



This presentation was part of an ongoing open submission research series for the Drawing Room London.

My current key research words are: place memory and time.

St Augustine 4th century: “Perhaps it might be said rightly that there are three times: a time present of things past; a time present of things present; and a time present of things future. For these three do coexist somehow in the soul, for otherwise I could not see them. The time present of things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation.

Two of my recent solo exhibitions (Remember Me 2009 and Present in the Past 2015) have been about regeneration in Kings Cross.

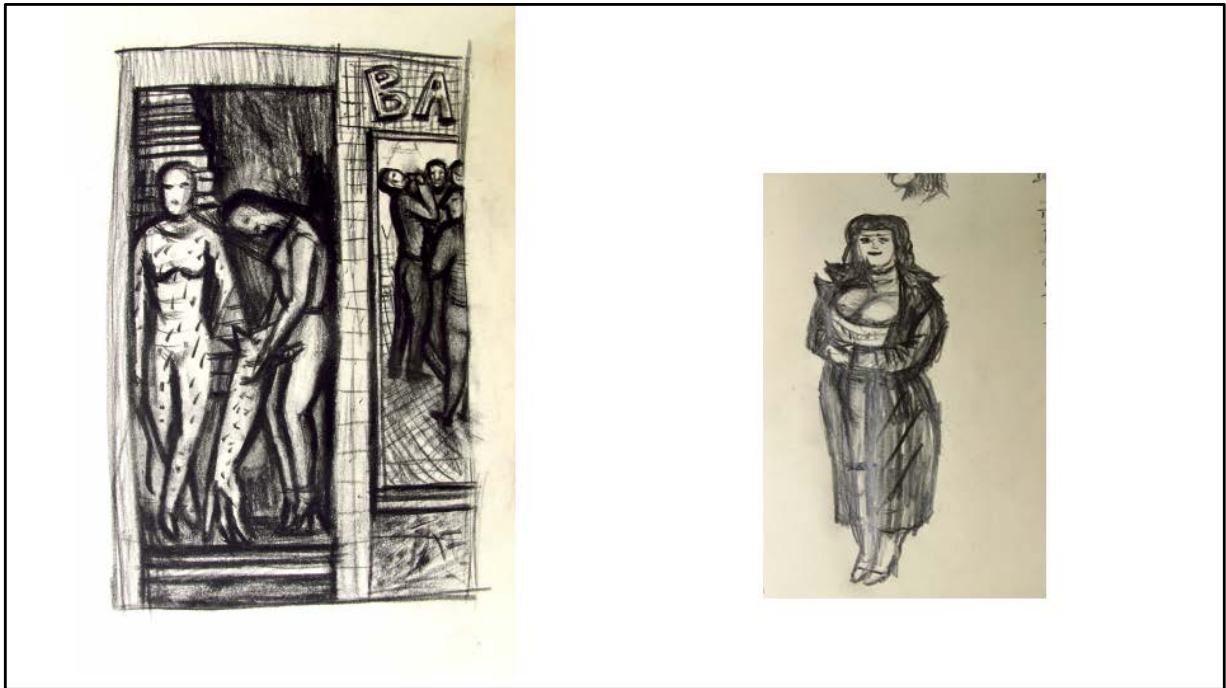
I used a mixture of research methods for these shows: drawing from life and memory, documenting with photography and searching through prints and drawings archives in London and online. Writers such as William Blake, Dickens and WG Sebald have been important, also the films of Andrei Tarkovsky, Patrick Keillor and Humphrey Jennings.

My first image is 'KX Away Day Girls' - from early in my career. It's a response to an actual place - Goods Way in 1980's Kings Cross - where the prostitutes used to stand (Mona Lisa/Bob Hoskins). A place that has now disappeared or been swallowed up by the new neighbourhood of Central St Martins, Google with its highly contemporary and commercial culture of bars and cafes.

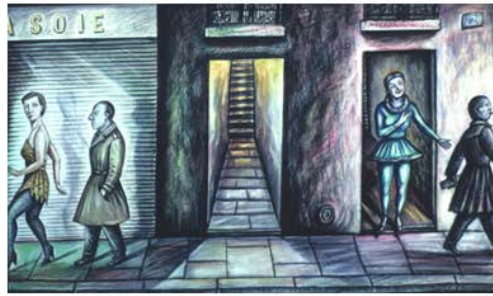
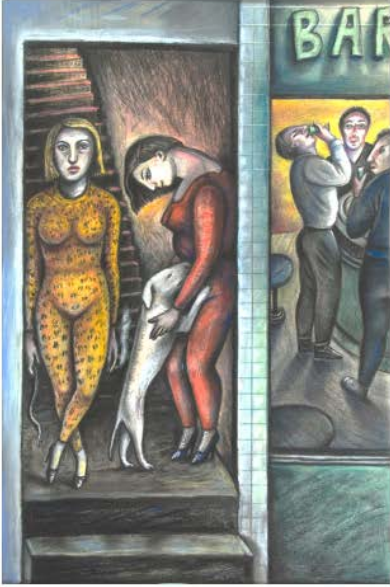
KX Away Day girls reflects an interest in place (an enduring theme) but it's also a political statement, because at that time I was working towards an exhibition about prostitution. My research trips then were to Paris/Amsterdam and Thailand.



Initial drawings towards the exhibition made from memory and on site.



More memory drawings for the early prostitution show.





KX in around 2013 - at the beginning of regeneration (still looks like Away Day).

Here are some key drawing references which informed my approach:

John Berger: Drawing is the most fundamentally spiritual – ie completely subjective – of all visual artistic activities. And: ‘Drawings are meant to be looked at virtually as a book is looked at, from close to’

It’s this intimacy which has always attracted me. In galleries I’m drawn to drawings, wanting to go up to and look at them closely. In my own work although I use paint, I’m mostly drawn to the action of scratching and erasing on paper.

William Kentridge: ‘Drawing is a testing of ideas –a slow motion version of thought.’

I feel it is intuitive and acts as a conduit from our feelings straight through to the paper we draw on.

Philip Rawson: ‘a drawing is an image of our own subjective experience of what it means to exist, an image taken not just at one moment, but gathered together from

long stretches of time into a sum which is outside any individual time, and becomes mythical time'.

Josef Herman: 'What never ceases to amaze me is that drawing always knows, better than I, what I want to say. If my drawing seems resolute and determined it is because the drawing knows how to follow its own single track and how to merge present with past experiences.

FILM MISSING HERE

Stop frame animation called Regeneration and Revival at KX (shortlisted for the Ruskin Prize and currently on show at the Millenium Gallery Sheffield).

While this (extremely slow) film is running I'd like to share some thoughts on research:

In some ways I'm reluctant to intensively interrogate my own work, agreeing with John Mc Gahern (the Irish writer) who said that work should 'need no accompaniment, no scaffold, no reinforcement.' I prefer to talk about it in a simple and plain way - avoiding jargon as much as possible.



To me, Kings Cross is a romantic place, still resonating with the lives and memories of past inhabitants.

At first my method of research was a version of Debord's derive - I went out on night walks taking photographs and making written and visual notes, driven by a fear that the gritty atmosphere of KX was about to disappear and needed to be captured before this happened.





In the early 2000's there were still prostitutes working in the area. They were pushed northwards up the Caledonian Road as the area gradually became more gentrified.

AH car on left

.



This is KX in its gritty grey stage - railway lands and rave night club sites

I was fascinated by the idea of a sleeping place - a place in transition.







When the Eurostar track opened in 2007 it ran through a kind of waste land.



A waste land that looked strangely like it had in the 19th century (this is an early print of Maiden Lane now known as York Way).

The dust heaps of Charles Dickens' time stood near this site close to Goods Way. In his novel 'Our Mutual Friend', he described it as: "a tract or urban sahara, where tiles and bricks were burnt, bones were boiled, rubbish was shot, dogs fought and dust was heaped by contractors."





Threatened buildings (CULROSS)



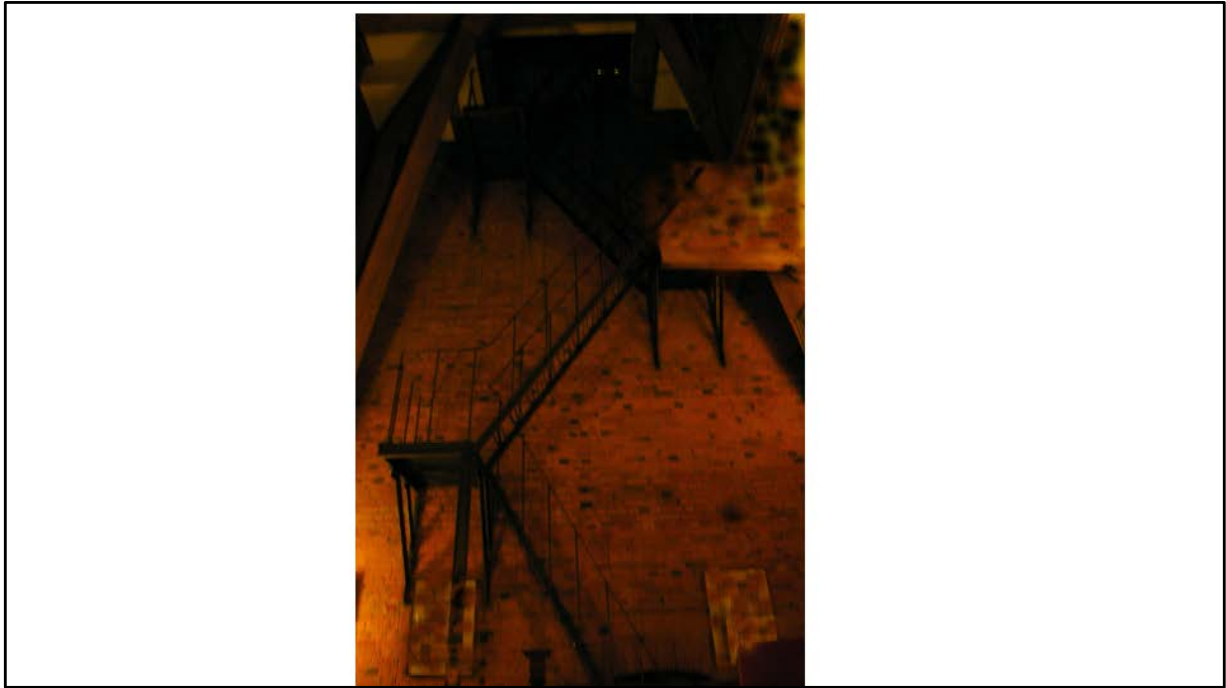
At first I didn't know what approach to follow (like Sebald's dog, I followed all leads I could find). I took photos but documenting building sites through drawing in a topographical way doesn't interest me.



I got access to the semi derelict St Pancras Hotel (Midland Hotel) prior to renovations.
(It is now the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel)







And made contact with the owner of the apartment under St Pancras clock Tower. He lent me keys and gave permission for me to enter on my own at night to take photographs at night.



Twilight walking









Some of the first series on KX 'Remember Me' at the Guardian Media are simply a commemoration of local buildings. Research for this came from drawings on site as well as photographs.

Coal and fish – one of the first buildings I noticed and wanted to record although it has not been threatened with demolition





I wanted to do more with the idea of memory and time, by inventing a made up future for favourite buildings like Coal and Fish. This kind of image was not unpopular with the developers who thought I was being critical of their vision. I applied for funding but didn't get it.



Coal and fish Fictional future - made 2/3 years before the high rise buildings started to go up near St Pancras station. I imagined the buildings as corporate, huge in scale and uninteresting to look at - not allowing for a real mix of uses/living space. This is partly true but there are some highly original buildings. (4 Pancras Square by Eric Parry Architects (King's Place made of weathering steel and white glazed ceramic) and some positive aspects to the developments, for example the mixed use King's Place Building on York Way successfully, combining culture and corporate offices.



Guardian purchase - using early photo reference of concrete tower blocks.



This early drawing showing the Eurostar track and a gasholder is patched because it kept expanding. I was imagining a different future for KX - a future where there would be Mosque (there is going to be a Saudi Arabian University).

In this first series there were very few people: in a way the buildings themselves became the personalities –

A key text Another part of the research was texts, for example Apollinaire's 'Zone', where he referred to the Eiffel tower as a person:

O Eiffel Tower shepherdess today your bridges are a bleating flock



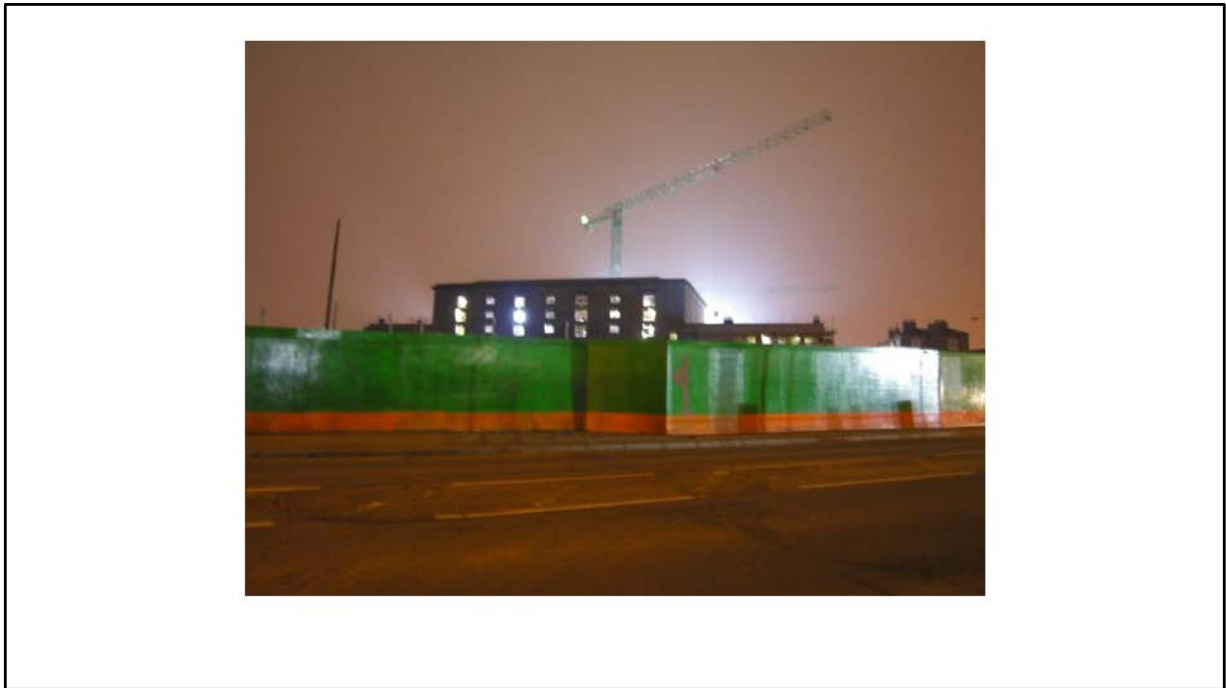
Television is also useful for research - a TV documentary on English Heritage.

I sometimes use freeze frame exercises in my RCA seminars
(and promote the use of quick memory drawings as a route to imaginative ideas).



Granary building, now CSM





Hoardings 'in between' state of places



HALF WAY



Culross Disappeared – this huge building originally made to house railway workers was pulled down to make way for the new developments. Fiercely fought over by local residents and the 150 squatters who had been living there.



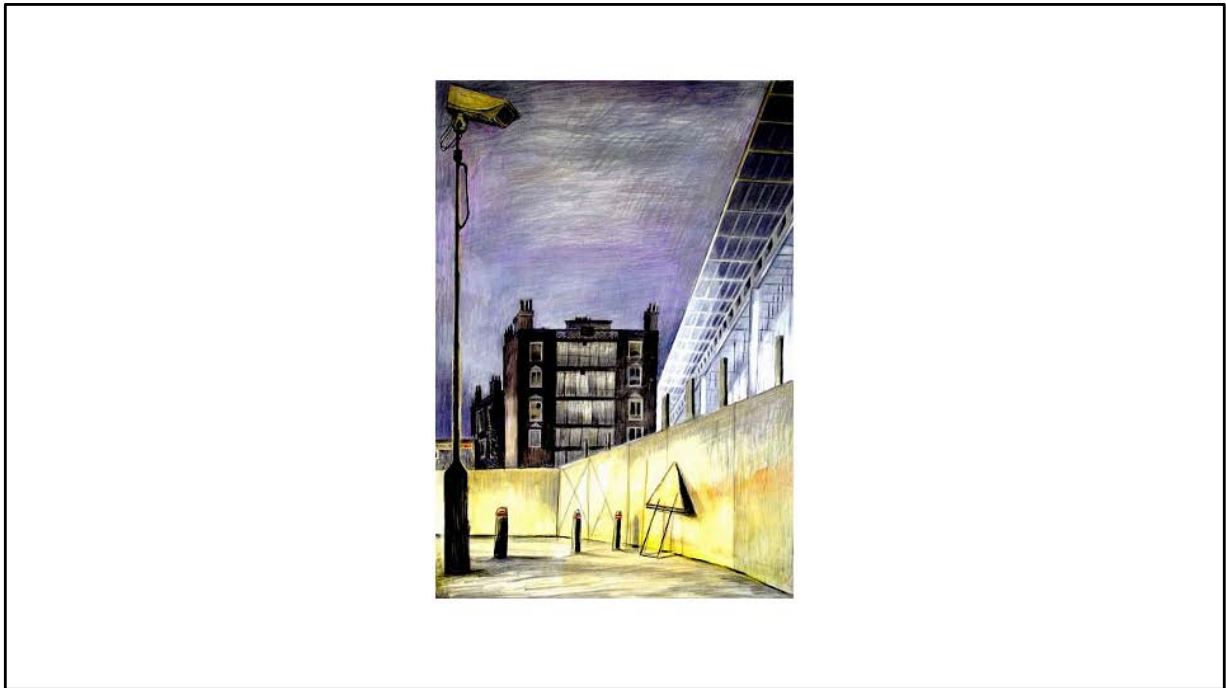






Stanley Buildings - marooned inside the development area waiting for destruction. A single façade remains, wrapped around by a modern glass construction as if persevered in aspic.





Stanley's Cornered.
Another building I drew as it waited on the brink of demolition.



Sketch book research



William Blake: Each Chartered Street:

I wander thro' each charter'd street, Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

NETWORK RAIL bought rights to seven reproductions of my drawings – still on display in the KX Business Lounge.



Francis Marshall from the MOL collections visited the Guardian solos show, and the MOL bought three drawings. He suggested I visit the MOL collection of prints and drawings.

The idea for the archive series (the second exhibition Present in the Past) grew from this. The prints used from now on come from either the MOL , the LMA or the Foundling Museum.



ARCHIVES from here



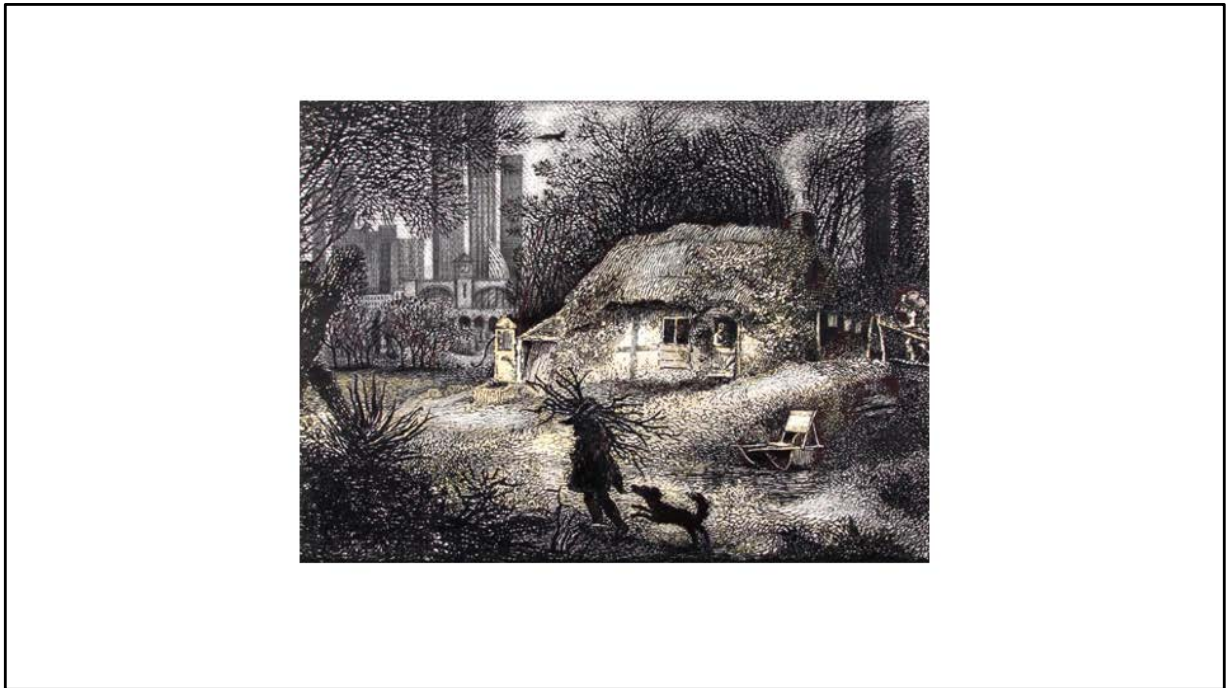
Battlebridge 1797

This was the first print I worked on for Present in the Past' series.
All the drawings are about time and memory.

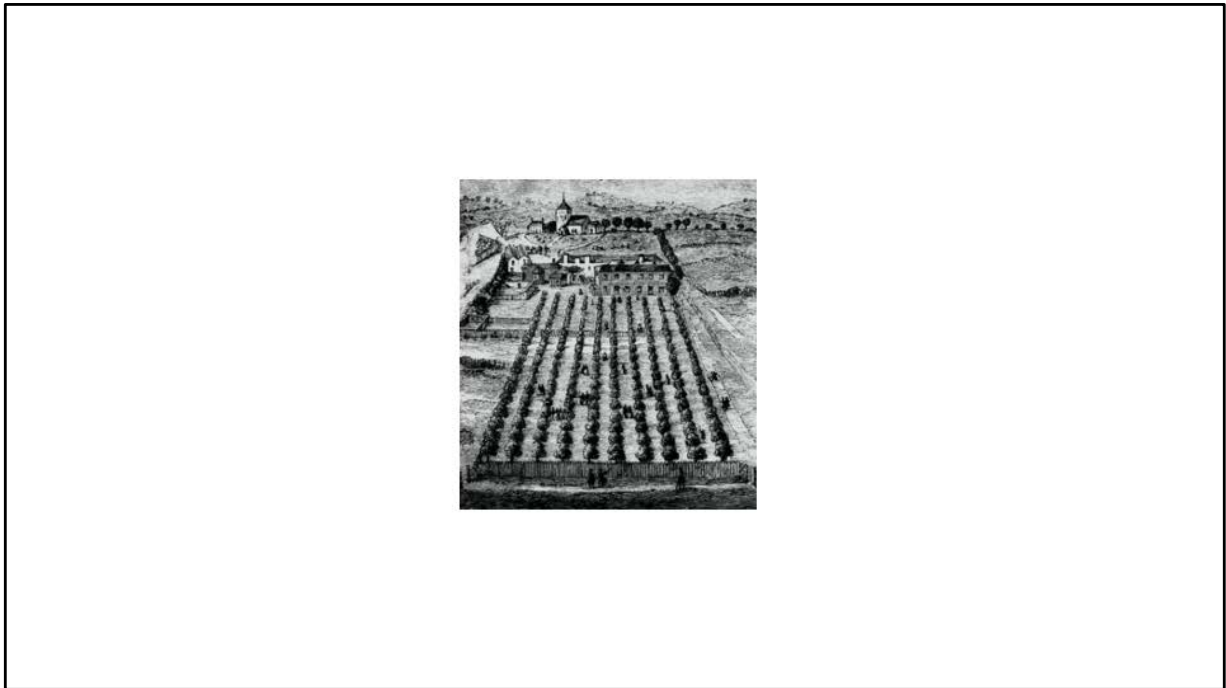
I start by taking digital photographs of early engravings, then make digital prints, usually larger in scale, on heavy acid free drawing paper. The quality of the photograph doesn't have to be perfect because I erase much of the original. The original version is gradually subverted or disappears as the new image begins to grow.

Sometimes I work on images that weren't especially strong to start with (perhaps awkwardly drawn or badly composed).

One of the best things about working on top of the prints is that there's something on the paper to start with, which takes away the fear of the white page.

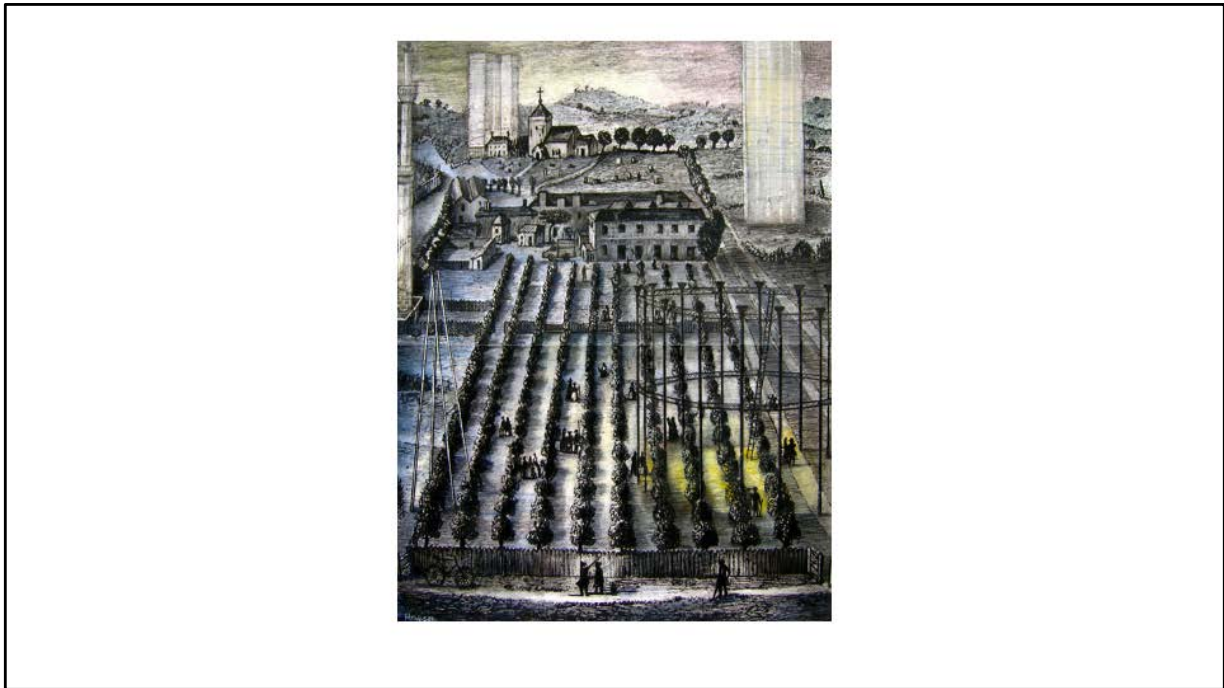


Battlebridge in 1797 - only 200 years ago people were gathering firewood in KX.



St Pancras Wells dating from the 17th when its waters were known for their curative values.

KX/Euston have always had health associations, today it has contemporary associations through UCH, the Crick Institute, Wellcome Trust.

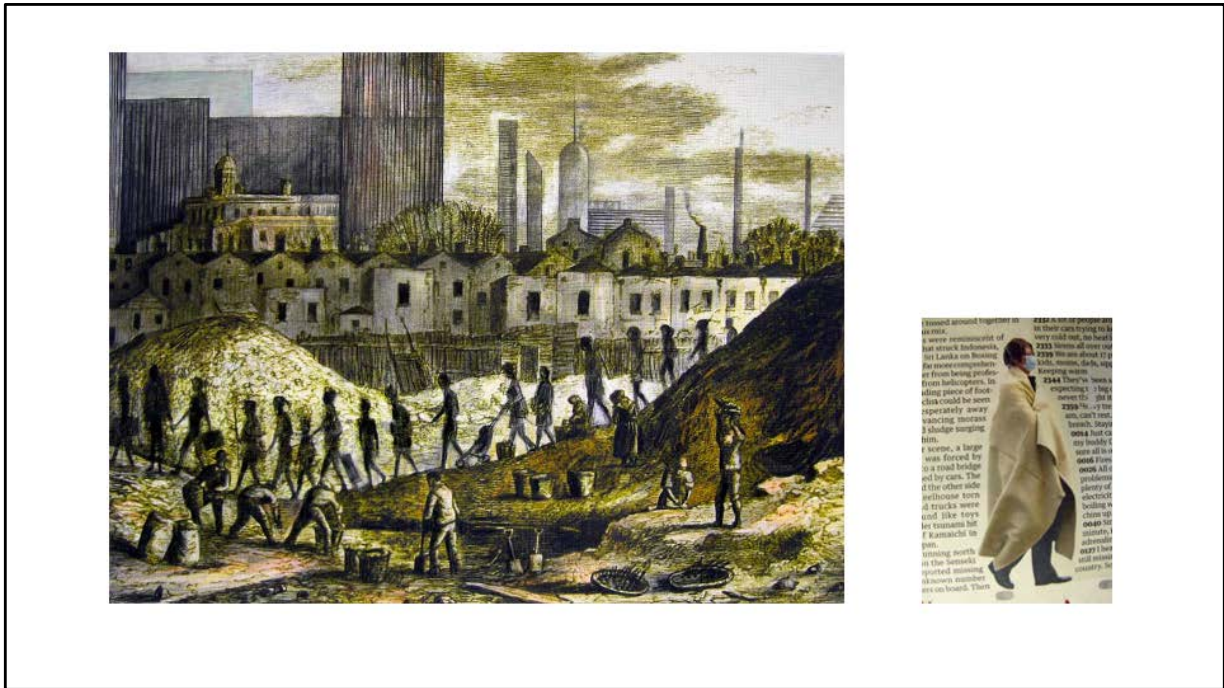


The Health Spas offered remedies for wide range of conditions

Dissiness, Drowsiness, and heavyness of the head, Lethargies, Palsies, Convulsions, all Hectical creeping Fevers, heats and flushings, Inflammations and ebullitions of the blood and spirits, all vapours, and disorders of the spleen and womb, also stiffness of the limbs and Rheumatick pains, also shortness of breath, weakness of the joints, as Rickets, etc., sore eyes, redness of the face, and all impurities of the skin, also deafness, ruptures, dropsies and jaundice. It both prevents and cures colds, creates appetites, and helps digestion, and makes hardy the tenderest constitution



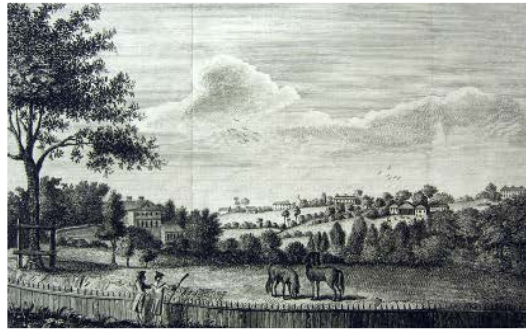
The Dust Heap of 1836, (Maiden Lane, now York Way) - seen as a health hazard it was dismantled in 1848 to make way for the building of King's Cross Station. Charles Dickens in 'Our Mutual Friend' described the nearby area as 'a tract of suburban Sahara, where tiles and bricks were burnt, bones were boiled, carpets were beat, rubbish was shot, dogs were fought, and dust was heaped by contractors'.



This was made soon after the Japanese earthquake. There were photographs in the media of people wrapped in blankets looking for shelter, and it has associations with images of asylum seekers from war zones.

I liked the opportunity to tell stories that emerges from these exchanges with archive material. Almost as though by treading in the footsteps of the earlier artist, you can have a 'conversation' with them . People from the past seem to be connecting with people from the present.

At this point, time emerged as an important theme. Time and ghosts.



I continued working and the theme of time grew more important. The figures in the early engravings from the past began to seem as alive as people of today.



In this image, the figures from the past are more real than the modern day figures in the background, which are the 'ghosts'.





An early engraving made during the Civil War (which was partly about religion). Religion is a recurring theme in the series because St Pancras Church features in so many of the archive prints.



Another place for a mosque in KX.



The shard also appears often – it reminds me of a huge secular modern day cathedral and is visible from almost everywhere in London.



1752 : a idyllic picnic near St Pancras. But the modern day intrudes in the form of the twin towers.



Which becomes dystopic, threatened by encroaching regeneration on the left, while the twin towers have been re built near St Pancras Church.



I made many images of the Foundling Hospital, as the organisation Coram had an interest in the Collyer Bristow show. Doing research on the Foundling Hospital was extraordinary. There are detailed accounts of many issues, including the role of apprentices when the orphans reached adolescence.



The young orphans were sent out to be apprenticed in their early adolescence. Some of them fell into the hands of unscrupulous employers.



Wealthy Londoners used to stroll around the grounds of the Hospital to view the young people at weekends.







Railways and rail travel are a continuing theme. This is the digging up of bodies during the building of the Midland Line out of St Pancras station. Bodies buried to a depth of 24 feet. Public outcry.



The people in the foreground are modern day travellers (with ipads and cameras) watching people from the earlier prints.



People from the present looking at people from the past. Wheelie suitcases.

Delvaux.





The current series moves more towards photographic archives, remaining with the theme of time, memory and railway travel.