

P L A C E S P A C E H O M E

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when my nan died my dad found a few hundred pounds or more stuffed away in a chair her favourite sitting chair with its trail of spilled tea leading up to it from when and where my grandad had brought it through all those times the money was in all the crevices and joins and down into the chair itself in the frame and in the springs and in the spaces in between twenty pound notes each folded and folded and folded again then slipped away sometimes wedged and held sometimes falling into the inner workings of the chair hidden and forgotten in all those final weeks and months in her more confused moments she'd accuse my dad of stealing her money but he wasn't he was just caring for them and it was just lodged and lost to her more were then found in the walls in her bed in her glasses cases in the beside drawer she was only small when she died a nervous timid creature and then so was my dad when he died



The Bookcase (a text read as part of an art talk given March 2024)

There is a bookcase in my house
It's well made
But I don't think I like it very much
And I'm not sure I ever really did
But it is useful, very useful

You see it holds all this stuff:
CDs I no longer listen to
Books I probably won't read
Games that were barely played when my children were younger
And certainly don't get played now
And an album that hasn't been listened to yet
And on top of it is a 'holiday box'
The box is way too big for the things inside
And does not really fit anywhere else
But it's half hidden on top of the unit and that's useful

The holiday box has various leftovers and takeaways from holidays
Sweet wrappers, drinks mixers, lollipop sticks, tickets,
a few small swimming pool tiles, half finished colouring in
That sort of thing
For a long time our girls could remember everything in that box
Everything about everything in that box
And then one day, they just couldn't, and it was just stuff again

Anyway

If I got rid of the stuff, the bookcase would be empty
And then I'd have to get rid of it
Or if I just got rid of the bookcase anyway
The stuff would just then be on the floor
Or we'd have to put it somewhere else
Out of the way
And that wouldn't do at all

And moreover, there's a wall behind the bookcase
That wall is in a funny place
And would likely just be empty and blank
if the bookcase were taken away
So I need the bookcase to occupy the wall
and the stuff is there to fill the bookcase
But I suppose the wall could go
Although thinking about that, it too is useful
You see, behind that wall is a toilet
And we couldn't well have the toilet room exposed
All down one side
Although you'd probably be able see the telly from there if you did
And that might be okay if you were the one on the toilet
But it might not and I don't think it'd be so good for everyone else
So I don't think that is a runner
I suppose the whole toilet area could go
But the problem with that is that its under the stairs
And next to the toilet, using one if its walls, is the 'under-the-stairs'
space

Now, the under-the-stairs space feels like part of the old house
The house as it used to be
Before various renovations
And it has a little prayer card in there
I think from the owner before last
and, so the story goes,
she was first to live in the house
And it reminds me of my gran and growing up
So I can't get rid of that

And anyway stairs are useful and without an under-the-stairs
I can't see how the stairs would work anymore
They'd just be all along the floor
And then I'd have the stairs all along the floor
Together with the CDs, books and games, that LP,
and the too big holiday box

No, the stairs will have to stay where they are and they too are useful
They lead to more house
And equally importantly, another set of stairs

Those second set of stairs run over the top of the first set of stairs
And together they make the stairway and so if nothing else
The stairs need each other
And anyway without these stairs I couldn't get upstairs
To the top of the house
Now, the top of the house was changed
There's a room up there with a telly and whatnot
It's a good room and I wouldn't want to lose that

But more importantly there are the spaces around that room
Around that room are the attic spaces
Like a crown of stuff around the head of the house

One part is like a little room itself
There we've got:
Christmas decorations
Luggage
Sleeping stuff
Camping equipment that we don't use anymore
I loved comping but I also definitely love not camping anymore
And the camping stuff reminds me of both
And you just never know
And there's a small array of other things
These other things have no real use or emotional value
Yet they hide out up there, amongst the more useful stuff
And then, then there are the real attic spaces
The gaps between the roof and the walls and the ceilings
With the stuff that's really in permanent stasis
The old toy dolls house the children didn't quite want to let go
The wedding box
The growing up box
Boxes from my wife's family and their old photos
Boxes from my family and their old photos
Memories and things, sometimes forgotten and sometimes only
reluctantly remembered
Boxes of school books and children's drawings
Half-kept perhaps because the girls might need stuff for their attics
when they're older
And there are boxes of boxes up there, as I heard you should keep them

There's also a half-finished model boat
It was there when we got here
And I think I want to leave it there when we go

It's all stacked, stashed, piled and stuck
It may be holding the roof up and the walls in place for all I know
The last job done on the house wasn't the best
A bit of a botch job at times, in truth
So this may be necessary
And the stuff must be insulating the house too
Because that isn't all it should be either

And so I figure we should keep the bookcase and its stuff, the wall, the
toilet, the under-stairs and the stairs
And we can't just have a house that's some shelves, its stuff, a wall or two
from a toilet room, an under-the-stairs, two sets of stairs and some attic
space
There'd be no spaces for any people
And no walls to stop everything falling out
So I guess we can say that everything can stay

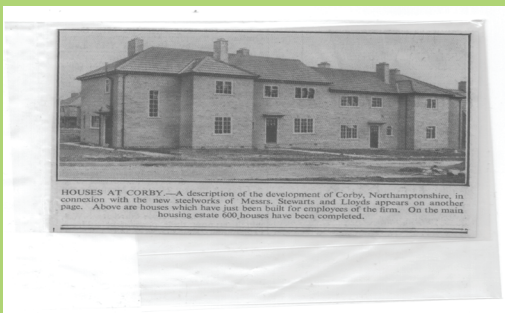
And anyway, we've got a cat now
And the cat doesn't go outside,
So we definitely need all the doors, walls and windows that we've got
For the cat





‘Surely my own story is also contained in this pattern of cards, my past, present, and future, but I can no longer distinguish it from the others. The forest, the castle, the tarots have brought me to this point, where I have lost my story, confused it in the dust of the tales ...’

Italo Calvino, *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, 1969



With these words I knock on your door Aiken-Drum

I have been thinking about a story, a story of my own family and a home town, a small story of industrial transfer, relocation and place building, with much in common with the many similar stories. A town built rapidly out of a village to support iron and steel works, and which saw thousands of people leave Scotland to travel to a barely built place in the middle of England. Growing from 1500 people to 30,000 in only a few decades and then to 50,000 a few decades later and then more again. Many still from Scotland. But not only. Many of those from Scotland in those first years, walking, hitch-hiking, cycling the 300 plus miles. Doing what needed to be done to arrive for the chance of work and home.

The mythical figure of Aiken-Drum looms large in this story for me. A figure who on one telling, in a children's song, is a travelling musician who lives in the moon and wears food for clothing - haggis, beef, bread and cheese. An old Scottish folk song of uncertain origins. Perhaps a marching song from the Jacobite uprisings but also the song of a rougey, rougey piper. In this story I'm thinking of he travelled in this cheerful song to this new town. And perhaps the rougey piper joined him too. My sister would certainly say so, but that is another story.

Yet in another telling, Aiken-Drum is a ghostly figure with a ghastly appearance, and who only wants to work for the most meagre of pay; and I wonder if he also came like this to this same town and worked in filth of the iron and steel works. Maybe his claws and long arms were the very same as the mighty draglines that smashed and grabbed the earth for the iron for all those years; until the works were all shut down and the draglines slowly moved off to labour again elsewhere. Did Aiken-Drum leave ever so slowly with those great draglines, as the town was left to start over. Maybe he did. And perhaps he is also here now, as this story is being told.

Layered |
|Combined |
|Compressed |
|Tied |
|Wedged |
|Fed|
|Stuffed |
|Squirrelled away|
|Secret-ed |
|Caught |
|Crammed |
|Covered |
|Clipped |
|Touched |
|Tucked |
|Pinched |
|Aligned |
|Filed |
|Filled |
|Spaced |
|Placed |
|Pressed |
|Passed |
|Through|
|Passed |

|Around |
|Bound |
|Strung |
|Crowded |
|Expanded |
|Bunged |
|Secured |
|Parted |
|Padded |
|Folded |
|Stacked |
|Packed |
|Wedged |
|Entwined |
|Laced |
|Hid |
|Trapped |
|Enclosed |
|Ensconced |
|Rested |
|Laid |
|Encased |
|Wrapped |
|Stacked |
|Held



In my object compositions I'm thinking about an architecture of self, place and objects. And thinking of the home as a place for things and their stories, and our stories, and a place for the roles, routines and chores performed alongside the care, love, loss and change. Things known and precious. Together with things unknown but collected. Fragments or small items that can be collected and stowed away in a pocket or held lightly as I travel here and there. But sometimes hauled and even dragged. Found as part of the human waste and detritus of the street. Things cast aside, or broken free, to tumble and turn in the world. Passing through. A sort of material travel diary. Things lost and found on the way to somewhere, sharing places with special things. Travelling in place and time and thinking about then, now and next. Accumulations brought together through repairs and provisional combinations and the structures that follow, as ways of creating and holding spaces for people, stories, places and other things.

POST CARD

CORRESPONDENCE

ADDRESS



Having a nice
Holiday weather just
lovely, hope its nice
at home, will be home
on Friday night so
Hope everything is
OK did you get your
hall finished

all the best C Phillips

Mrs M^{rs} Jarlane
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Sandyhills
Glasgow G 32
Scotland



**the journey away
away
away to the edges
the edges of this life
of our emotional memory
to be released
or perhaps just lost
lost in or out of the home
but lost all the same
lost to us now**

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