

08/09

UNIT 5

REAL STRANGE: Silvertown



The district of Silvertown lies between the Thames to the South and London City Airport and the North Woolwich Road to the North: a slither of land with one road in and one road out. The area is named after Samuel Winkworth Silver who established his rubber factory there in 1852. A few years earlier in 1844 the Metropolitan Building Act was passed banning toxic industries within most of the area covered by London at the time. Silvertown laid just outside this boundary and so the area became heavily industrialised, having large residential areas to house the workers. Today it is still dominated by the vast Tate and Lyle sugar refinery which once employed many of the area's population and was badly damaged during the blitz. The adjacent Royal docks opened in 1855 and is still one of the largest bodies of enclosed water in the world, comprising of some 245 acres. The docks acted as the warehouses of the empire, importing raw materials from all over the world and in turn exporting a vast range of goods from chemicals to food. The Victoria dock (one of the three Royal Docks) specialised in tobacco, South American beef, New Zealand lamb, citrus fruit and bananas. In 1917 several parts of Silvertown were devastated by a massive TNT explosion at the Brunner-Mond munitions factory in what is now known as the Silvertown explosion, one of the largest ever experienced in the British Isles. During WWII much of Silvertown's population was evacuated to safer areas never to return to the district. The docks closed finally in 1981 and the old Silvertown railway station closed in 2006. There have been a series of large-scale infrastructure developments in and around Silvertown including the Thames barrier in the 1970's, London City Airport in the 1980's, the extension of the Jubilee Line in 1999 and the extension of the Docklands Light Railway in 2005.

Task 2: Capture (to be reviewed 03/03/09)

Identify a section of Silvertown between the Thames Barrier and the Woolwich Ferry (West to East) and the midpoint of the Thames back to the runways of City Airport (South to North). In choosing your section play close attention to the layering, adjacencies and juxtapositions of the urban fabric. Consider the different protagonists, timeframes and scales that exist within your slice of Silvertown. Your section should aim to cut through the past and present, the residential and the industrial, the proposed and the redundant: this section will be the material from which the plot of your future architectures will evolve.

Silvertown Blues

On Silvertown Way the cranes stand high
Quiet and gray against the still of the sky
They won't quit and lay down through the action
has died
They watch the new game in town on the
Black Wall side

From the poisonous drains a vision appears
A new circle of cranes, a new reason to be here
a gig silver dome rising up into the dawn
Above the church and the home where all the
silver is gone

A silver dawn steals over the docks
A truck with no wheels up on cinderblocks
Men with no dreams around a fire in a drum
Scrap metal schemes rusted over and done

When you're standing on thin and dangerous ice
You can knock and walk in for citizens' advice
They'll tell you where you can turn, where you
can go
There's nothing they can tell me I don't already know

From the Canning Town train I see the billboard
high
There's a big silver plane rising up into the sky
And I can make out the words, seven flights
every day
Says six of those birds are bound for J.F.K

If I'd a bucket of gold, what would I do
I'd leave the story untold Silvertown blues
Going down in Silvertown
Down in Silvertown
Going down in Silvertown
Down in Silvertown [Mark Knofler]