

# Empty town hall inspires a series of short stories

Vacated Hornsey building has become 'time capsule' – lying untouched for years but not suffering vandalism, waiting for a new life

Of the many pictures photographer Roelof Bakker took of Hornsey Town Hall, it is fitting that one of the most striking images is that of a clock seemingly bleeding with rust down a wall. When it opened more than 75 years ago, the building was a grand, oak-carved hub of the community. Now, as Bakker's new book *Still* documents, it is a haunting time capsule buried in a world that has passed it by.

"It reminded me for a while of the Hilversum Town Hall in Holland and maybe that's



■ The striking image of a "bleeding" clock at Hornsey Town Hall

what initially attracted me," says Bakker, originally from Amsterdam and now a Crouch End resident.

"What was particularly interesting about the space though was that, despite being vacated, it had not been vandalised. It meant that, even more than other vacated spaces, you got a sense of what it used to be before. You're taken by the stillness and you just want to breathe life back into it."

## Represent more

*Still* aims to do exactly that. A selection of Bakker's photographs, accompanied by short stories, drawing inspiration from them, it is a powerful exploration of the time we live in via a space that we do not. Having enlisted 26 writers to compose the stories, Bakker is keen to stress that both the pictures and words represent more than just an unloved building in Hornsey.

"The photos are evocative, but there's no sense of location. This could apply to any structure in any community and the stories reflect that. Some are political, some are humorous. The only recurring theme is the darkness that naturally comes from a wasted space."

Many of the stories do indeed



■ The Green Room at Hornsey Town Hall  
Photographs by Roelof Bakker from his new book *Still*

transport the reader away from the town hall and into a whole host of locations. Examples include a modern red-brick church where an apparent murderer tries to claim sanctuary, the office of a psychiatrist whose patient has been driven mad by the buzz of microwaves and iPods, and a series of lifts all over the world toured by a self-confessed lift fanatic.

In fact, what is most poignant is how nearly all of the stories seem to create such eccentric, people-centric scenarios from photos that are completely devoid of life.

"We live in systems where the way we operate is moving increasingly fast. But here things

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were standing very still, which in itself can show how some people are left behind. The basics are still there, we still love and laugh and cry, but the ways we show this can perhaps pass some people by."

And what of the building itself? Currently used as a film venue for shows like *The Hour* and *Call the Midwife*, it is also being leased to Mountview Academy Theatre of Arts – all of which Bakker keenly supports.

"When I first entered the building three years ago, I was overcome by a sense of melancholy, that darkness so evident in the stories. So it's great to see it being used again."

"Any building like that needs to have a future, a purpose. A life."

■ *Still: Short Stories Inspired by Photographs of Vacated Spaces* is available now.

## BOOKSELLERS

Celebrate great reads and meet famous writers

World Book Day is here, and once again The Children's Bookshop in Muswell Hill is looking forward to joining in all the fun. On the day itself (March 7) children come in dressed as their favourite book character and we always love to see who they choose and their inventive costumes.

This year, there are eight fantastic books they can exchange their vouchers for. From everyone's favourite Shirley Hughes, we have *Alfie's Shop*, a beautiful story that has Alfie and Annie Rose opening their own little shop. Giles Andreae and Guy Parker-Rees have created



■ *Horrid Henry*  
Illustration: Tony Ross

a Colouring and Puzzle Fun Book to go with their hugely popular *Giraffes Can't Dance* picture book. While Francesca Simon's *Horrid Henry*

presents his *Guide to Perfect Parents*, helping all children secure more pocket money, more sweets and a later bedtime.

## Most bonkers

For those who love history and science, there is Tony Robinson's *Weird World of Wonders: Funny Inventions* – a history of the most brilliant and most bonkers things ever invented.

While Anthony Horowitz's fans will be keen to get their hands on the new Diamond Brothers story, called *Two of Diamonds*. What does Strawberry Yoghurt have to do with Paris? And why are the brothers invited to a remote Scottish Island?

Lauren Child brings us *Hang in There Bozo*, in which 13-year old detective Ruby Redfort gives us the lowdown on how to survive any number of tricky situations. Cathy Cassidy presents a new addition to The Chocolate Box Girls series – *Bittersweet*. And Tom Gates's fans will be rejoicing as Liz Pichon gives us *The Best Book Day Ever (So Far)*.

We hope it is! We're also looking forward to a visit from Liz Pichon herself at the end of April.

Meanwhile Mr Gum's many fans will be excited to hear that Andy Stanton – creator of the grumpiest old man ever – will be joining us on Saturday (March 9) between 11am and noon to sign copies of all the books in the hilarious Mr Gum series. As you probably know, Mr Gum hates "children, animals, fun and corn-on-the-cob" but we've been assured that Andy likes the first three at least, and may well like the fourth...

We're looking forward to World Book Day – and Andy Stanton Day! – and to seeing all our customers enjoy the wonderful celebration of books and reading over the next few weeks.

Peter Salmon  
Children's Bookshop  
Muswell Hill