



Nottingham Departed

Tony Simpson

... So I hold two fingers up to yesterday
 Light a cigarette and smoke it all away
 I got out, I got out,
 I'm alive and I'm here to stay ...
Jake Bugg, lyrics to 'Two Fingers'

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The new Clifton Estate, across the River Trent to the south of Nottingham, is under construction in the closing pages of Alan Sillitoe's less well-known 'prequel*' to *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. Brian Seaton, lonely soul, has returned to Nottingham, perhaps for the last time. He walks south from the Station towards childhood haunts near the river, and sees Clifton Grove and other playgrounds making way for thousands of houses which were to become homes for some 11,000 residents of what has been called Europe's largest council estate. For decades after the Second World War, Nottingham's reputation as a successful housing authority was based on large, publicly-owned estates built mainly on the periphery of the City.

Brian has recently returned from the British colony of Malaya, rich in rubber and tin, where, as an Air Force wireless operator, he was engaged in fighting local communists at the tender age of 19. In

◀ Shirley-Anne Field and Albert Finney, stars of the film version of Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, in front of Nottingham Council House (courtesy of Nottingham Post).

**The Open Door* by Alan Sillitoe, ISBN 9781907869631, published in Nottingham in 2012 by Bromley House Editions, an imprint of Five Leaves Publications. The novel was first published in 1989. Bromley House Library was founded in 1816 as Nottingham Subscription Library, and moved to its present home in the city's Angel Row in 1822.

The Open Door

by Alan Sillitoe

In this brief excerpt, Brian Seaton takes younger brother Arthur (hero of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning) on an outing to the countryside around Byron's ancestral home of Newstead Abbey.

... In Hucknall Market he looked at the map. 'See that church?' Arthur glanced. 'You shouldn't point at a church.'

'Why not?'

'Grandma towd me not to. She said it was wrong. Don't know why.'

'Maybe it is. But you know what's inside?'

He gave a horse-laugh. 'God?'

'Byron's heart's buried there.'

'Who's he?'

'A great poet.'

He bought ice-cream from a barrow. Arthur threw the paper down, licking before it could melt. They walked along a street of small houses towards the outskirts. 'Is the heart still beating?'

'I shouldn't think so.'

'Who ripped it out of his body?'

'A surgeon, I guess.'

'Was he still alive?'

Brian laughed. 'He died in Greece.'

'Did he fall in?'

'In?'

'You said 'e pegged out in Greece.'

'Greece is a country.'

Arthur looked at him slyly. 'Must be slippy.'

1949, after a two-year stint, he returns to England by sea, only to discover that he has contracted tuberculosis. Nottingham, in an earlier age of austerity (food rationing, in particular) under Attlee's socialist government, provides much of the backdrop.

Publication of this fine new hardback edition of *The Open Door* coincides with 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning: the authentic moment in British photography', an exhibition inspired by Sillitoe's most famous novel and the grainy film adaptation directed by Karel Reisz, at Nottingham University's Lakeside Arts Centre. (Incidentally, the

University now has campuses in Malaysia and China, as well as the Trent Valley.)

The exhibition and associated programme of screenings and discussions of films such as Stephen Frears's *St Ann's*, a documentary homage to the city where the director spent some of his formative years (he has described it as the 'most friendly place in the world'), represents something of a step-change in Nottingham's self-awareness. Curated by Anna Douglas and Neil Walker, Nottingham people responded to a public appeal for photographs of their city in the 1950s and 1960s. Family snaps, all black and white, are interspersed with more professional shots, such as those of Roger Mayne, who provided the cover for the Penguin Special Edition of *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen* by Ken Coates and Bill Silburn, which itself forms a central part of the display, and was based on a pioneering survey of poverty in Nottingham in the 1960s. There are magnificent stills from Reisz's film, as well as shots of the filming itself, courtesy of the *Nottingham Post*.

The adventure in preparing this uplifting exhibition is engagingly described by curator Neil Walker in the catalogue* which accompanies it. Comprehensively illustrated and stylishly presented, Walker describes how his co-curator, Anna Douglas 'proposed a further democratization of our material by the inclusion of contemporaneous home photography contributed by the residents of Nottingham'. This is a very encouraging approach, which would be appreciated by all those democrats drawn to the Institute for Workers' Control and its famous conferences, many of which gathered in Nottingham, from the early 1960s through to Mrs Thatcher's arrival. Might that make a new adventure?

Like D H Lawrence before him, Sillitoe left Nottingham, although he maintained contact with family who stayed. Soon, probably, they will be followed by Jake Bugg, Clifton's teenage minstrel, whose recent hit record, 'Two Fingers', waves an unfond farewell to the streets that formed him. He is a refreshing new talent, nurtured by relatives and local schools, perhaps with some help from Bob Dylan's 'Theme Time Radio Hour'.

A step away from all these striking photographs, Nottingham High School (for boys) celebrates its 500th anniversary in sub-fusc fashion with a small display that includes the splendid seal and charter, replete with Tudor roses, from Henry VIII, granted to the widow Agnes Mellers to

*SATURDAY NIGHT & SUNDAY MORNING *the authentic moment* in British Photography, published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name by Djanogly Art Gallery, Nottingham, 2012, ISBN 9781900809023, £15.99.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning

by Alan Sillitoe

In this excerpt, Arthur Seaton takes a view.

'Once a rebel, always a rebel. You can't help being one. You can't deny that. And it's best to be a rebel so as to show 'em it don't pay to try to do you down. Factories and labour exchanges and insurance offices keep us alive and kicking – so they say – but they're booby-traps and will suck you under like sinking-sands if you aren't careful. Factories sweat you to death, labour exchanges talk you to death, insurance and income tax offices milk money from your wage packets and rob you to death. And if you're still left with a tiny bit of life in your guts after all this boggering about, the army calls you up and you get shot to death ...'

establish a 'free school' in the county town of Nottingham. Without apparent irony, this exhibition is called 'Balls, Boots and Players: Celebrating 500 Years of Nottingham High School in its Community'. Yet I cannot recall any opportunity or public invitation to visit the High School during 40 years in the city. Lawrence attended as a scholarship boy ('free schools', then as now, came at some cost), as did Ken Clarke, who came from the coalfield streets of Bulwell in north Nottingham. Jesse Boot stumped up some money, as he did for the University. Lawrence responded in verse (see 'Nottingham's New University').

In January 1963, there was an opening night premiere performance of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, adapted for the stage at London's Prince of Wales Theatre. It starred Tom Bell, Joan Heal and June Ritchie, and was a benefit performance 'for the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation in support of the people of Vietnam'. The Foundation was to be established that year. The horrors of the Vietnam War were still comparatively little known.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, the novel and fantasy, is a belter. The pace never flags, from the moment Arthur tumbles down the pub stairs in the opening lines, propelled by seven gins and 11 pints, until the closing paragraph, when his float bobs in the canal as he contemplates settling down with Doreen. Set entirely in Nottingham, it put the city on the map and encapsulated a way of life. The film, screened continuously during the exhibition, attracted huge international acclaim.

Nottingham's New University

In Nottingham, that dismal town
 where I went to school and college,
 they've built a new university
 for a new dispensation of knowledge.

Built it most grand and cakeily
 out of the noble loot
 derived from shrewd cash-chemistry
 by good Sir Jesse Boot.

Little I thought, when I was a lad
 and turned my modest penny
 over on Boot's Cash Chemist's counter,
 that Jesse, by turning many

millions of similar honest pence
 over, would make a pile
 that would rise at last and blossom out
 in grand and cakey style

into a university
 where smart men would dispense
 doses of smart cash-chemistry
 in language of common-sense!

That future Nottingham lads would be
 cash-chemically B.Sc.
 that Nottingham lights would rise and say:
 By Boots I am M.A.

From this I learn, though I knew it before,
 that culture has her roots
 in the deep dung of cash, and lore
 is a last off-shoot of Boots.

D H Lawrence, published in Pansies, 1929