people with a common past.
I’m waiting for the arrival of the past.
I’m standing outside a telephone box
on the corner of Parade and Crownhill Road.
I’m waiting for the newsagents
on my favourite street corner
to become Easterbrooks again.
Waiting for Dewhurst and Liptons
to make their long-awaited comebacks
like Dr. Who and the Daleks.

I’m standing aged ten or eleven years old,
midway between the bus shelter
and the fish and chip shop.
There’s crowds of people,
packed four or five deep
on both sides of the Crownhill Road,
as the Queen Mother passes through West Park
on her way to the Tamar Bridge
with a pair of pink scissors
and a bottle of Plymouth Gin.

The patriots in the crowd are waving flags,
royalists take photographs for the mantelpiece
and someone in the crowd thinks
this is a fairy-tale
and someone in the crowd thinks
she’d like to be a princess
in a party dress of royal blue.
And I remember thinking
I’d never seen so many people
gathered together in one place,
ever realised there were so many people
living in the world,
ever saw so many hands, waving,
furiously waving,
on both sides of the Crownhill Road,
and the Queen Mother waves back,
doesn’t even stop for fish and chips.

I’m waiting for the arrival of the past,
glancing back over my shoulder
down the badly lit tunnel of the last forty years
to the lost continent of Coronation Street
and the Crossroads Motel,
where the real life of television,
migrated into the living room.

So at age sixteen I go into exile
and walk under the bright lights of adolescence
down an infinity of Crownhill Roads
where The Royal Family will never live,
and I begin to fall in love
with the poetry of street corners
and I begin to save my paper-boy money
for Catherine wheels,
and I begin to save for Christmas.
And I don’t want a bicycle,
I don’t want a train set,
I want a garden shed
which I’ll call Buckingham Shed,
I’ll make this shed
a centre of popular entertainment,
a night club in the back garden
for nocturnal readings
from *The Honicknowle Book of the Dead*.

I’m waiting for the arrival of my knighthood,
waiting for a member of The Royal Family
to officially open Buckingham Shed,
to step inside onto bright red lino
only to discover it’s really a Tardis,
decked out in bunting
from across the vast empires of time and space.
I’m waiting for the arrival of the past, waiting to win the Nobel Prize for being your plaything, waiting for *The Honicknowle Book of the Dead* to be published, waiting for the fourteen Dalai Lamas to buy it from the shop next door to the shop next door.
I Met My First Girlfriend at a Bus Stop on Honicknowle Green

I met my first girlfriend at a bus stop on Honicknowle Green.

I know it was my first girlfriend as I'd never had a girlfriend before.

and although I don't remember the number of the bus the colour was red and so was my jumper.

When this relationship ended I met my second girlfriend at a bus stop.

This sequence continued for the next half a dozen girlfriends and was only broken by the first of four girlfriends I met at a Bingo Hall.

I can even remember the number that was called as we kissed for the first time

and the year was nineteen sixty eight or sixty nine.

After I'd worked romance in bingo halls out of my system I met further girlfriends in cinemas, supermarkets, funeral parlours.
Then in my mid to late twenties
I had no girlfriends at all,
even though I caught
buses regularly.

Then one night I started talking
to my next-to-be girlfriend
at a bus stop when her friend
came along and joined us.

We started going out as a threesome.

After waiting at bus stops for years
two come along at the same time.

Now with my mid life crisis
miles behind me
I’m starting to pull
at coffee mornings.
I cried on my first day at school.  
This is traditionally a child’s privilege.  
I didn’t want to leave my mother alone  
at the school gate like an unloved scarecrow.

I didn’t want her to feel sad walking home  
through the new born fields of tin cans,  
that dead morning, when separation  
was the next dish after breakfast.

I’m modest enough now to admit it,  
I’ve still got the tears somewhere.  
I take the handkerchief out now and then  
like a souvenir from a weepy movie  
and dab early childhood from my eyes.

Later I failed the eleven-plus  
a year or so after Tim failed his,  
which I regret now,  
not the fact that Tim failed his  
but because I could have taken the day off  
and headed for Portland with my notebook.

Five years later I graduated from academia  
with a grade four in Modern History.  
This wasn’t remarked upon in the global press at the time.  
I suppose men walking on the moon was considered  
more newsworthy than a schoolboy walking home  
across Honicknowle Green with a C.S.E. certificate.

And the same grade in Religious Knowledge  
ever motivated any angels to fly over the garden,  
which was mostly cabbages,  
and if God ever called to offer extra tuition  
no-one ever said.
My formal education ended there soon after I left home for the streetlights and the covens of blues and rock, spending three or four evenings a week at night school, learning how to spell backwards in the bad book dark.