



The Importance of Elsewhere
Philip Larkin's Photographs

Richard Bradford

... I think you put your paw on the flaw in Churchgoing, a strong lack of continuity ... The most important emotion – the church as a place where people came to be serious, were always serious ... this emotion I feel does not come out nearly strongly enough.

Letter to Monica, 10 August 1954

'Church Going' was Larkin's first major poem and it points, albeit obliquely, to other new departures. He and Monica discovered that they shared a fascination with medieval religious architecture, but not in a conventional sense. They were entranced by churches and their surroundings as memorials to a collective state of mind. The photographs of the churches – some in the Cotswolds, others in Yorkshire and on Sark – were taken on their journeys during the 1950s and 1960s and each evokes a sense of a building at once compelling yet unused.

The unmown grass seemingly swallowing the ancient headstones might soon be dealt with by a churchwarden but for Larkin the photographer it evinced the feeling of irreparable loss that informs the poem: 'Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky, / A shape less recognisable each week'. He and Monica exchanged numerous letters

as he sent her drafts and she replied with remarks and opinions. It was at Monica's suggestion that he included the lines on 'Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few / Hectoring large scale verses ...' They too had done this in empty churches and the photograph of Monica at the lectern, taken several years after the poem was published, can be treated as a tribute to her contributions. Monica would continue as his most dependable literary adviser, an arrangement that reflected a sense of mutual trust and intimacy and a more straightforward, shared, affection for the kinds of places that inspired many of his best known verses. Notably he never mentioned any of this to Amis, often during the 1950s lying blatantly about his countryside holidays with Monica. Their habits – walking, seeking out quirky ruins and architectural curiosities, open-air picnics and so on – would, he knew, earn him limitless amounts of opprobrium and ridicule.







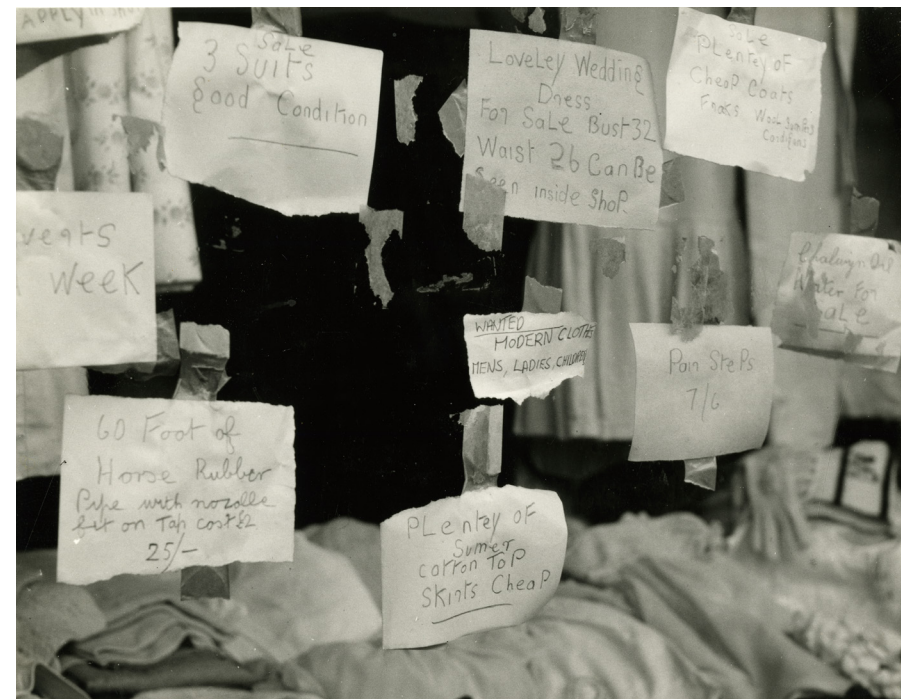
Upper left and lower right Cranes at Hull docks, 1956.

Upper right and lower left Bomb sites in Hull, c.1957, more than fifteen years after the Luftwaffe raids.

Opposite Ruined timber ships on the Humber foreshore, 1957.



Larkin sometimes bought freshly landed fish from the stalls near the docks in Hull. The print is inscribed, 'large cool stalls'. He would write 'The Large Cool Store', inspired by the newly opened Hull branch of Marks & Spencer, in 1961.

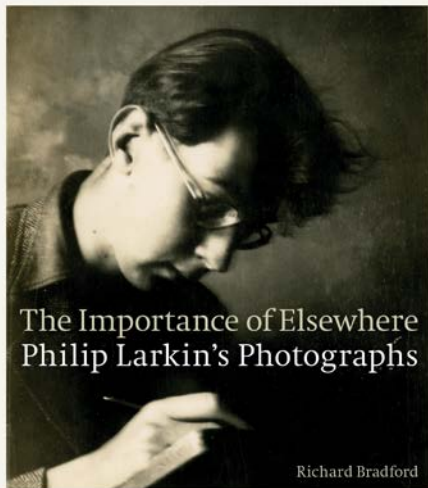


A shop front in Hull, 1956, that Larkin referred to as encapsulation of 'life'.



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THE IMPORTANCE OF ELSEWHERE PHILIP LARKIN'S PHOTOGRAPHS

By Richard Bradford, By (photographer) Philip
Larkin, Foreword by Mark Haworth-Booth

'Larkin's photographs not only illustrate his poems - they explain and deepen them ... superlative, succinct and subtle biographical commentary'. The Times

The most widely read British poet of the twentieth century, Philip Larkin was also a keen amateur photographer and through his life he made images of the people, places and things that meant most to him. *The Importance of Elsewhere* gathers the best of Larkin's photographic work, divided into short thematic chapters arranged in chronological order.

Written by Richard Bradford, the acclaimed author of the Larkin biography *First Boredom, Then Fear*, the book shows how Larkin, as an individual, as a writer and indeed as a photographer, developed an acute sensitivity to all aspects of the world around him, from his love of open uninhabited landscapes and empty churches to his mixed feelings about crowds. There are also fascinating portraits of those people who were closest to Larkin, including his lovers, his mother and his literary peers.

The book beautifully reproduces more than 200 images from the Larkin archive at Hull: the majority have never previously been seen in print. A substantial foreword by Mark Haworth-Booth, formerly curator of photography at the V&A, explores what it meant to be a serious amateur photographer of Larkin's generation.

Together with Larkin's literary works and his letters, these images make up the third, so far unseen, constituent of the material upon which our future perceptions of him will be based.

Key Points:

- First publication of powerful and revealing photographs by Britain's preeminent post-war poet
- Beautifully reproduces over 200 images from the Larkin archive at Hull: the majority never before seen in print
- Gathers the best of Larkin's photographic work, divided into short thematic chapters arranged in chronological order - effectively forming an illustrated life

Author Information

Mark Haworth-Booth served as a curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) from 1970 - 2004 and, as senior curator of photographs, helped to build up its great collection of photography. He is now an Honorary Research Fellow at the V&A and a Senior Fellow of the Royal College of Art. He was appointed an Officer of the British Empire for services to museums in 2005 and he became an Honorary Doctor of Arts of the University of the Arts London in 2012.

'Elegantly written and cogently argued ... His book is founded on a deep respect for, and love of, his subject's curious greatness'

Paul Bailey reviews Richard Bradford's earlier Larkin biography *First Boredom, Then Fear* in *The Independent*

Richard Bradford is Research Professor in English at the University of Ulster and aside from having published a large number of academic monographs he has earned a considerable reputation as the author of literary biographies of Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, Alan Sillitoe and Martin Amis. His book *The Odd Couple* on the curious relationship between Amis and Larkin was described as 'a lively, readable and often