

Echoes of a Beginning.

Reportage: the brief

Emma Leach & Natasha Vicars, as part of their three day residency at KUBE Gallery, explored a mutual interest in reportage. They recruited reporters locally, assigning them topics to write about with tight deadlines and making connections with the reporters' initial experiences of Poole. This resulting 'newspaper' holds a selection of different voices, and explores what it means to tell a story.

For three days we turned our eyes on Poole

Comment from editor, Emma Leach

How does one connect with a place? There is a temptation to try and find an answer to this question, but a town is a slippery thing, defying lazy summary. We walked around ("Is this the heart of Poole - is this?"), read the local paper, spoke to people.

While we were here The Bournemouth Echo reported on the death of Gilbert the whale on Poole's coastline. In doing so it quoted reactions from locals, trying to pull together the voices of different people to represent an elusive quantity: the public. In a sense we've been trying to pull together different voices too, but our subject matter is once removed. The topics we set these reporters were inspired by what we discovered about them and their relationship to Poole - the resulting texts are a documentation of our time here through the eyes of others. A number of the articles speak of transformation, a journey. Other than this it is hard to run a thread joining the different writings; they are varied in style, tone and subject. The Beginning, Middle and End in this paper form a disjointed story of these three days.

I took this photograph in 1982 when I first moved into the area. The image is of friends from Portland inciting piracy on the seven seas on Poole Lake. Two hired rowing boats coming into collision, and not by accident. The girls scream, the men cheer! The scene reflects what we were about at the time: we were buccaniers, adventurers on a mission of discovery of new things and experiences and Poole was a new playground. It was a big bustling city compared to my hometown of Portland. The world was our oyster and we were full of hope for the future. Poole seemed mysterious and vibrant, ripe for discovery and adventure and work - the reason I moved here. At least there was more chance of finding a job as the recession had hit hard on the island; Poole meant opportunity and a new start.

That was 27 years ago, the recession ended and I found a job. Today another recession and again I find myself looking for a job. This time I am wiser and have more experience both of Poole and of unemployment. My impression of Poole remains the same as it did when I first moved here. It is still a place of adventure and discovery. It is less mysterious now but still as vibrant and busy. My aims and priorities have changed but not my enthusiasm. The recession will end and I will find work but until then my passion for photography is let loose on the town. I still have hope. Scott Irvine

My favourite cycle route by far, in the Poole area, is a 27 mile trek around Poole Harbour. My route starts and ends at my house in Branksome, and goes through Poole, Wareham, Corfe Castle and Studland, crossing on the ferry to Sandbanks and back to Branksome.

The journey takes 2-3 hours, but I usually go with friends so it takes longer as we stop at Corfe Castle and Studland. The route is great because although it is very long, it is relaxing - once past Wareham there is little traffic, and the quiet country roads leave you free to go as fast or as slow as you like. The view from Studland is great - from here you can see the whole of the harbour and Brownsea Island. It is a beautiful sight. Angus Norman

Bournemouth station: Investors in People?

As I enter the station at around 5pm, I am immediately filled with a feeling of dread as I see a five-man queue already formed at the ticket office. They are restless, and the minute I stand in line, an angry man in front spins round and says, "This is ridiculous: I've already been here for 20 minutes. Totally ridiculous." I see I have automatically been initiated and accepted into this unfortunate situation, and it seems that I am now part of the angry queue camaraderie. Oh lucky me!

I look around me and take in the surroundings. Bournemouth station has recently been redecorated in the hope that it will be more up to date and efficient (ha!). I am thus greeted with lots of new looking furnishing made from MDF wood, which are somewhat strangely decorated with small square blue tiles. This unfortunately gives the appearance of a leisure centre reception than a train station, but that's where the similarity ends as it is apparent I will not be having any sort of leisurely time here.

Five minutes later and the queue has not budged. I peer over the heads of the other customers and see that the sole ticket office attendant still seems to be on the phone dealing with his current customer's problem. The angry queue starts to turn into a sort of angry mob and this isn't helped by the sudden, shifty arrival of the station duty manager. Dressed in his suit and tie, he sees the queue, he hears the retorts, but yet he seems unable to meet anyone's eye and quickly darts off into an office before he can be accosted. We, the treasured customers, are left open-mouthed and unhappy. Deep breath...

The minutes drag on and the white plastic clock on the wall in front of us continues to mock us with its large red hand: tick, tick, tick. The queue is getting more and more exasperated and the anecdotes are coming thick and fast. "You get to see your GP quicker than this," says one man. Unfortunately all of these retorts are not helped by the numerous certificates that hang over the ticket office commending Bournemouth station for its investment in people and for improvements in efficiency... interesting.

Finally the station Duty Manager reappears (sans suit jacket trying to seem like he is one of the people I presume) and immediately assumes his 'good guy' role. He starts to explain the predicament they are in with the lack of staff, and that their conversations whilst also trying to note down my first impressions of the station. The duty manager notices that I have a notebook and pen in hand and that I am writing. I can see him looking at me, obviously curious as to what I am doing and whether it will directly affect him. I realise that there has been a slight power shift here, and yes I want to enjoy it. I start to emphasise what I am doing with a few fleeting but poignant glances at the duty manager and my surroundings, scribbling now and again and making sure that the scratch of my pen can be heard, especially when I write a final and definite full stop.

I put the book away and look up, complaints and conversation still buzzing around me. I realise that I have been here almost 30 minutes now and even I am starting to get a little annoyed - especially by members of the queue who are taking it upon themselves to complain on behalf of all of the customers now; thank you Little Miss Whinger behind me!

Continued in the Middle >>

Pool Outrage

Shelton Pool is a small council-run swimming bath in Stoke-on-Trent. The pool is known locally as a place for teaching young people to swim, as well as hosting ladies' classes and other specialist fitness classes. It is also possible to book the pool for a party. The pool is however also known for less positive reasons.

The pool is small and warm, the perfect breeding ground for bacteria and verrucas. *Verruca Vulgaris* are generally flat lesions in the skin that can resemble a cauliflower, and are caused by a viral infection that spreads on contact. It is also possible to get warts from using towels or other objects used by an infected person. They typically disappear after a few months but can last for years and can recur.

Local residents, who wish to remain unnamed, have said that recent outbreaks in the Shelton area may have been due to visits to the pool. One member of the public outside the pool yesterday said, "Verrucas can happen to anyone, at any time - the best thing to do is put a piece of banana skin onto the infected area, and cover with a plaster."

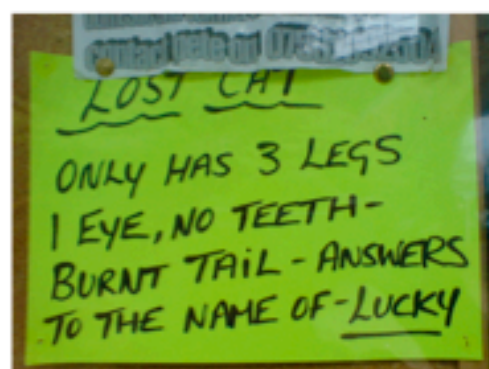
The pool declined to comment on the case. Anna Francis - our correspondent in Stoke

My first memory of Poole

The sun searing down, making the powder fine sand scorch to the touch with soothing cooler, and moister, sand below.

Andrew Soakell

First day in Poole. The B&B has no visible staff or other guests, but we do hear a couple of voices at some point in the morning. I make a sweet instant coffee with UHT milk in a little foil-topped container. It's amazing! Our B&B isn't doing the second B of breakfast, and we knew this in advance. We have spied a 'master baker' up the road. It's open and displays neat rows of fresh hot cross buns; my breakfast is beautifully yeasty and cinnamon spiced. Walking through Poole - as I think of it, though maybe it's Parkstone, or maybe an in between area - I try to take the place in. Everything intrigues me, the Bermuda Triangle pub, the medals and uniforms place - 'The Queen's Shilling' - with handpainted shopfront, the church that looks villagey in its green island, noticing acorns on the pavement and still disbelieving it's really Autumn, the 'Blue Shutter' guest house with the fake shutters tacked on either side of the windows, the ex-servicemen's club with union jack bunting - does Poole have a particular history here? Past a courier shop, bikes outside and four or five men inside sitting about, ready to go. I spy the car dealership and reckon KUBE is near, half recollecting directions from the website. It sounded complicated to find. But it's not, it's part of the College grounds, and looks like the photo, a big glass cube. Natasha Vicars



Echoes of a Middledle.

Turning Point

I wrote before about a recession. In the early 1990s, a recession had again turned me into an unemployment statistic. It was two and a half years before I gained employment for an electronics firm in Poole, while in the country unemployment was yet to peak. I screen printed fluorescent emulsions and circuits onto computer membranes to produce back-lighting for digital watches and other electronic gadgets. But the mid 1990s, the midpoint of my time in Poole up to now, just happened to be a turning point in my life.

I had traded my old Land Rover in for a smart BMW series 16, had joined a local acting troupe and was strutting my stuff at the Tivoli in Wimborne as the policeman in Toad of Toad Hall. "He called me fat face, your honour." I was playing Sunday League football for Dorset Commercials, and generally having a good time. Then I started to see politics as the con that it was. Its attempt to enslave the people and control our lives seemed hopeless to struggle against. I began to look at alternatives and, after taking an interest in paganism and Druidism, started to discover the spiritual in man. I discovered that there was more to life than the material world, the physical world we experience through our five senses.

Away from Poole, the world was going crazy. The three musketeers, John Major, Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, were trying to create order from the chaos that swept the planet. The Balkans War was acting out, Canary Wharf and Manchester were bombed by the IRA, there was a Sarin gas attack in Tokyo and the assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister Rabin caused a new ripple of madness to enter into the chaos. The Dunblane massacre occurred in Scotland, BSE was linked to human death and Dolly the sheep was cloned. The world seemed mad to me.

Then the madness pervaded Poole also. Things were about to change. A manager had passed my idea off as his own to earn the company £250,000. I pinned him against his office wall for an explanation – needless to say, I was soon out of a job.

As it was I had been studying photography at night school and was offered a place at Poole College studying a two year National Diploma in Photography course. I accepted. Would I have done so if I was still in employment? Who knows?

I went on to gain a BA (Hons) degree in Photography at Southampton Institute. I spent three years living in a student house and even a spell at Lisbon University in a 16th century palace before graduating and moving back to Poole in 2003 to look for work. Scott Irvine

About a cat I know

My mother doesn't own a cat and hasn't done so for about five years, but she has always had a cat in her life, including now. Not knowing his name, where and when he's coming or going, and having become good friends, my mother has given him a new name; he is Roamin. I will keep the cat's identity confidential for fear of him being grounded again – yes, his real owner has grounded him before for staying out too much!

It's up to this cat what he will decide, with whom he will decide to reside. You can't make a cat be where you want him to be, a cat will decide because he's always roaming free.

Roamin comes to chill out and have a good chat – his favourite word is 'hello' (in a 'meow' kind of way). He can be partial to a bowl of milk, but prefers to live just off love, as sometimes he doesn't go home for ages and goes without eating (you see it is wrong to feed someone else's cat). My mother's friend has decided to leave some roasted chickens in his will for Roamin, as a mark of respect for long-serving unrequited love and feline friendship.

Sleeping is one of the daily priorities for Roamin and this takes place in his favourite spot on an old pink towel in the conservatory. Pink and black is always a good combination, trendy and edgy. He has also been known to try out some camouflage, by falling asleep on a black blanket. When napping outdoors, he enjoys hanging out with the white cat sculpture in the garden under a bush. Here he has created a little nest for himself to shelter from the rain, when times are hard and there is no one else to love.

Roamin enjoys helping with the gardening by finding the odd toad or mouse, and when he's done with gardening, he rolls onto his back and stretches out like a starfish. His velveteen fur shines in the sunlight revealing his black coat to be a deep, rich mountain-bear-brown-black. He is by no means as vicious as a wild bear, but cuddly as the teddy variety. If he were ten times bigger he would actually be a panther.

He has decided, as many a free spirited feline, to spend much of his time in good company and his company is indeed enjoyed greatly. Hazel Evans

...Sunny day...La la la... Hmmm...Oh, the glass is open... Lady... Lady, why are you going?... Come back...Oh closed! Can't visit the big comfy square now! ...Ah yes, I am fabulous...Cuddle of lady...Purr purr purr...La la la, nice Lady...Purr... Chair...I'm great...Purr...Oh... What's that? Hazel Evans

<< continued from the Beginning

The sole ticket office attendant is still on the phone at this point, by the way. I wonder if he is even talking to anyone anymore or just using the phone as a kind of safety buffer against the angry people waiting and the potential verbal abuse.

Finally, we see a twitch of a blind in the second window of the ticket office, and up it goes revealing another member of staff. Where did they get him from, I wonder? But now the line starts to move and there is a sense of victory especially from Little Miss Whinger behind me. Thirty-five minutes waiting to be served at Bournemouth train station – it is clear that my first impressions were not good, and as for the 'Investors in People' award proudly displayed on the wall, I think this should be replaced with a much needed Investors in Chairs award, as after 35 minutes of waiting I certainly would have appreciated a nice sit down. Antonia Beck

Heart pounding, shortness of breath, palms beginning to get a little sweaty (gross) – these sensations seem to be not so uncommon to me now, as I find myself becoming more and more nervous and anxious about even the smallest things that take place in my daily life. But this, this particular thing is not small on my anxiety scale; in fact it is pretty big and as a result, the familiar feelings return in full force as I watch the clock, the minutes, seconds, ticking away rapidly as I hurry to read through the document and spell check it before the 4pm deadline. I experience a sharp intake of breath as I attach the document to an email and click the dreaded 'send' button. It's gone; I've sent it. It is out of my hands now. You might think I would be left with a feeling of relief and joy, but instead I am exhausted, drained. Writing a proposal is tricky.

Now perhaps you think I have over-reacted slightly here, that I'm being a bit dramatic, but honestly this is the process I often go through. A few years ago I would not have considered myself to be a nervous person, perhaps a little shy when meeting people for the first time, but generally in terms of writing or talking I was okay. I had confidence. Admittedly, I can look back and pinpoint some of the reasons why there has been this shift of confidence, but generally I believe it to be down to the delightful experience of growing up and entering a time in your life when things suddenly start to matter, where people begin to listen to you and ultimately begin to judge you. You then find yourself starting to really care about things as well and you begin to pour your heart and soul into everything and by the end of it your poor heart is beating furiously and you wonder whether bits of your soul have now disappeared forever.

I am told that this is all part of growing up and that next time I embark on something or I am confronted with something it won't be so difficult, but honestly I am really looking forward to the point in my life when I have embodied all this experience, and I just generally don't give a shit anymore about what people think and I can continue to live my life in a wonderful state of bliss. When I analyse life like this, to me it becomes an odd kind of cycle – you go from the blissful, naive and somewhat cocky nature of childhood to the 'AHHHHH' intense nature of middle life and then back to the blissful, but obviously much more experienced nature of older life.

I often wonder whether it's just me
Continued in the End >>

When thinking back to my first memory of Poole, I cannot really say that it is of Poole itself but of the beach, broad and endless, at Sandbanks where my mother (due to an absentee father) used to take myself and my twin brother Peter with our slightly older sister Jayne for summer days out. It is a pure recollection of very simple and uncomplicated elements, just clean sand, blistering sun and crystal if chilly waters which were both shallow and calm. The absence of a father in those trips or how we came to get there and back are strangely absent from my recollection. The day seemed to last for ever, I suppose now I know this to be because it was a cheap day out and a rest for my long-suffering mum. She must have got there early with us and left as late as possible. She probably savoured the freedom from responsibility too as we were swallowed up by our imaginations for hours playing in the sand with the concentration only children can possess. The bliss of innocence and sparse elements. Andrew Soakell

The Return

I was fortunate in the millennium, I feel, to be on a beach in Barbados with my father. We had sailed the Atlantic from Lymington Harbour via the West coast of North Africa and across to the Windward Isles along the latitude of about 13° North.

We had planned to sail back to England together and so circumnavigate the Atlantic; we were unable to and I flew back from Grenada disappointed.

Early in 2003, Aron, my old globetrotting acquaintance and I, were catching up after his latest trip to China when he mentioned an opportunity to deliver a boat for his sister's new boyfriend, Andrew. I took his number and rang him straight away.

He was keen to get me involved and began by outlining our task. We would be sailing from Florida in the USA to Southampton in England. Andrew's new purchase, named 'Determination', was an ocean-going Pleasure Cruiser with wide, timber planked decks. It was a twin-mast beauty originating from Hong Kong.

The adrenaline was already beginning to pump in my veins. I had to remind myself to keep an objective view of the venture ahead of me. Firstly, I knew nothing about the two crew members I was about to risk my life alongside. Secondly, I had no idea of the condition of the boat. I did know that it was being purchased in Pensacola and we were to sail it with the trade winds in the Gulf stream back to the River Hamble. But I decided to join the crew and made my flight arrangements.

Within a few days I had dropped everything I was involved with in England and was landing at the tiny Orlando Sanford International Airport in Florida. I didn't have a map or much of a clue what to do next. I looked for a bus stop or for information around the building, but there appeared to be no bus service. A couple of big American taxis idled nearby. I reckoned I should grab one before they disappeared – who knows how long I would be left stranded if I did not? The crew and boat were now sailing inside the Keys, in the Gulf of Mexico, in an attempt to rendezvous with me along the very long Overseas Highway. Andy and I had simply arranged to liaise via mobile phone when I got to the Keys.

So, ever optimistic, I took a taxi to the
Continued in the End >>

The day passes quickly.

We have more of a news desk now. A single long white table with our two white macs side by side. The Bournemouth Echo spread out as an accessory. And a couple of used tea cups too. It's like we're part of the place, regulars.

I'm told there's about to be a fire drill. An officer will time how long we all take to get out of the building. The alarm, minutes later, is a wailing siren. The group that assemble in the car park are me, Angus, Nicky, Denis and three people who are rehearsing a dance piece in the gallery. One of the dancers says, "Oh, are we the only people in the building!?" I ask about their work as we wander back through the afternoon sunlight, and as we enter, we spot wisps of smoke rising from the two large glass balls she has placed on a bench. She dashes to move them; the fabric under each has burnt in a neat circle, smaller than a cigarette burn. "It's ironic it happened during the fire drill", I say, and hear my observation repeated as I walk up to the top and the woman relays the incident to others. Natasha Vicars



Echoes of an

End

Dying Man's Water Work Problems Resolved

A fatally ill man has been saved from a very stressful situation by The Dorset Daily Echo. The man had been engaged in a five-year battle with his water company provider. The man from Sixpenny Handley had recently received a threatening letter from a debt collection agency for £116 relating to visits made to his home by water company assessment officers in 2004 and 2005.

A letter to the man from the water company, dated 2005, stated that "due to our Health and Safety policy, our contracted process servers are not required to advise our customers of the charge for them to visit."

The man said, "For five years they wouldn't write it off, but the minute the Echo phoned, they have written it off." He was very pleased with the intervention from the local paper, who called the water company and managed to secure a bill waiver, due to the unfortunate circumstances.

A reader response left anonymously on the paper's website was less sympathetic: "Well done Echo, shame on these companies who fight to rip us all off. I have a 100k credit card debt and they are wanting me to pay it!!! I have had the holidays and fast cars, why should I keep paying? Can you help?" Anna Francis - our correspondent in Stoke

Sorry End for Gilbert

Updates and reports about Gilbert, the Northern Bottlenose Whale, have been coming in for the past month, but there is no happy ending here.

Gilbert was first spotted off Poole Bay on 13 September by Nick Gilbert-Smith (hence the name), an RNLI lifeguard. Experts have commented that whales head south at this time of year, but can sometimes take a wrong turning and end up in the English channel.

Early reports said Gilbert - who had originally been believed to be a boy, but was in fact a girl - seemed content to swim around the Devon and Cornish coast. She had then been thought to have made her way out into the Atlantic. Unfortunately however, Gilbert was later found washed up on the beach in Poole.

Early signs to explain her demise include injuries to Gilbert's nose, which could indicate that she had got trapped in fishermen's nets.

Officers from British Diver's Marine Life Rescue have urged the public to stay away from the beach for safety reasons. They note that it is not yet known if the whale had a contagious disease which could be passed to humans. Anna Francis - our correspondent in Stoke

45 Green Road

After a brief telephone conversation with my mother this morning to ask the number of the house, which she couldn't remember, I got a visual description instead which enabled me to recognise the abode once again. "You know that climbing plant that I have at the front of my house here, with the red berries on, well, there's one of those there and I think it's the second house in of the terrace. Also there is an alley across the road". Thank goodness for this information! I think I would still be wondering up and down the road now, playing eeny-meeny-miny-mo trying to guess which white house out of about six it was.

The house is located approximately 64.4 stones throw from the house where I am now living. So visiting Green Road on this pleasant sunny day took no more than a leisurely stroll.

When I arrived at the house, I actually walked straight past it first, then had to go back. I identified it as No 45 with a bottle green front door. It wasn't quite as I remember; the front garden has been replaced with two wheely bins, blue and black and the blinds in the front window were sun bleached. I was disappointed at the lack of bay window, as this is one of the main features I remembered... Clearly my memory was playing tricks on me!

I sat on the green patch opposite the house and observed for a while. 6am - 8pm Permit holders only or 2 hours during the day... The first floor has a dressing table in the window... And indeed the plant with the red berries is a lovely feature at the front of the white house... Red car... Green car... Blue car... No 43 man comes out of his house and looks at me curiously as I am taking notes... The primary school at the end of the road is out and a lady with three children gets into the silver family carrier opposite me; she is chewing gum. I don't like chewing gum! She drives off... Then a little overweight girl with blonde, plaited hair runs past me and meets her mother at the end of the road. From the other direction comes a man with his daughter; she is wearing a purple dress. "So we had a Chinese meal." "Aha, aha," replies her father, mind seemingly elsewhere... A lady comes along with her two sons chewing on sweeties from a white paper bag, "Boys, this way!.. George!.. George, this way!" George replies, "I just wanted to tread on the little froggies." Then he runs towards his mother... A blue convertible Beetle pulls up and parks where the silver family carrier with Chewing Gum Mum was once parked. I didn't see who got out of the car as a lady with black hair knocks on the black door of No 49, "Hello," then she enters and the door closes behind her. Just then a black three-wheeled car pulls out of the side road with Z.O.R.T. on the side. Hmmm, curious!.. No 43 Man returns to his home. A man with a union jack on the right butt of his jeans walks by, followed a man with a Superman T-shirt and dark glasses. I took this as my cue to leave! Hazel Evans

<< continued from the Middle

and whether I'm just a bit nuts, worrying about things too much and getting worked up over stupid things, but I just assume that everyone does this to some degree. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe there really are all these Zen-like people wandering round, speaking eloquently and poignantly and not getting nervous about anything. If so, I really need to learn from these people. Could they club together and present a conference or organise some one-to-one sessions please, for those of us who are desperately flailing?

Even now as I read through these last few paragraphs I feel a bit nervous. Wondering what will be thought of what I have written and wondering whether it was a bad idea to think that I could write in the first place. Eek! Even I, the crazy one, am beginning to give myself a headache now - bring on the men in the white coats and just wheel me away to my wondrous state of blissful, Valium-induced unawareness. Antonia Beck

Taking the role of a reporter

(scratch) was quite daunting at first (scratch), but it made me realise how much I miss writing. For a while now, I've expressed myself mainly through movement and dialogue with audiences (scratch), so it's nice to get back to the familiar pen and paper and scratch away. Scratch...scratch...scratch. Antonia Beck

<< continued from the Middle

nearest Greyhound bus station at Orlando for \$25. On N. John Young Parkway, within earshot of Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, I got my bus ticket and waited outside in the dark all night for the morning service. I think I am lucky I was not robbed or killed. Suffice to say that I did lose \$10 to an ex-offender; he showed me his prisoner's ID card. When morning came we filed onto the vehicle, a large African American man was announcing to everyone, and yet to no-one in particular, "It's all gravy man, 'ts'all gravy!"

Finally I managed to rendezvous with Determination, hot and bothered from a few miles of walking after the bus journey. It seems a minor miracle that I ever did - when you look at a map of the area! Andy was waiting for me at a little pontoon on the inland waterway of the Eastern Seaboard. His inflatable kayak seemed a little out of place, but we loaded my gear and paddled out to the yacht. I was welcomed aboard by Will, the second crew member. The boys had already sailed together for a week across the Gulf of Mexico and we sat together as they amused me with the story of the adventure so far!

Judging from this, we were in for a whole lot more action on the return trip to England. Andrew Soakell

We'd booked our return

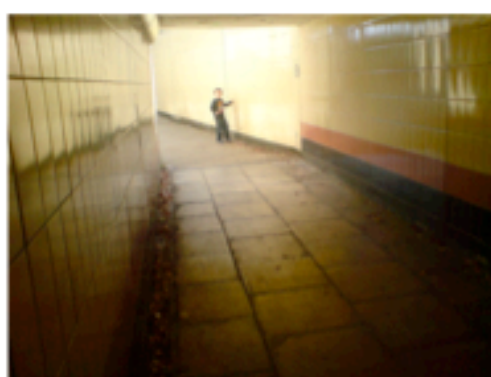
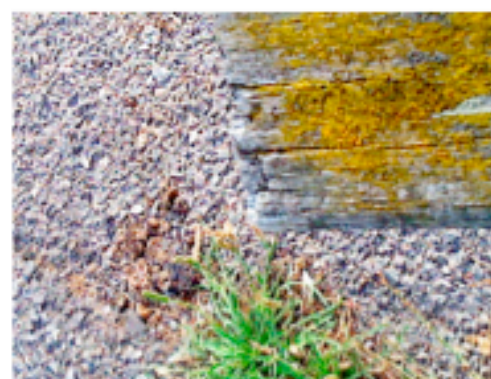
train in advance and, not knowing how we'd be using our time in Poole, made it quite late. But the way it actually went, with all our reporters having their assignments and a deadline of the next day to email in, we can easily wrap up by 5pm. The gallery closes then anyway and the remaining staff member seems ready to leave. All our bags in tow, we walk towards the town centre. I am hankering now for cream tea. On the pretext of trying Dorset clotted cream.

We stop in the park for a while, although the café isn't serving. A Canada goose does roll-overs in the water near us. Then move on, the now familiar route past playground, through tiled underpass to a windy bay of boats. There's a strange feeling when you're about to leave. You can't yet look back, you can't consign it to a pleasant nostalgic past when it's dragging on. I take up food as a mission, although I'm not really hungry. Finding somewhere that offers cream tea, we sit outside, next to the dock, and also a road junction and poor seagull roadkill.

But having eaten become restless again. We continue to drift on and soon the visitor-friendly quayside ends and round a corner are bleak warehouses, fenced off and crossed by a large road without pavements. I have a cold and am wearing all my jumpers. We double-back, aiming for the warmth of a 'nice pub'.

But we are aware of a time pressure; we can't settle somewhere unless we know how long it will take to find the station. We roam on, asking directions, sensing the Friday night impetus of those around us. In front of a map, a woman asks if we need help. And, miraculously, she directs us to the perfect place – calm, comfortable...nearby. It feels okay to stop now, to talk, rounding up the visit.

The train station, when we find it, is sandwiched between something like a ringroad, and a 70s concrete car park belonging to the main shopping centre. The London train arrives, bringing with it young men with beer cans who head out into Poole. When we get on we find London papers, evidence that the carriage has shuttled between the two towns. I get out the laptop and begin to type. Natasha Vicars



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natashavicars.blogspot.com
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