



Present in the Past

Anne Howeson



Renovation and Revival in King's Cross Central

Anne Howeson

The title Present in the Past was inspired by Burnt Norton
from the Four Quartets by T.S. Eliot



Midland Line Railway Works 1
Digital print and mixed media 40 x 47 cm



St Pancras Wells
Digital print and mixed media 46 cm x 38 cm

Raising Ghosts Dan Cruickshank

Anne Howeson's series of images in and around the St. Pancras and King's Cross area of London are strange and haunting. They weave a spell that evokes the past in the present and, more subtly, hints as the possibility of the present somehow casting its shadow into the past. The images are crowded with spectral beings, people rush past buildings or loiter and look, but it is not always clear if these are ghosts from the past inhabiting our modern world or if we are a ghostly presence in the past. This raises the question - what is more real, more tangible, more significant in our daily lives - the past, the present or contemplation of future?

The images are about transformation, change, memory and atmosphere.

The transformation operates on two levels. Howeson works largely with 18th and 19th century prints that she copies onto drawing paper and then transforms through rubbing away and by additions using gouache and crayon. So the image is changed and through its changes illuminates the nature of change itself - change in the city, change in the nature and value of buildings as they themselves change, as the context in which they exist change. Central to the perception of change - to the atmosphere conjured up by these strange juxtapositions of past and present, fact and fiction, nostalgia and in some cases almost futurist excitement about worlds to come - is the power of memory.

In the ancient world memory was all-important. In Egypt if the memory of the dead was obliterated, by destroying their memorials and their written name, then the dead suffered a second and more profound death. To be dead in memory meant that you were denied a foothold in eternity. To be lost to memory was to be doomed to oblivion. Memory was - and remains - crucial. To understand the present, to have any hope of controlling the future, it is essential to remember the past. Memory gives an individual identity and the possibility of a rich and fruitful life.

Howeson's images are memories - idiosyncratic, intensely inventive and personal (as most memories are) - of a piece of London. They hint at its history, at its buildings and landscape - lost, transformed or surviving - and keep memories alive. These images are the visual equivalent of the passages written by the best writers on, or historians of, London. They take facts - and memories - and through them tell timeless stories, evoke atmospheres, and offer insights and perceptions that are more telling - more truthful perhaps - than the mere telling of unvarnished truth. Charles Dickens knew well how to do this, to make his subjective portrayal of reality more real, more direct and more telling than a simple rendering of the objective facts of reality. By the same token Howeson's images of King's Cross and St. Pancras possess reality, in far greater depth and richness, than could be captured in a photograph. And this is, in a word, because of their depth of 'atmosphere' and because



Foundling Hospital
Digital print, conte and gouache 28 cm x 55 cm

the alchemy that has taken place in the transformation of the inspirational 18th or 19th century print into a considered and conscious work of art. As Howson explains, she 'intensifies the atmosphere of the print to tell a story,' but also in the process starts to 'have a conversation' with the earlier artist or printmaker, begins to get 'a sense of the person' who made the original work. This is a potentially fascinating dialogue that opens up intriguing possibilities. Is Howson, in her visionary transformations, responding, intuitively, to some latent force lurking within the original image? When the artist made his bucolic image of the fields around Battle Bridge, as King's Cross was known in the 18th century, was he thinking about, anticipating, the changes to come. Were his figures merely contemplating the view or, in fact, gazing into the future?

These possibilities give Howson's works a remarkable narrative quality. Each is, in its way, a time-machine, representing a journey from past, present to future – and even across space. Each roots the present in the past, and evokes visually that sense we all sometimes get – at specific moments, in specific places – of the past being ever – present and alive. The works help confirm the idea that we are but part of a vast continuum and that the past is, indeed, as L.P. Hartley wrote, no more than simply 'a foreign country.' The atmosphere that these works conjure-up, the unexpected continuities at which they hint, gives them a profundity and makes their contemplation strangely rewarding.

More can be grasped, insights can be gained and the essentially intangible made a little more tangible – more corporal – by looking at two of Howson's works in more detail.

'St Pancras Fields' possesses the most extraordinary atmosphere, the result of juxtapositions, of colour, tone and composition. It seems to portray a blasted world in which all boundaries of time and place have been broken. Below a darkening, threatening and unhealthy post-apocalyptic sky – which casts its lurid hues upon the fields below – an unlikely, even unholy, gathering is taking place. Towers are on the march, forming a fantastic and 'futuristic' urban imagery, that hedge-in the fields and all upon them. And the towers themselves are odd – and feel like wicked invocations, ghosts or resurrections rather than mere erections. On one side, leading the advance of the towers, is the familiar cutting edge form of New York's 'Flat-iron' building, with what appears to be the Shard coming up in reserve. On the other side is the haunting and most sombre image of New York's blasted 'Twin Towers', rising next to the coy steeple of Old St. Pancras Church, here in its long-lost guise before 19th century re-building. And in the foreground, spectres from the 18th century – sole-survivors from the original print – gather to contemplate, and promenade within, this

frightful evocation. In a way this image reminds me of George Cruikshank's London Going Out of Town, or the March of Bricks and Mortar, which in 1829 satirised and criticised speculative house-builders' designs upon the fields and pastures of Parliament Hill and Hampstead Heath. But this is Cruikshank with a vengeance. Is it a vision, a dream - or a nightmare? Each viewer will, of course, decide.

'Bringing up the Bodies' captures and transforms a particular moment in the history of St. Pancras. In the mid 1860s, the eastern edge of the graveyard of Old Pancras Church was appropriated by the Midland Railway Company for the construction of the tracks leading to its terminus - St Pancras Station. Large numbers of bodies were removed and, in the view of many, graves were desecrated due to the unseemly and cost-cutting haste of the operation. Among those profoundly upset by the whole exercise was the novice architect nominally in charge of the operation - the young Thomas Hardy. The disgust he felt, following this harrowing experience, was no doubt a contributing factor in Hardy's decision to give up architecture for writing.

Howeson's image is based on a print of the construction works showing coffins being lifted and stacked. But now there is the ghostly presence of the future, with what looks like the semi-transparent images of curtain-walled office towers descending and obscuring St. Pancras Old Church, which had been recently rebuilt when this print was made. Howeson admits to an 'interest' in the 'subject of death' - indeed don't we all. This interest can be morbid - or it can lead to focussed, clear and uncanny insights. Certainly there is something about these shimmering, precise, and ominous portents from the future that suggests an awful prophesy.

With this work Howeson is, it would seem, displaying a degree of artistic prescience for it seems that, in the graveyard of Old St. Pancras church, history could well repeat itself and the shades of the mid 19th century 'desecration' be conjured-up in no uncertain manner.

Plans for Cross Rail Two apparently envisage works within the graveyard. Having seen, from the construction of Cross Rail One, how huge such works can be it is impossible not to tremble for the future of the past residents of St. Pancras who continue to slumber within the consecrated - although clearly not inviolate - environs of the ancient churchyard. The set of images that Howeson has created possess a tremendous visual power and atmosphere and - it must be stressed - a brilliant excellence of execution.

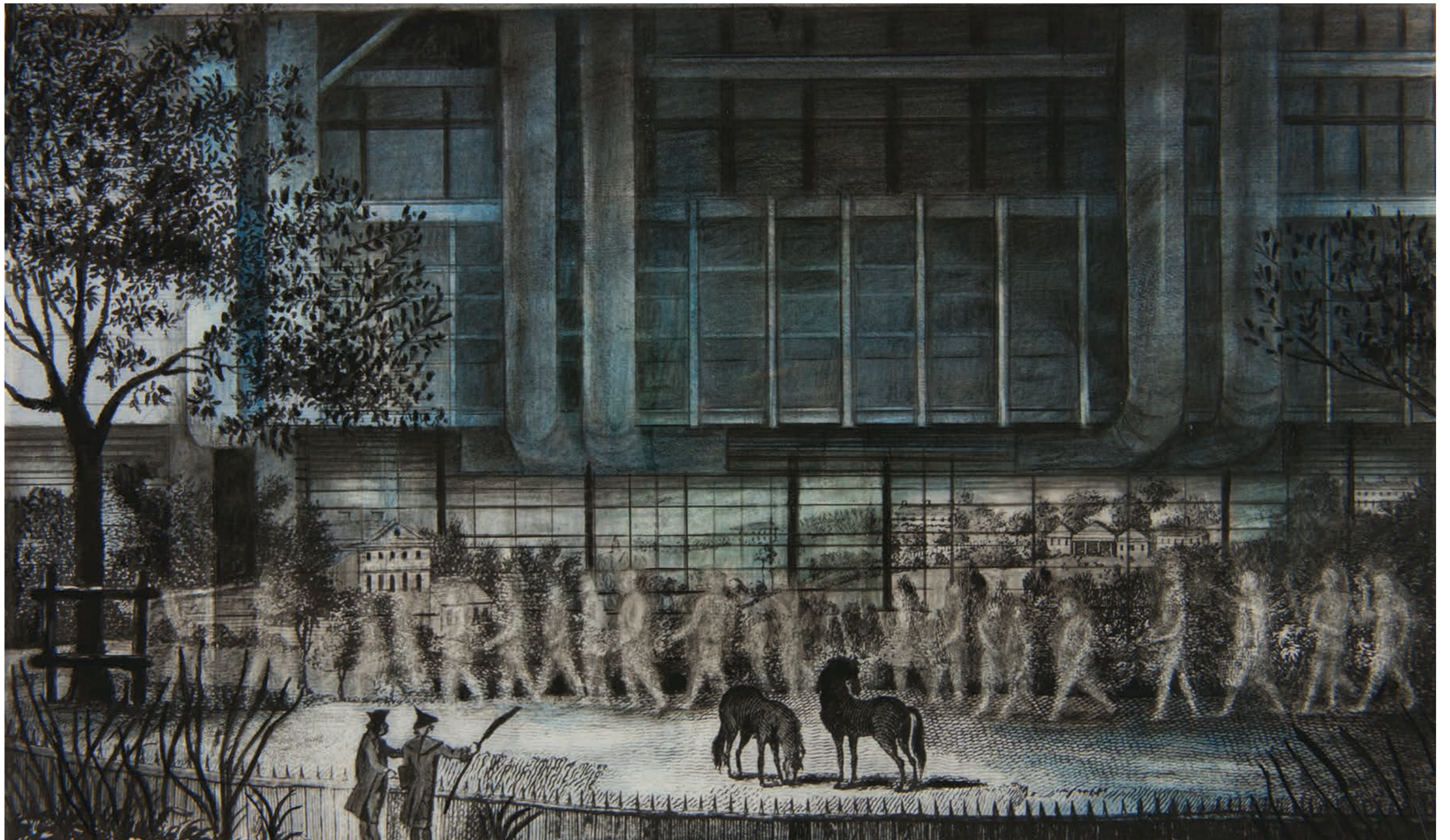
The retained fragments of the original prints, and the new elements, fuse in convincing manner - which, of course,



is essential to their artistic and narrative success. If the works looked too much like a collage then the story they tell would probably not be greater than the sum of their parts. But this is not the case. The seamless assemblages invariably take the retained and added detail to a new level. With these images - that are commentaries on the London that was, is and will be - Howeson joins that intriguing band of artists who have not only chronicled London life but through their work added to our understanding and appreciation of the city. Sometimes these works are visionary, sometimes satiric but nearly always cautionary. As with Hogarth, Blake and Cruikshank, Howeson's works have compelling stories to tell.

Coal and Fish
Crayon and gouache 33 cm x 26 cm





Hampstead Horses
Digital print, conte and crayon 28 cm x 46 cm



Coal and Fish Hoardings
Crayon and gouache 28 cm x 45 cm



Tile Kilns
Digital print, conte and crayon 32 cm x 45 cm



St Pancras Fortifications 1642
Digital print, conte and gouache 42 cm x 53 cm

Foundlings
Digital print, crayon and gouache 35 cm x 55 cm



St Pancras in the Fields 1762
Digital print, gouache and carbon 36 cm x 57 cm



St Pancras Churchyard at Night
Digital print and mixed media 32 cm x 45 cm



St Pancras Old Church and the Fleet River
Digital print and mixed media 32 cm x 47cm



Culross Buildings [disappeared]
Gouache 35 x 54 cm



Dust Heap
Digital print and conte 39 cm x 52 cm

Dust Heap 1836
Digital print and conte 38 cm x 50 cm





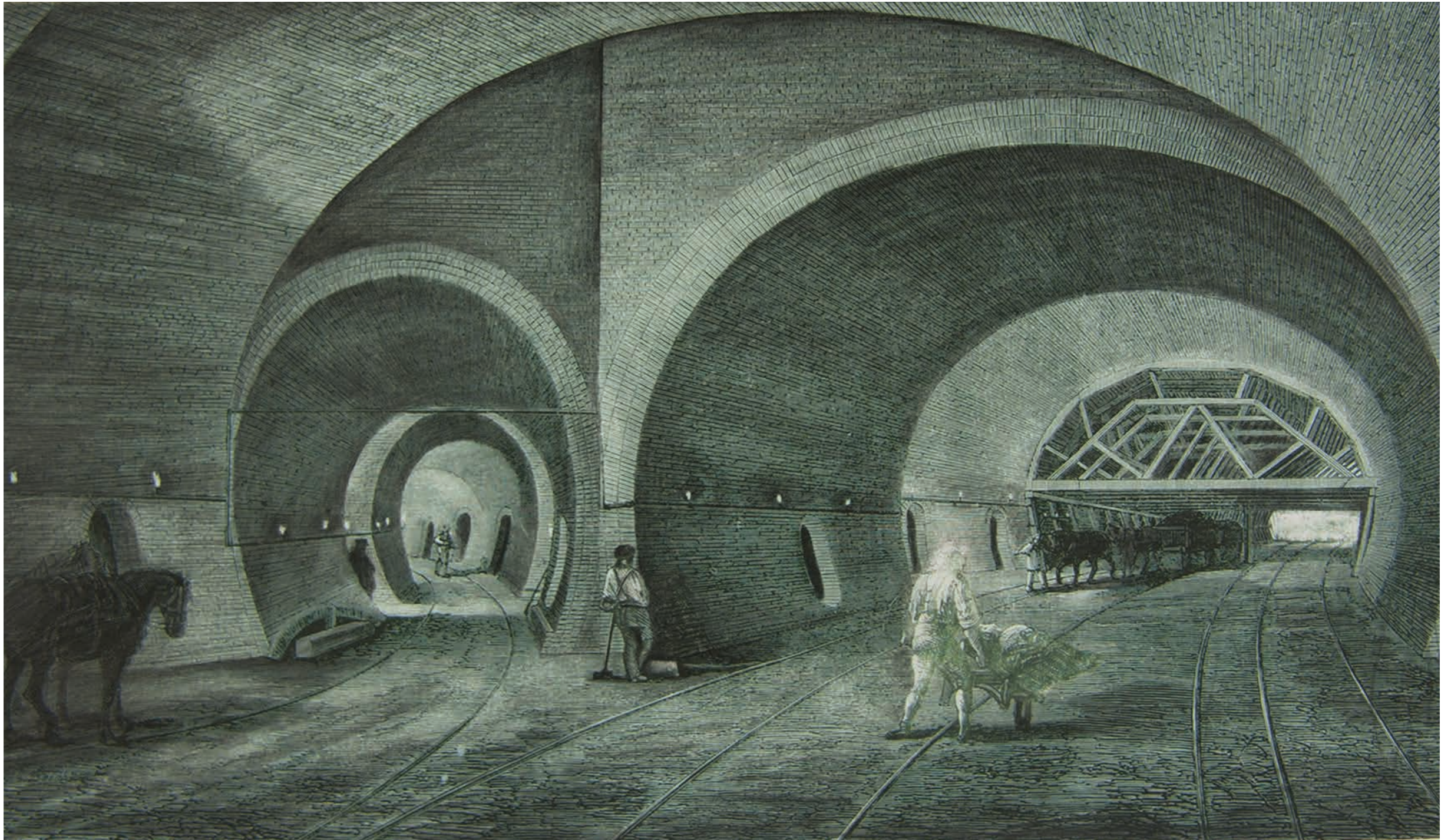
Bringing Up Bodies
Digital print and mixed media 33 cm x 48 cm



Celebrations of the Dead
Digital print and mixed media 41 cm x 55 cm



Battlebridge 1797
Digital print and carbon 42 cm x 56 cm



Under King's Cross Station
Mixed media 30 cm x 57 cm



King's Cross and the Smallpox Hospital
Gouache and mixed media 65 cm x 42 cm

Smallpox Hospital, Battlebridge
Mixed media 52 cm x 63 cm



King's Cross Railway Shed
Digital print, conte and crayon 30 cm x 55 cm



Midland Line Railway Works 2
Digital print and mixed media 40 cm x 47 cm

Biography Anne Howeson

Anne Howeson lives and works in London
Tutor at the Royal College of Art

St Martins School of Art 1971-1974
Royal College of Art 1974-1977

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Selected Group Exhibitions

1980 Galerie Mokum Amsterdam
1981 'Business' Thumb Gallery
1982 Hayward Annual, British Drawing, Hayward Gallery, London
1983 Jock McFayden's Invited Artists, Sunderland Art Centre
1985 Critical Lines, Talbot Rice Centre New York
1985 Out of Line, ICA, London
1986 Cover to Cover, Ikon Gallery, Travelling Exhibition,
1986 British Illustration from Caxton to Chloe, British Council
1991-1996 Spectator Art Award, London
1989 Unusually Good Haircuts, Minneapolis College of Art
1990-92 South Bank Picture Show, Festival Hall London
1998 New Grafton Gallery, London
1999 Edifice and Memory, The Gallery, Cowcross Street - two person show
1999 Peers Feetham, London
2000 Alpha House Gallery, Sherborne
2003 'Drawing: the Process' Travelling exhibition, Kingston University
2004 Ambit Art, Chelsea Arts club
2007 'The Edge', Bath Festival
2007 King's Cross Arrivals Festival
2011 Discerning Eye, Mall Gallery London, invited artist
2014 National Open Art competition Somerset House, London
2014 Derwent Drawing prize exhibition Mall Gallery, London

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Solo Exhibitions

2009 Remember Me, Guardian Newspaper, Kings Place, London
2015 Present in the Past, Collyer Bristow Gallery, London

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Commissions

2012 Network Rail

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Award

2000 Jerwood Drawing Prize

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Work in Public Collections

Museum of London
Guardian News and Media
St George's Hospital London
Imperial College Art Works, College Archives

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Selected Catalogues Reviews Books

1981 'Radical Illustrators' Association of Illustrators Magazine
1983 The Guardian, 'Voyeur involved in the Game', Waldemar Januszczak'
1986 The Artist as Reporter, Fraser, Paul Hogarth
2004 Creative Drawing Ideas, Shambhala publications, U.S.A.
2009 Times Literary Supplement, October 9th 2009
2013 Varoom Magazine, Experiment, Issue 22
2014 Understanding Illustration - Bloomsbury Visual Arts, London

Published by Anne Howeson in association with Collyer Bristow.

Present in the Past an exhibition at Collyer Bristow London 5 - 25
February 2015.

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Original images © Anne Howeson

Photographed by Dominic Tschudin

Designed by Chris Nott

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I'd like to thank:

Francis Marshall for inviting me to work with the Paintings, Prints and Drawings Archive at the Museum of London. Jeremy Smith, from the London Metropolitan Archives, City of London, for his encouragement and recommendations. Sarah Culshaw for her belief in 'The Present in the Past'. Darren Butt for all his work and assistance. Maybelle Peters for help with the animation. Martha Clarke for being the PR consultant. Collyer Bristow for supporting the exhibition.

Thanks also to:

Dan Cruickshank for his perceptive essay.

Simon O'Toole for his ongoing support and critical interest.

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ISBN: 978-0-9563574-1-0



