Poetry from Hollins Vale

Richard Easton





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Hollins Vale

Hollins Vale is a recovering brown field site situated to the southeast of Bury, bordered by the M66, Croft Lane, Aviaition Road and Hollins Lane. Its industrial heritage harks back to the cotton trade and the factories that were once present produced bleach. I believe there was also once a brick factory located in the Vale.

More recently, the dedication of a service track as 'Aviation Road' references that the RAF had a logistics base here during the second World War and there are tales locally of Prisoners of War and companies of UK and US troops being based around the area now occupied by Garic.

The site fell into disrepair and for much of the latter part of the 20th century, it was abandoned with foundation slabs and an old doorway that led deep beneath what is now Aviation Road, being the last remaining suggestions as to the past.

In the early part of the 2000s, investment in Hollins Vale, funded by Viridor Ltd and Bury Council, saw permissive pathways created providing easy access throughout.



The site was also given Local Nature Reserve status. This resulted in increased recreational usage and was later supported by additional investment in the Plantation area adjacent to the Church Meadow housing estate.

Hollins Vale is easily accessible via the following entrances:

Church Meadow into the Plantation:

The Hags, off Hollins Lane:

Borden Way, off Croft Lane:

Public Footpath running off Hollins Brook Way

Aviation Road, off Pilsworth Road

Since the Nature reserve was established, much of the care and maintenance has been completed by the volunteers of Hollins Conservation Group.

If you are able to do so, please support the group through their GoFundMe page





A Walk in Hollins Vale

I wrote this poem in 2020, during the COVID 19 Lockdown. I spent a lot of time walking during Lockdown and the value of this nature reserve on our doorstep really became clear.

I began to list the various bird species that I saw, a list that grew and grew and now numbers 84 separate species that I have seen in Hollins Vale.

There are others still, such as Barn Owls, which I am aware of but have not personally witnessed.

My poem attempts to record some of the bird life as well as recognising the beauty of the area, and the benefits myself and others still regularly appreciate.



A Walk in Hollins Vale

Once over the '66'
I'm in a different world
as natural glory begins to unfurl
My feet on the cobbles
as I walk down the lane
a soulful connection
awakens again

The pace of life slows
The air in my nose
The noise disappears
The sounds in my ears
The things now heard, like a nearby bird
an escape from the madness
and a cure for my sadness

A fearless Robin makes a pledge a tiny Wren sings in the hedge a Grey Wagtail's, tail-wagging display whilst a flock... of Long Tailed Tits play







A Woodpecker, tap tap tapping a Wood Pigeon's... panicked flapping a Common Tern hovers above the lake a Jay and the dreadful sounds they make

The Chiffchaff, alarms a Goldfinch, charms the delicate butterflies delicately, flutter by

A Tawney Owl's hoot the Swans... they are Mute a Moorhen's red beak the white beak is a Coot

So distinctive... Peewits or Lapwings? a tiny Goldcrest in a fern tree, sings a Blue Tit, a Great Tit House Martins and Swallows Dunnocks, Rooks and Carrion Crows

A Chaffinch, a Greenfinch, a Bullfinch too a rare Ring Ouzel, just passing through a territorial Blackbird, chases off rivals a Tree Creeper, creeps up a tree in spirals



In Hollins Brook, I spotted a Dipper nearby, the evidence of another fly-tipper A Roe Deer, bolts, towards the landfill an unforgettable moment, a real thrill

A Greylag Goose, a Great Crested Grebe at Pilsworth, I see a Bunting in the Reeds A Kingfisher in flight, with a blue and red coat a Song Thrush competes with a singing White Throat

Sparrowhawks, keeping watch from a tree The Heron... flying away from me A pair of Buzzards soaring above a pair of loved up, Collared Doves

A Cormorant, a Little Grebe, a Tufted Duck so many Magpies, I'm due some good luck An aggressive, male, Canada Goose a rumour, there's a 'Big Cat' on the loose

A Kestrel, hovers, to observe the beauty of Hollins Vale Nature Reserve.

Jacob & Penelope

There can't be many visitors to Hollins Vale who haven't admired the resident pair of Mute Swans who have chosen this place as their home.

I chose the names Jacob and Penelope on the basis that a male swan is called a Cob, whilst a female swan is called a Pen. I am sure other people have different names for these 2 beautiful birds who brighten the lives of many.

I believe that they first nested in the spring of 2019, and as such, they themselves were probably born in 2017.

They built their first nest alongside the path on The Cut and I recall there were 6 eggs of which only one hatched, and subsequently fledged on 14th March 2020.

In 2020, with lockdown in full force, many people, myself included, leant heavily on the local countryside to enhance our wellbeing. This coincided with the swans mating and nest building.

Their exploits became a welcome distraction from the harsh reality of Covid 19 and provided a real sense of hope as they laid a clutch of 10 eggs.

Locals visited regularly, monitoring their progress, willing the eggs to hatch and longing to see the cygnets on the water.

It was perhaps in keeping with the mood of the ongoing pandemic when all the eggs perished and the nest was abandoned.

I have written several poems about Penelope and Jacob.





Jacob & Penelope

Throughout Coronavirus Lockdown the Swans in Hollins Vale provided hope to many folk that goodness would prevail

For seven weeks she dedicated Almost every hour Eight eggs lovingly incubated through both sunshine and shower

The hope that was once promised It seems has sadly passed these pods of love, of life and hope lie silent in the nest.



The Pen

She chose her cob and they danced on the water and He laid his claim and they built a nest and She laid her clutch and She incubated and He defended his territory whilst we waited and He waited and they incubated and we waited, and waited... And we looked at her eggs and she looked at her eggs and he looked, and we looked and they looked and we all looked again and she mourned and we mourned with her and they were beautiful.







The Hollins Vale Swans

In Spring 2021, Penny and Jacob were more successful.





The Hollins Vale Swans

Seven weeks have passed She's hardly moved parental dedication proved Her trance like incubation ends their territory, He defends the eggs have hatched new life arrives, she's off the nest there're 8 new lives they've made it this far now there's quite a crowd this family of swans the parents, so proud with young to protect, and beaks to feed the Vale is graced we're lucky, indeed the swans, that chose this place to live the community impact, so positive the geese beware and know your place these swans preside with effortless grace I wish them well and hope they prevail the Swans that reside in Hollins Vale.



The 2021 nest was on the far side of The Cut, 9 eggs were nurtured, 8 of which hatched on 4 dune.

Unfortunately, over the next few days, five cygnets were lost.

Predation? Possibly, there are Mink and Heron in Hollins Vale, both of which are capable of taking cygnets.

Whatever the cause, only 3 survived the first weekend and one of these also later disappeared.



Predated

Like others, I have waited years to welcome cygnets to The Vale the swans provided lockdown cheer until last year's clutch of 8 failed

So throughout this spring, a nest with 9 eggs brought mixed feelings to this community the joy that comes when a new life begins against the unease of mild anxiety

The eggs started hatching on the 4th June and soon there were 8 cygnets present such a contrast to the previous year and a natural anti-depressant

On the 5th of June I made my way to meet them and say "Hello" with seeds and mealworm for them to eat and to imagine how they'd grow



On the 6th of June, I visited twice in the morning and then later as all 8 cygnets followed their parents for a parade around the water

So many posts on social media confirmed how people felt 10 swans around the vale caused many a heart to melt

But everything has its purpose and Nature has no compassion to allow continuance of all species nature has quotas and rations

So it was so sad and quite a shock on Monday the 8th June to see that we'd lost 4 cygnets overnight to a predator in the gloom



A Mink, I think, may have been the culprit for they stalk prey within the Vale a callous predator, that shouldn't be here but it needs to survive as well

Five little souls that over a weekend in June lived out their entire lives

Who knows what will happen to those who remain the three cygnets that still survive

Life is so precious, like those cygnets we lost because, when it's gone, then it's gone

But the one's we lost will always be remembered whenever I see these swans.



In October 2021, each member of the family was ringed by the British Trust for Ornithology.

There are 2 rings fitted to each bird. A blue plastic one which is more easily readable but is susceptible to coming off, and a metal ring which is more permanently attached, by being clasped.

Ringing is done by trained and authorised people and the process allows the birds to be identified and traced.

This process has allowed some of the Hollins Vale cygnets to be identified and you will recognise this as you read through this story.

Penelope: Blue Ring: 4DYH Metal Ring: W53030 Jacob: BlueRing:4DYI Metal Ring:W53033

Cygnet: 4DYC Cygnet: 4DYD



Penny and Jacob appear to prefer mating in April and when they have cygnets, so far, they have kept them through the winter, eventually 'showing them the door' in the following March.

In 2022, they mated again, this time the nest was situated on the far side of the 'basin' on The Cut. This area is difficult to access so I didn't know how many eggs were in the nest and had to wait until they hatched on 7th June to see that they had 5 cygnets.

These 5 cygnets did well although 1 was rejected by the family and had to be rescued when they became violent towards it.

The remaining cygnets were ringed in

October 2022:

4FHH: Male

4FHI: Female

4FHJ: Female

4FHL: Female



For some unknown reason, in December 2022, the three females all fledged together.

One of them, (4FHI) was seen to crash land on Kilner Close in Unsworth.

Local residents rallied around and offered food and drink, eventually coaxing her into a garden where she spent the evening awaiting the attendance of the RSPCA.

I suspect that this was 4HFI's first proper flight and if you consider this, there is the realisation that once you are up, you also need to get back down. I expect landing from height is quite a challenge the first few occasions.

I also wondered if once she had landed on Kilner Close, the 'spiders web' of telephone lines might have presented her with an obstacle she was unable to navigate and which prevented her from taking off again.



By pure chance, the RSPCA officer who attended the following morning had been involved in ringing the family and after a quick welfare check, 4FHI (by now named 'Sammy') was returned to her parents and brother in Hollins Vale.

At the time of writing (Oct 2023), I am unaware of any reported sightings of either of the other 2 fledglings (4FHJ and 4FHL). Sammy remained in Hollins Vale until around 25 February 2023 when she finally fledged.

On 4th May 2023, she was sighted safe and well in Moses Gate, Farnworth.

4FHH, the male cygnet, remained in Hollins Vale until the end of March 2023 when, as is their way, Mum and Dad decided he had been around long enough and had to take his chances.

This process can often involve the parents being aggressive towards the youngster, literally making it clear that there is no choice, they cannot stay and it is now time to go. This is what happened to 4FHH.



He appeared to suffer a minor injury to one of his legs and stayed in Hollins Vale, at the far end near to Croft Lane, possibly sulking, possibly confused. It is really sad.

Eventually, he took off and flew to the Meadway Drive/Lakeside area of Blackford Bridge, where I guess, tempted by the lake there, he decided to land and in doing so, flew right into a very similar situation where the resident adults were also evicting their clutch of youngsters.

4FHH (by now named Jeff) was the last thing that these adult swans wanted to see and he was again attacked.

He walked away onto Hampson Mill Lane where, following a call from a resident, he was also rescued by the RSPCA, checked over and released onto Elton Reservoir.

He was last seen at Moses Gate, Farnworth, on 14 August 2023.

In spring 2023, Penny and Jacob mated again, built a nest and Penny laid a clutch of 9 eggs.



But Hollins Vale isn't just about Mute Swans, there are lots of other birds and creatures, all going through the same difficulties. There are breeding families of Canada Geese, Coots, Mallards and Moorhens in Hollins Vale.

The Coots and Moorhens are very timid and spend much of their time in or around the reeds at the far edge of The Cut.



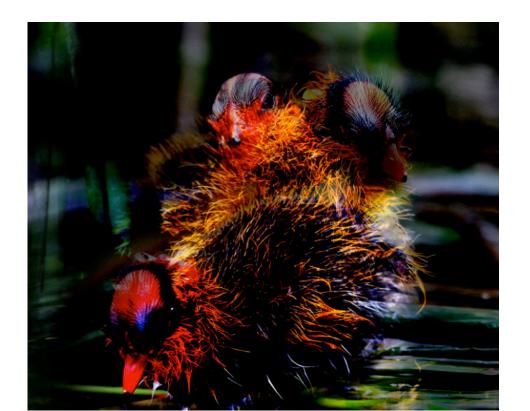
The Coots

They mated though nobody knew and then they laid an egg or two

that hatched unnoticed then came the test when they were led out from their nest

Proudly presented to the folk who tramp around the Vale this family of Coots such a timid bird I hoped that you'd prevail

T'was such a lovely... thing... to see a family of four but then... just three So both the parents doted on their Punk Rock chicks... then two, then one but then he too vanished where had he gone? A meal for something? Then there were none.





Fly Tipping

Fly tipping is such a dreadful crime against all the community. Whenever I come across it, I almost always see a pile of rubbish that could just as easily have been taken to a Council Tip.

Invariably, fly tipped rubbish has been dumped by somebody who could not be bothered going to the tip and who has no respect for the environment or their community.

Otherwise, it is either the abandoned remnants of a cannabis farm or waste generated in connection with a business, often a builder seeking to avoid the fees associated with business rubbish.

Hollins Vale has suffered more than its fair share of fly tipping.



Fly Tipping

Shall I compare thee to a parasite?
A selfish lowlife, an ignorant man
Your own needs met, as you tip in the night
In a flat back truck or tatty old van
A remote location to mask the noise
Sneaking down a lane, or a public park
Mattresses, tyres, a load of old toys
Plasterboard and rubble, dumped in the dark
Garden waste, furniture, thrown from a bridge
They'll rot there forever, but you don't care
As you tip in the night, a broken fridge
Dumped in a river, a settee and chairs
A freezer; bin bags... full of dead chickens
A clear health risk, you don't give a Dickens.





Hollins Brook

A river creates a Vale. In the case of Hollins Vale, it is Hollins Brook. Hollins Brook runs from Whittle Brook, on the farmland far side of Castle Road, under Castle Road at the old iron bridge, under the M66 behind Garic, then emerges in Hollins Vale, west of the M66.

It trickles through, passing underneath Croft Lane and into the River Roch.

The River Roch meets the River Inwell in Springwater Park. The Irwell then runs through Radcliffe and Kersal to the Blackfriars area of Manchester, before arriving at Salford Quays.

From there, the river runs west to join the River Mersey at Runcorn, before joining the Irish Sea at Liverpool.

Hollins Brook has also suffered at the hands of fly tipping. Please note, the incident referred to in this poem predates the arrival of Crown Oil on Borden Way.

Hollins Brook

Today the Brook runs in blue and gold an oily discharge from where untold upwind in the Vale an acrid smell risk of death to hirds who dwell within this stream and on the banks nearby where someone emptied tanks and set their excess oil to drain mixed with gentle summer rain encouraging the stream, 'Faster, faster' dispersing our own 'Exxon Valdez' disaster via the Roch, the Irwell, the Mersey sending the slick towards the sea what chance for the Kingfisher? Or the wildlife I see? What chance for your kids?



Hollins Vale Weather.

I have walked the Vale in every kind of weather. A few poems to record the memories.

Footsteps in the Snow

Only when it snows do I fully appreciate exactly how many people walk through the Vale gate

Their footsteps recorded in the snow then frozen into ice walking their dogs recreation or maybe exercise



The snow that fell across the Vale has changed the way it sounds the deadened noises flattened and dampened across the hills and mounds

The Swans break through the frozen water to meet me for some food the adults and their cygnets the 2021 brood

The footsteps, evidence
if any were needed
that so many come to see
The Hollins Swans
I realise
it's not just the swans and me.

Into the Mist

Water particles fill the air a haunted land of dampened sounds as fog descends across the Vale the colours stripped from damp surrounds

A cloud, descended, steals the view the route intended, now hidden from you naked trees, now sinister, haunted branches seem like arms, contorted

Senses heightened through raised anxiety an increasing feeling of isolation a fear of that which cannot be seen Perception lost in condensation

You adopt appearance of a spectre as you walk into the veils of mist you're image fades to grey, then gone now we're both alone, in this abyss

A Wet Day in May

Today in Hollins Vale Nature Reserve
I got a drenching I didn't deserve
my task, to make sure that the swans got fed whilst
more sensible folk stayed in their beds

Before I left home, I'd checked the weather online "Fine early on, then showers after nine" an unexpected turn, around ten past seven a torrent of h2o from the heavens

The hard baked paths have soon turned soggy the fields around the Vale, now boggy the footprints, 'fossilised' since they were trodden already softened and totally sodden

So, as rain stopped play
I tramp back to my abode
my socks are wet, my hands are cold
no photos today, there's been nowt to see
just swans, the geese, some ducks, and me.





Birdsong

I used to walk around Hollins Vale as a power walk, I'd often complete it in less than 45 minutes, listening to my favoured tunes through headphones. In doing so, completely ignoring everything that was going on.

When I tried the walk without headphones, it took me twice as long as I stopped to see which bird was singing nearby.

This poem breaks away from my usual style in that it doesn't rhyme. I am still uncomfortable writing non rhyming poetry, but this is what I came up with.

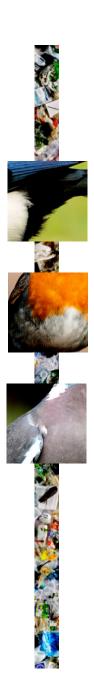
Birdsong

A walk through the woods some sounds I hear across the sky, and treat my ear...

Strands of spider silk hang like trip wires across my path whilst a cinnabar caterpillar dressed in a Wasp's overcoat, dines at the Ragwort Hotel

The engines of a squadron of geese roar into life to clear their route as their Canadian pilots guide them through take off in formation from a freshwater runway

Lapwings, calling their tropical loops over a ploughed field, rising and falling A Bullfinch calls the shopping through the scanner at the till



The juvenile attitude of a young magpie berating inadequate efforts to feed her prompts the parental discharge of a Gatling gun nearby, a blackbird sniper takes single shots in the woods before retreating into cover with exaggerated panic

A mournful robin calls a decaying tone the Great Tit enters a code and a Carrion Crow pushes open the creaking door of a haunted house with a Jay waking everything around like an old Binatone digital alarm clock

A Woodpigeon preaches his asthmatic sermon across the tree tops a support act for the main attraction: The Song Thrush, proudly performing R2D2's greatest hit "The dial up modem network connection" as Swifts scream overhead like Star Wars Tie Fighters on a mission from the Death Star Herons rest above a River Roch Venue like vultures, after a feast

The hostility of the fishermen, ignored and returned their rubbish scattered across the path for nature to collect and craft a live art painting entitled "Discarded plastic bottles" done in blue and gold oils temporarily displayed at the dam head 'gallery' before inevitably draining away into the Brook on a journey to the Irish Sea and beyond The ripples of consequence can spread almost forever.



M66 Entrance

The motorway behind you a place of transit and stress the place that lies before you offers relaxation and rest

The pathways lead you through the Vale where you are free to roam for foxes, weasels, birds and deer this place is their home.

So walk the paths freely and often but the creatures, please protect take away all that which you bring Hollins Vale deserves respect.



Hollins Vale from The Hags

A place, that many hold in their heart that ticks so many boxes A place to relax and gather your thoughts and share with weasels and foxes

And so many other different creatures like birds of prey and deer This is their home and whilst you might see them they'll not let you get too near

This place. rough land where we can wander so many benefits prevail a Nature Reserve right on our doorstep that is known as Hollins Vale

A Frosty Morning

As the temperature drops in the darkest hours mist settles on grasses and flowers Then winter chills craft new ornaments a unique jewel formed by the elements Temporary decorations born and adorn

the exposed tips
of leaves and lawns
Such beauty and symmetry
unnoticed so often
as the icy footpaths
demand my attention
shattered panes of ice
crunch under foot
crystals of frost
coating fields and woods





The rising Sun spreads its gaze cold, to warm dry, to wet crisp, to soft temperature defined separation between ice and thaw stones cast across the frozen lake temporarily held suspended above the water in the death row that is the tundra in shade waiting to eventually suddenly, inevitably fall as if standing on the gallows already condemned fate assured to be lost forever in the water below upon the arrival of sunlight by the hand of a solar clock executioner a celestial second hand, ticking sweeping across the land



as a natural sundial marking time with unrivalled precision As white turns green steam, briefly rises from a thawing branch before disappearing, condensing into tears lamenting defrosted formations that drizzle the ground below where a song thrush forages snails under the hedgerow Unseen, unwitnessed, unmourned... a stone, silently sinks to the bottom of a lake relinquished by the frost forever lost as the sunshine burns across the sky and the dawn chorus greets the start of the day exposed points start to thaw these crystal masterpieces melt away.

The First Bumble Bee

The wheel keeps turning
Winter frosts thawing
Spring is awakening
the year is alive

Temperatures rising Nature reprising insects are crawling trying to survive

Nature, urging daffodils emerging each day is warming providing cheer

(The) dawn chorus performing blackbirds proclaiming Nature celebrating the first bee of the year



The Swans are courting creatures, cavorting nest building and mating leaves on trees

Sunshine in the morning frogs start spawning nectar enticing the birds and the bees

Bluebells ringing the woods are now teeming the canopy forming providing shade

Dragonflies hovering fox Cubs playing baby birds hatching from the eggs that were laid

Summer arriving lavender, thriving tadpoles morphing bats chasing flies

Bucks and Does flowers in meadows swallows returning adorning the skies

Pollen dispersing sufferers, sneezing bees pollinating nourishing hives

The haze in the morning the earth, absorbing hedgehogs foraging Midsummer arrives



The ants start flying house martins gorging sun rays, burning clearing the haze

Caterpillars, crawling butterflies, transforming families enjoying long lazy days

Lily pads floating goldfinches, charming bumble bees buzzing cygnets on lakes

The Earth's axis tilting the foliage wilting Summer is waning as Autumn awakes If you like my poetry, I have 3 books available.

My first 2 books, previous books, 'Words, Thoughts, Observations' and 'Rambling Through Lockdown' are now only available from Kindle.

There are audio recordings and videos of my poetry on my website where you can also find details of how to buy a copy of 'Shoelaces' if you feel so inclined.

'Shoelaces' is available in paperback for £9.99 including UK delivery*. It contains 100 poems printed over 200 pages and contains many new poems as well as some taken from the first 2 books.

*Postage outside the UK at Post Office rate

Richard Easton



Shoelaces

100 observational poems of emotion, compassion, love, hope, despair, reflection, rembembrance, ascension and decline, subconciously crafted whilst passing through the decades of my life, school days, workdays, beauty and horror, to a time when I suddenly realised, I have to write this down.

"I think he's fantasic." Pauline Easton, Mother

"Poetry? Yeah... whatever." Michelle Easton, Wife

"Richard's poetry is accessible, inventive and full of charm" Henry Normal, Writer, Poet, Film Producer

"From fun with puns to rhymes for our times, Richard's love for writing shines through." *Tony Longfella, Poet*

"Richard chooses his words well and writes with feeling from the heart about subjects that he genuinely cares about. Always a pleasure to read." Steven P. Taylor, Poet

"Sensitive, intelligent and down to earth, these poems reflect the poet perfectly. Richard observes both the world around and the world within with a rare relatability. Glorious." Lesley Atherton, Presenter of the 'Words and Music' radio show and publisher with 'Words Are Life.'



Richard Easton: www.JeffersonPoetry.co.uk

Bury Council's Hollins Vale Map www.bury.gov.uk/asset-library/hollins-vale-nature-reserve-leaflet.pdf

Hollins Village Conservation Group www.facebook.com/HollinsConservationGroup/?locale=en_GB https://theburydirectory.co.uk/services/hollins-conservation-group www.neighbourly.com/project/5c8b73a1c7ac890bc467675d