

Davey Payne

Dockhead to The Caul

Writers' Walks



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Davey Payne is from Dumfries and currently living in Berwick-upon-Tweed. His writing explores the history and psychogeography of urban spaces and rural places. He has a particular predilection with rivers.

photo : Gilbert West





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From Dockhead to the Caul, Dumfries

A short distance in geography, a thousand years of history. There are plenty of benches on which to sit and contemplate past and future and what we have done to and continue to do to the river, Nith, named after a Celtic Mother Goddess, mother of the town, giver of life.

I believe rivers are sacred and have soul and that by tampering with the Nith's tidal nature we have cursed the town. Think of lunatic and full moon tropes, then imagine what disrupting the Moons will with each tide might do to healthy mind. Might go to explain the erratic ideas and senseless behaviours we observe here.

In defiance of asphalt and townplanners, a fizzing confluence pays tribute. Below Nith Place lies an ancient watersmeet that summoned humankind long before we held faith in dead carbon and tatto'd the patterns of the night skies on each other.

Long before the cold torch of the moon guided stealthy bands across the Locharmoss its push and pull fetched conquerors, raiders and merchants with the rise and swell of Novius Fluvius to settle as the scorch of the sun gave them wheat and hay.

Yes, the moon was pulling its puppet strings on us for aeons until merchant classes began locking up the sick and desperate for nurses and turnkeys to cry and ca 'lunatic' whenever she was fully lit. Before, even, they dared to divert its hold over the Nith at Whitesands.

In the name of commerce to prepare grain denied to townsfolk, shopkeepers come proto councillors gave the nod for militiamen to open fire on their furious starvation. Is it the lament of the tide or the threat of riflemen that quells the townsfolk, still.....?

To this day, the caul thwarts every tide the moon gives the town - a wall, barring an effervescent fascination where imagination ends and the doldrums set in. Fresh waters lay stagnant and acrid beyond the brick barrels of the Auld Brig.

Echo chambers that resound with the unhinged drunken laughter of greeting faced stoics and erstwhile troubadours hoarse covers favoured over original material. The moon takes her revenge on the townsfolk. Aggression misplaced, where it will not be reciprocated.