

Hillview by Chris Reeves

This neighbourhood survives, foxed but more or less intact.
People co-operate, renew each other here, in a sort of bliss,
not like in a high rise or two up two down in Cheam.
Made for the presentable poor to replace what they termed
the 'lowest class, vicious, semi-criminal' poor.
The fish sculptures half-heads come through the glass,
long dry fountains but a symbol of our self-respect.
Oddly, tourists refer to their guides and look on in wonder.

The west end is moving east, Bloomsbury is moving north.
We were bamboozled by the shiny PR of Argent St George.
Now it's 150 brands and company HQs, 'creatives' pumping iron.
The council's "Not For Self But For All" squeezed between Google HQ
"Where Art Meets Tech", private security and facial recognition.
The clipboard man was 'doing a feasibility study to demolish'.
But this estate is an achievement of human organisation,
and would contain its opposite if they tried to wrinkle us out.

In the council blocks they were afraid of ghosts,
and spent EU money on cameras and metal gates.
Now they allow European workers to bed down inside.
At six they fold and hide their shrines and go to work,
fresh from the bin sheds, at risk but upbeat despite its being -5.
In our blocks there are plastic instructions, 25 orders in one,
close gates quietly, escape route keep clear, parking conditions,
don't feed the rats, covering their backs, 'One Housing, living better....'

I arrived the year the Pistols broke up after Nigel and Mary moved in.
We admired your frayed kaftans and crushed velvet loon pants,
and the old VW you'd help us to move from squatted Huntley Street.
The talk was hot with bold resistance, mainly fiction,
but the corrugated iron barricades were real enough.
You were making notes and covert phone calls, hairy cops,
fake hippies doing their duty to try to convict the ringleaders.
And the under-sheriff of London's leather coat was drenched with ... water.

We had energy and were right, and in the end we prevailed, helped by
the anti-racist peoples' Ken now demonised and hounded from the party.
Our efforts created an island of calm in a frenetic sea, a chaotic estate
became generous to the vulnerable, one of those communities they mention.
The teacher, the labourer, the driver, the guitarist, those who do nothing,
live side by side in the same five blocks, self-possessed and calm.
People still talk here, they find room inside the cracks,
they find time to do nothing, resisting the attention economy.