

The Honicknowle Book of the Dead

**The
Honicknowle
Book of the Dead**

KENNY KNIGHT

**Shearsman Books
Exeter**

First published in the United Kingdom in 2009 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
58 Velwell Road
Exeter EX4 4LD

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-017-0

Copyright © Kenny Knight, 2009.

The right of Kenny Knight to be identified as the author
of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the
Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.
All rights reserved.

Cover photograph by Tony Frazer

Acknowledgements

Some of these poems previously appeared in the following magazines and
newspapers: *Evening Herald* (Plymouth), *Fire*, *Great Works*, *The Rialto*, *Saw*,
Smiths Knoll, *Tears in the Fence*, *Tremblestone*.

Many thanks to Tim Allen
for reviewing the manuscript prior to publication.

CONTENTS

Lessons in Teamaking	9
The Queue	11
The Honicknowle Book of the Dead	12
I Met My First Girlfriend	
at a Bus Stop on Honicknowle Green	15
Grade Four	17
Comeback	19
Hummingbird	22
Back in the Days of Pounds Shillings and Pence	24
Skinny	26
Background	28
Mod	32
I Don't Know Much About Cars	33
Lorry	35
Scorpio	36
Haven	40
Laudanum	41
The Left Eye of Mae West	46
Ruth Padel and The Dalai Lama	49
The Cold War	51
What the World Needs Now	54
Furzeacres	55
Treehouse	57
Blush	59
Guthrie to Ginsberg	61
Bruce Dern	63
The Shadows off the Wall	65
A Rough Guide to Birdsong	68
Headbanger	70
Dogbite	72
The Second of November Nineteen Fifty One	73
Dangerman	75
Hairnet	77
Woodland Wood	78
Walking with Lorna Doone	80

Queen Log	82
Hometown Nineteen Fifty One	84
The House on Honicknowle Lane	88
The Dark	91
Cancer	93
Mythological Honicknowle	94
Sundown	97
State Hill	101
Wanstead Grove	105

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.

THE HONICKNOWLE BOOK OF THE DEAD

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,
never realised there were so many people
living in the world,
never 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.

GRADE FOUR

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
never 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.