

Night Walks

Poems Angelina D’Roza Pete Green

Chris Jones Fay Musselwhite

Photographs Emma Bolland

Essay Brian Lewis

Longbarrow Press



Club Mill Lane, Hillfoot, North Sheffield, 17 January 2018, 9.02pm. Photo by Emma Bolland.

...the river had an awful look, the buildings on the banks were muffled in black shrouds, and the reflected lights seemed to originate deep in the water...

‘Night Walks’, Charles Dickens

On 17 January 2018, Longbarrow Press led a night walk through north Sheffield. This 90-minute excursion, with poets Angelina D’Roza, Pete Green, Chris Jones and Fay Musselwhite, accompanied by a small audience, tracked the River Don on a southerly course from Owlerton to Neepsend, on one of the coldest nights of the year. This publication brings together some of the poems that were performed at stages of this itinerary, alongside Emma Bolland’s photographs of the night walk, and an essay that both retraces the journey and examines some of the ideas and exchanges that contributed to its development.

Brian Lewis
Sheffield, March 2020

Song of Silence

Darkness, my old friend, you old fowl, how charmingly sweet you sing, like silent raindrops. You old foxhole, my old fright, you old fracture. You have a great gift for silence, but I'm no longer able to separate silence from prayer, silk from preamble, old friend, old fragrance. There is no such thing as silence

only the utter and heartbreaking stupidity of words, the utter and heavenly stutter. I have freed myself and remain alone, darkness, darling, my old frill, you old fragment. How charmingly swell you sing, you sing, a procession of basic emptiness, an avalanche, an aviary. Ideas are one thing, silence another.

Angelina D'Roza

The Storm Lamp

Night unpins its coat, shakes out fire
and smoke – no, here’s a chainsaw searing timber.
A woman decked in outsized gloves and visor
is spitting through this sleek vanilla limb.
A storm lamp lists from loops of knotted string.
Set back, a camper with a loose-furled awning,
deckchairs, couch, four carpet ends for lawn.

She cuts the buzz, unhoods, limps to the fence.
‘Did you flee the city?’ she asks me straight
as though I’ve taken flight from pestilence.
‘You think my landing here might mean escape?
Today I walked a friend back to her place
and since I kept on going, came this far
tonight I’ll trail this rise toward the moor.’

‘I heard about the PC shot in town.’
She bends to lay the gloves beside her feet.
‘I know they’ll play the real connections down
and look to ramp up neighbourly unease:
Does someone act suspicious on your street?
Who’s sharing all that streamed jihadi snuff?
Does your Imam at the mosque protest enough?’

Sweat has licked her short hair into a peak.
‘For those men, women, who strap themselves in
to some flesh-melting creed, I cannot speak.
Could you even begin to imagine
that final breath’s a wick to catch and kindle?
This map of scars, the fact I’m bloody lame
is as much or little I know of pain.

For years I shared a flat in Norfolk Park.
I'd bike to town at dawn to work a shift
then pedal pump and sway back in the dark.
Coming home one night I took a hit:
a drunken driver offered me a lift
twenty feet across the rain-smear'd road.
I blessed him as I heard my hip explode.

High and leashed, on tubes and drips for weeks
I dreamt of woods, blossoms, resin scented leaves
mixed up in my head with the smell of bleach.
I dreamt I tied a confluence of streams
to one small field: there I found some peace.
I dreamt I sold off everything I owned
and when I came around that field was home.'

The lamp picks out a spade and pail of lime.
'It must be tough,' I say, 'just to survive.'
'I've sun and rain for friends, which suits me fine.
I work a patch of veg, my chickens thrive.
The sweetest smelling wood cut up to dry
will crackle, powder, blue the winter skies.
To count on others' aid means compromise.'

She stoops to pick her padding from the dirt
flicking at the mozzies round her shins.
'Sleepwalk and you're likely to get burnt:
fix a red eye on what this bad world brings.'
Even the air about her's a little singed;
when she cups my hand her palm feels raw.
Carrying her heat, I start toward the moor.

Chris Jones

Flight from Cuthbert Bank

from an autumn art walk

with Emilie Taylor and Mark Doyle

In search of pigeon lofts
we cross Philadelphia Park where gusted leaves
from laden crab apple trees chase over the scrub,
seed-blown flower heads ball into skeleton fists,
and my palms itch when dock-spikes rustle
their bright cluster-crust.

Some of us have memory-maps
to share, so we retrace how Wales Road's end
met the rise of Kelvin's *streets in the sky* –
a short-lived try to flat-stack a neighbourhood.

Then to the hillside opposite
we turn our gaze, led by the potter who sketched,
in slip and scraffito, men's pigeon-kept hearts
on the shoulders of vases a child could hide in;
wood-kiln fired them, carried both down from the sky
and its edge to plinth-rest in the hallowed half-dark
of the city's main art shed.

Under instruction, out on the path,
we ink-roll glass to catch the skyline: phone mast,
overgrown ski slope, Pitsmoor's Church of Christ
– all in reverse and smudge-edged; find a line
or word to mirror-write, hail each other's art,
then bag it up to head down Neepsend clough.

We skirt the six-lane race,
part thin trees to tread the dumped gear – teapot, tyre,
paint tin, plastic chair – that bolsters the soft rot
of fallen weed flesh, spent wood, topped
by a slither of leaves, waxen and wet.

When later we wheel
round and back up to peer over that top road wall,
we'll see how these flaking roof terraces nestle
in rhododendron and yellowing birch; lean further
for a bird's eye view of fly-bundled rubble sacks
where brazen new window frames lounge;
bramble and buddleia bind it all back.

Down at the foothills
we clutch creeper-twigs as we climb to the lofts.
Their ledges, when timing those loaded returns,
must have been like massive grins, each tooth a bird,
now collapsed to grimaces, above the faded bloom
of panels tagged in urban-runic fonts,

bedded in, weathered,
rooted like they grew there in the tangle-shrub.
A couple seem to topple from the bank, one has lost
its horizontal hold, is derailed so shifted slats
leer over the drop, its cabin-body lodged
in dented trees, shaggy in grassroots,
its gape creased shut.

Ten years since the last
kept pigeon homed to here. Back five more decades
to before they razed Parkwood Spring and sucked
Neepsend dry: the valley not this fleck of factory,
a filament between car galleries
and abandoned hillside,

but like a Lowry vision: a flock
of men released by work clocks, to rise above
day's end, the valley's din, legacies of grind,
to hold the small bulk, feel its heat
pulse through feathers in cupped hands,
and send those tiny hearts and lungs
to claim their reach of sky.

Fay Musselwhite

From *Contraflow* (2016)

Ball Street Bridge

Past the cutlers, halfway over the Don
I stop to watch the river's dull pewter
slow-shimmy the strait, grinding stone,
cutting shingle. Mallards perch the weir

sloped in water-gush and slugs of rain
like dregs of Kelham Ale. I envy their grit,
webbed roots dug down against the braid
of ore-heavy stream, a quiet unshifting.

With moonrise, light pivots as it fails.
The suds beneath glint with gudgeon
and coltsfoot smoulders the watery soil,
yellows the banks like fire. I want to learn

this knack of standing still while headwaters,
washing past, whittle rocks to quartz.

Angelina D'Roza

Night Walk by the River Don

Saturday. The city's out there dancing
and I'm suffused in alcoholic fug
sleeping in my clothes and dreaming some
night walk by the River Don where
Neepsend Lane plays tributary to
Penistone Road, where hostelry ghosts
of the Farfield Inn drink on, nine years
since the Don called an imperious last
orders, its waters rising as high as the bar
and here my feet make off northwest:
a lane flanked dense with thickets,
the freakish Don below, a carriageway
of bustling currents. I commute upriver,
the work of the dream awaiting and white
points of light, white lines of engine noise
reaching from the road beyond. A moment
comes when rumination's apt, when to
offer down my soles to stroke the surface
seems the fittest course. I mull, send texts
(the Don could take me if it wanted to),
and I can't vouch for unseen trees
falling in the forest, but my dream-state
absence here attests the Don still flows
when nobody is there. Its spate persists,
relentless, unabashed. Taking a cue, I
rise again and shun the lane to hold
fast to the bank, backtracking, soft-
stepping, taking two small falls to founder
in soft ground, still clambering implausible
ledges that narrow near to nought,
aware that if this mud dispels all friction,
balance elude us and my footing fail, I'll

dream a fatal dash against a concrete edge,
wake bewildered, wondering and unscathed.
Further up our way broadens and emerges
onto some industrial estate: undisturbed,
I dodge a barrier watched by rows of
empty windows, which disclose only
blankness, and an assumed panopticon of
CCTV lenses up in the gods. A shopfitter,
a tool parts supplier. I can't tell whether
they're going concerns or gone; we take
dereliction as read, scoping the city
that never wakes up. In the end I'm
circling one small section of some dirt track
shot with potholes, Hillsborough's lights
glaring over from across the way, playing
on the tarry, sluggish surface of the Don
to set a monochrome mosaic. The city
too, it seems, continues to exist alone
when I dream I'm somewhere else.
The only thing to do's retrace my steps.
Somewhere a security guard chuckles
as I cross his screen again. Back at the start,
just before the dream fades, there I am
baffled by a dumped bathtub I'd not
registered before, matter-of-fact
as elephants in rooms. I wake to find
my coat and boots bedaubed in river mud;
on my phone, each step recorded by
an app that tracks your way by GPS, and the
bathtub photographed, stark as a full stop.

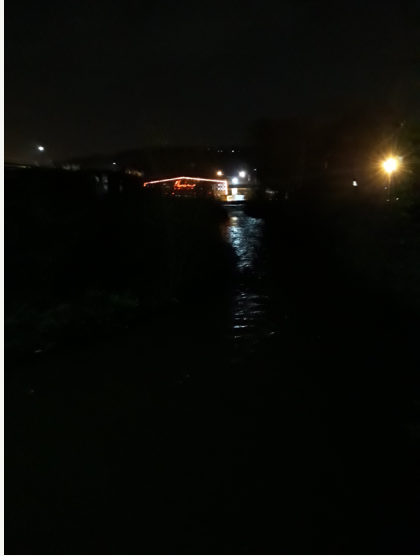
Pete Green

First published in *Route 57*, issue 13 (2017)

Night Walk #1: Owlerton

To walk with companions is to walk on fertile but uncertain ground – and so to keep my footing I will daydream a night walk...

‘Snow White / Rose Red’, Emma Bolland



6.53pm. We fold into the New Barrack Tavern, first Emma, then me, the double doors closing on the dark. In the second half of the 19th century, an earlier incarnation of the Tavern bustled with soldiery, the line infantries of Warwickshire, Rutlandshire, Bedfordshire, quartered at Hillsborough, a few streets away. It survived the closure of the barracks in the 1930s, and was one of the few pubs left standing after Penistone Road was converted into a dual carriageway in the 1980s. These days, much of its trade comes from Sheffield Wednesday fans, visitors to the greyhound stadium, and regular music and comedy nights. Tonight, though, it's barely breathing. Perhaps it's the early hour, or

the early January slump, or the wind and rain that's been racketing through Sheffield since the weekend. I think back to the last time I sat in one of the city's pubs, an evening in The Blake, three days before Christmas, the end of a year of starts and stops, a year without flow. A small table, the poets, and me, we talk, I express a desire to work quickly, to work quietly, we talk, an event in January, perhaps, ahead of the cultural seasons, outside of the festival circuits. A night walk. We've spoken of this before, but it's taken ten years of slow journeying through South Yorkshire – the itinerary always different, the poets and participants always changing with the landscape, the path always naturally lit – to see it as a possibility. The factors that discouraged us in the past – the uncertainties, the risks – are the factors that are now pushing us forward. Before we can talk ourselves out of it, we set a date, sketch a potential route, and renew our vow. Three weeks and six days later, at the end of an afternoon's anxious weather-watching, our group reconvenes in the Tavern, accompanied by a dozen people who



have signed up to the walk: we are 3, then 4, then 7, then 11, then 18. Having spent the last 40 minutes slowly filling the lounge area, we take our leave, and spill into the night.

In this country, the culture and literature of urban walking has, for many years, been monopolized by London and the solitary white male; after dark, these terms are almost synonymous, the archetypal ‘night city’ re-walked and rewritten by those at liberty to do so, from Charles Dickens to Bradley Garrett. In *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, Rebecca Solnit remarks on the absence of women from the histories of walking, observing that ‘most public

places at most times’ have not afforded them the same privileges of anonymity, of detachment, of drift; this inequality is, of course, magnified by night, as are its potential and actual consequences. Collective walking practices can offer some respite from self-policing, clearing a path for exploration, exercise, and recreation, though we might also question the balance of freedom and circumscription in group activity. As a practical solution to the problem of male dominance, harassment and violence in public space, it’s limited and imperfect; as a creative response, it is, arguably, helping to change the narrative of the street (and, indeed, the ‘wild spaces’ which are similarly ‘off-limits’). In the UK, contemporary women artists and writers who have used night walking as part of their practice include Clare Qualmann, co-founder of the Walking Artists Network (and, with Amy Sharrocks, co-curator of *Walking Women*, a series of walks, talks and events that took place in London and Edinburgh in 2016), who co-led the participatory ‘live art’ project walkwalkwalk (2006-2010, with Gail Burton and Serena Korda) which included a series of midsummer and midwinter night walks through East London; Ana Laura Lopez de la Torre, whose work with the residents of Southwark estates in 2008 and 2009 encompassed night walks, ‘night salons’, and night rides with cyclists; and Emma Bolland, whose collaborative research project *MilkyWayYouWillHearMeCall* (2012-2013, with Judit Bodor and Tom Rodgers) revisited and re-examined sites in Leeds made notorious in the 1970s and 1980s by Peter Sutcliffe, the ‘Yorkshire Ripper’. The site visits, undertaken in both daylight

and darkness, prompted a series of reflective essays and presentations by Bolland, in which she recounts her own experiences of walking these locations in the early 1980s, at night, alone, ‘shitfaced on spirits and speed’. She speaks of Ripper-era Leeds as ‘a battleground for the reclamation of territory’, with incompetent and prejudiced police and media on one side (advising women to avoid the city’s streets after dark, and distinguishing Sutcliffe’s ‘innocent’ victims from those defined by their work as prostitutes) and campaigning feminist organisations on the other (notably the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, who organised the UK-wide Reclaim the Night women’s marches held on 12 November 1977 in response to the police’s suggestion of a voluntary curfew). Emma is with us tonight, documenting our departure from the pub, its brick island receding as we drift north, then east, passing car dealerships, blade manufacturers, fencing specialists, a soft rain starting up, the casino etched in red, the last lamp lights counting down, three, two, one, here is the bridge, a view of the river, and slowly we find each other in the dark, copper wires hissing overhead, thinning out between breakers yard and graveyard.



7.51pm. Wardsend Cemetery is the only burial ground in Britain with an active railway line running through it, ferrying scrap and finished steel to and from the works at Stocksbridge, six miles north-west. The trackbed is laid parallel to the River Don as it passes through north Sheffield, and also runs close to Club Mill Road, a rough, potholed lane that forms a corridor between the railway and the river, and on which we’ll be walking for the next hour. With the light almost gone, I gesture at the rising ground, the stone steps at my back, the hillside memorials. For years, Wardsend was a byword for neglect; that the site has recovered is largely due to the efforts of the Friends of

Wardsend Cemetery, a historical society and conservation group. One of its members is here tonight. I attempt to introduce him, but the company is in blackout, the bodies without contrast, and I cannot read his position. I attempt to introduce the four poets – Angelina D’Roza, Pete Green, Chris Jones, Fay Musselwhite – who are somewhere

in this blind assembly. I step back and let them, and the night, take over, lighting the scripts with a torch. Angelina's is the first voice we hear, her 'Song of Silence' reminding us that 'there is no / such thing as silence', only an almost-silence and an almost-darkness circling each other, neither separable nor ever quite meeting. 'The Storm Lamp', a tale of fire and flight, is next; taken from a longer work-in-progress, Chris's vision of civil unrest and survivalism, set in a Sheffield of the near future, defamiliarises the city by degrees, and, perhaps, finds an echo in the decentred dark. Before we leave Wardsend, Fay reads 'Not thistledown', a refusal of the customs of death ('Don't [...] sing me to the flame') that also touches on the process at work in parts of the cemetery, its headstones displaced by trees, 'bone-work in oak root's way'. With 'the rinse of rain' reflected in the torchlight, we file past a clump of boulders and through the vehicle gate.



8.13pm. From Wardsend, the Don flows on a south-easterly turn for 400 metres, the lane at its side, before pulling away, a humming on the west bank, strobe and glare, the power station on the curve, the college and its floodlit fields. The lane straightens out, due south, smaller paths forking east and west. We gather at one of these forks, looking up at the railway embankment, the morning's snow still clinging to the ridge, then down at our boots, the puckered ground, part gravel, part water. Fay's 'Boulder' ('pulled from the river's bed') leads into a longer reading from Angelina, including two new poems ('Shore' and 'Lullaby') that speak of the light before dawn, rootlessness, seas, and

ivers, and 'Fairytale No. 13', which seems to anticipate the expansion of these themes, faithful to the small hours, their tonal shifts, 'the rush of the weir / after rain'. At this point, it's difficult to tell the current in the overhead wires from the drizzle speckling our jackets and hoods. We shuffle on, the hum tailing off, the rain picking up.

8.28pm. We stop again, a few metres short of the metal barrier that marks the northern boundary of an industrial estate. I scan the shadows for Pete, call them forward, then



realise they are standing next to me. They introduce an excerpt from *Sheffield Almanac*, 'a poem in four chapters about rivers, rain, relocation, and regeneration', a seasonally-themed survey of a city at a crossroads between a steel-plated past and a post-industrial future. Chapter Three of the *Almanac* brings the relationship of Sheffield's waterways to the growth of its manufacturing base into sharp focus, noting that the 'five rivers forever outspan' the achievements of the industrial age, the Don, the Loxley and the Rivelin still 'driving down through limestone, carving grit', while the waterwheels and millstones they once fed now moulder (or, conversely, are restored and reframed

as tokens of heritage). The torch passes from hand to hand. Fay recounts her own creative exploration of the Rivelin (in the long poem 'Memoir of a Working River') and the Loxley (in 'Flood Triptych', on which her next two readings draw). 'Long Fallow' picks through the 'wattle-growth' of an idle backwater of the Loxley, vehicular debris intermingled with 'oxalis, sycamore and dandelion', the remnants of a forge still visible in 'the under-dank'. It invites us to contemplate 'a scarf, a shoe, a sock', 'clothes / like and not like those washed out from grinders' homes.' On the night of 11 March 1864, the Loxley Valley was flooded by the water from the newly built Dale Dyke Dam, which collapsed while it was being filled; after wrecking Loxley Village, Malin Bridge and Hillsborough, the flood continued into the centre of Sheffield, and on to Rotherham. We're standing some 30 metres east of the Don, perhaps 300 metres north of its confluence with the Loxley, ninety degrees of impact, destruction and debris to the south and west. We cram through the metal barrier, a lane through the industries, there are lights, there are sounds, the work going on, shot blasting, steel fabrication, auto repairs, a radio sings to an open window, metal on metal, remake / remodel. The pace slows, the group breaks into smaller groups. Emma takes more photographs. There are rubber speed ramps, a vehicle gate that splits the lane in half, another ridge of rubber speed ramps. The units and yards flatten out. As we reach the last barrier the light abandons the lane. Almost darkness, almost silence.



8.44pm. We gather in the space between the asphalt road and a derelict, railed-off building, trees outgrowing the sagging brick. This is the site of a former silver mill, which one of our party dates to the 18th century. Although we can't see it, we've also drawn level with the junction of the Loxley and the Don; in 1864, the silver mill would have stood directly in the path of the flood. Fay picks up where she left off, with 'Factory', the second poem in her 'Flood Triptych', which speaks of 'the silted scuffle of industry unravelled', a site disowned by the money that made it, the 'ruptured brickwork' since retaken by birds, buddleia and bees. Angelina steps forward to read 'Magnolia', her third new

poem: six lines, 'two trees', each the other's measure, 'one is distance / one displacement', the home and its wild state, a window fractured by a branch. The reading concludes with 'Post-Industrial', a poem from Chris's sequence 'At the End of the Road, a River', which developed from a series of walks that Chris took along several miles of the Don, from Middlewood to Meadowhall, in 2005. The poem is set in the east of the city, but conjures a similar landscape of riverside trade, of 'pallets' and 'bay-loading gates'; we glimpse the 'last man's shadow slip[ping] the fence / as machines break into silence'.

The road ahead, like the crumbling plot, is curtained by a low metal fence, holding back the disorderly copse. As the copse peters out, so does the fence, the river surprising us, sidelong and dark.



9.02pm. 300 metres south, Club Mill Road meets Sandbed Road, the latter climbing uphill, west, while our road meets another line of boulders, and sodden debris fly-tipped on the turn.

Against this backdrop, Chris opens with 'Drift', a poem written over 12 years ago, in response to this location. At that time, the junk was being tipped into the



Don – ‘a typewriter scrolling water’ – and while the health of the river has since improved, the bankside clutter persists, cast-off cushions and mattresses, ‘the wasted attempts at home’. As Chris gives way to Pete, the waters seem to draw close, swollen by three days of rain, sleet and snow. Six months previously, Angelina and Pete had led 20 people over Sheffield’s bridges, high above a wide, shallow Don, a city at ease in t-shirts and shades. Pete reads a poem that they read on that summer’s day, an affirmation of resourcefulness and persistence in the face of precarity and impermanence, a tribute to a ‘waterboatman-sculptor’ whose riverbed works we’d encountered

on an earlier walk along the route. ‘Dan of the Don’ also gives us decline and renewal (and decline) in microcosm: Dan’s ‘relic stacks’, the art assembled from ‘the / lapsed pomp of / manufacture and shipment’, will be dismantled by a rising river during the winter months, after which the materials will be recovered, new ‘stanzas of brick’ will emerge, and the cycle will repeat. With Fay’s ‘Flight from Cuthbert Bank’, we turn from the Don to the incline of Sandbed Road, pared, in the dark, to a simple slope, all ascent and descent. The poem recounts a slow, indirect pilgrimage to the site of the former pigeon lofts of Cuthbert Bank, a few streets west of the corner on which we’re standing, the pigeons’ flights gradually fading from the ‘memory maps’ that linked hillside to hillside, the districts of Uppertorpe and Parkwood now divided by ‘the six-lane race’ of a dual carriageway. From these derelict ledges, the poem restores their release and return, recolours the valley and the sky above, imagines a flock

of men released by work clocks, to rise above
day’s end, the valley’s din, legacies of grind,
to hold the small bulk, feel its heat
pulse through feathers in cupped hands,
and send those tiny hearts and lungs
to claim their reach of sky.



9.15pm. The end of Club Mill Road, and the end of our road, the short span of Hillfoot bridging the river. We edge into the light, the glare from Penistone Road, a single lamp for the long-dead Farfield Inn. Fay reads 'Road', the last journey of a companion animal, the 'dark dog days' on 'the old steel road'; Chris follows with 'Otter Cliff', reaching back into apocryphal

etymology (the Sheffield district of Attercliffe supposedly deriving its name from the otters that once dwelled on the banks of the Don), and looking forward (since the poem was written, sightings of otters on the Don have steadily increased). Like 'Otter Cliff', Angelina's 'Ball Street Bridge' is set further downstream (by half a mile or so), extending our view of the river, summoning mallards and gudgeon, an 'ore-heavy stream' glinting as the moon rises. The moon tonight is new, though we don't see it; the night is colder and wetter than when we started, my hands numb with the shuffling of torch, umbrella and sound recorder. I introduce Pete, who, after thanking everyone present, introduces the final poem: 'Night Walk by the River Don', part dream, part drift, peopled by 'hostelry ghosts / of the Farfield Inn' (which, we learn, has apparently been sold in recent weeks), and the river, with us to the end, 'still flow[ing] / when nobody is there'. Apart from us, the streets are empty; another storm is closing in. We turn, for the last time, to

a lane flanked dense with thickets,
the freakish Don below, a carriageway
of bustling currents.

Brian Lewis

All photographs by Emma Bolland. An earlier version of this piece appeared on the Longbarrow Blog (25 January 2018).

Further Reading

In print

Correspondences (2019), *Enviies the Birds* (2016)

Angelina D’Roza

Sheffield Almanac (2017)

Pete Green

Skin (2015)

Chris Jones

Contraflow (2016)

Fay Musselwhite

The Footing (2013)

**Angelina Ayers, James Caruth, Mark Goodwin, Rob Hindle,
Andrew Hirst, Chris Jones, Fay Musselwhite**

Wanderlust: A History of Walking (2000)

Rebecca Solnit

Online (click titles for links)

‘Snow White / Rose Red’ (2012), ‘Lines of Desire’ (2012),

‘Trespassing Knowledge’ (2014)

Emma Bolland

‘Walking While Black’ (2015)

Garnette Cadogan

‘Night Walks’ (1860)

Charles Dickens

At the End of the Road, a River (with interactive map, 2005)

Chris Jones

‘The Cut’ (2013), ‘Haunts’ (2014), ‘Parallel Lines’ (2017)

Brian Lewis