

# Jason Wilde

## Reviews, Essays and Interviews

### Contents

- Page 2 - Guerns!, with an essay by Greg Hobson
- Page 7 - Vera & John, with a book review by Richard West, Editor, Source Magazine
- Page 10 - Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio, with an interview with Luisa Le Voguer Couyet, freelance writer and editor of Hate magazine
- Page 15 - I'll Kill All Your Fish, with an interview with John Duncan, Editor of Source
- Page 21 - Somers Town, with an essay by Professor Val Williams
- Page 23 - Silly Arse Broke It
- Page 24 - Knocking Dollies Out Of Bed
- Page 25 - Estuary English
- Page 26 - How To Keep My Gounders Tea Hot in Cold Weather and Other Firm Beliefs
- Page 27 - Sweet Fanny Adams / Camden Folks Tales / The Never Never

# Guerns!

- 2018, Published by Butchers Hook Books  
with Essay by Greg Hobson
- 2016, BBC Radio Guernsey, Jenny Kendal Tobias Show
- 2016, ITV Guernsey, News
- 2015, BBC Radio Guernsey, Jenny Kendal Tobias Show
- 2015, ITV Guernsey, News
- 2015, Guernsey Museum permanent collection
- 2015, Guernsey Museum, exhibition



## Guern [gurn]

1. a native of the island of Guernsey.

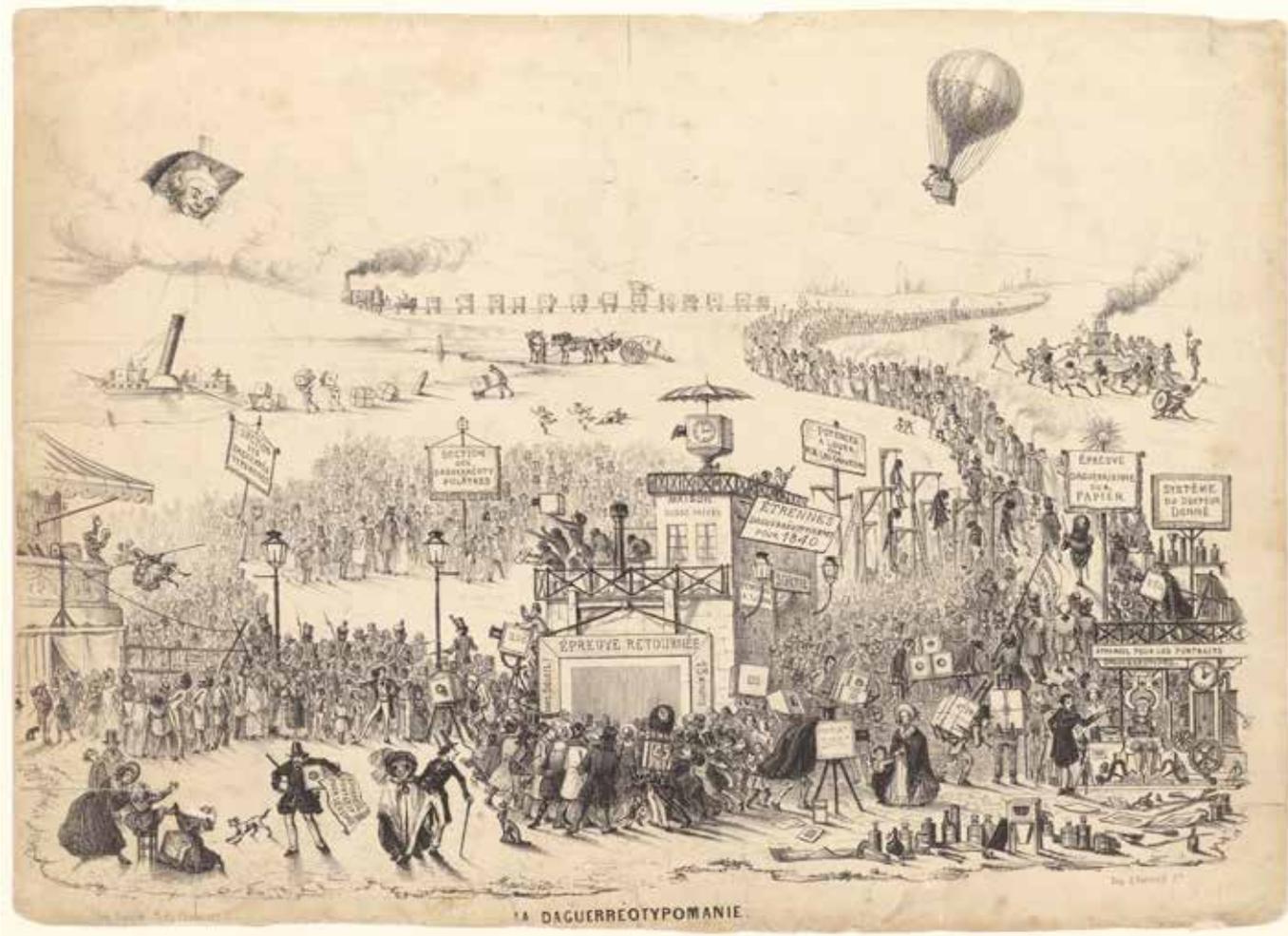
In 2015/16 the Guernsey Museums and the Guernsey Photography Festival invited me to become the artist in residence on the island of Guernsey with the idea of developing a project based on the island's social housing communities. The Guernsey Museums and the Guernsey Photography Festival had come to realise that the islands states housing communities were under-represented in the recorded history of Guernsey. By focusing on the women and children living in these communities, the prime aim of the project was to fill a gap in the island's visual record of 21st Century life in Guernsey and give visibility to a segment of the island's community that is often invisible and misrepresented.

## Geurns!

Greg Hobson

2017

Portraiture is the flesh and bones of photography, animating and humanising it. It was the first commercially successful photography practice and following the announcement of the invention of photography in 1839, Daguerreotype portrait studios proved phenomenally successful. The popularity of the process raced ahead of Talbot's conceptually superior but aesthetically lacking process, and its success impacted not just on a public desperate to have their portraits taken, but on the supply chain of materials, studios and photography portrait artists. The process was so successful, it led to a frenzy described as 'Daguerreotypomania', which is artfully described in Théodore Maurisset's 1839 illustration entitled "La daguerréotypomanie".



***Théodore Maurisset's 1839 illustration entitled "La daguerreotypomanie"***

Complicated and somewhat bitter rivalries between Talbot and his evolving process and the French government, who purchased the Daguerreotype patent from Daguerre, meant that rather than being free to use - as it was in the rest of the world - it was necessary to purchase licenses to use the daguerreotype process in Britain. This resulted in the commodification of photography and portraiture in particular, in many ways establishing portrait photography as a business-dependent practice, rather than one that was associated with a freedom of creative expression.

Shackled to the dependencies of the studio or commercial commission, portraiture grew into a genre that, with rare exception, could only be partial in relation to what it told us about history. This linear historical perspective would endure and be particular to photography in Britain, the legacy of which would be photographs of royals, celebrities and fashion models, rather than a truer reflection of the character of the times, as August Sander in Germany, or Lewis Hine in the USA would show in their work. Continuing into the late 1960s and despite occasionally startling portrait projects such as David Bailey's 1965 Box of Pin-Ups, portrait photography in Britain appeared dreary and without purpose.

In the early 1970s a new generation of photographers, inspired by the energy of the 1960s countercultures and influenced by new American photography by Diane Arbus and Lee Friedlander, and the MOMA New York 1967 exhibition *New Documents* in particular, began to overturn the photography establishment. An independent British photography culture flourished, which in turn gave rise to a new kind of portrait photography; one that conflated documentary and portrait practice to make photographs that had both social meaning and historical value. These new practices eschewed the traditionally condescending viewpoint of some documentarians - who were more interested in the spectacle of squalor - and embraced a more respectful, engaged methodology.

Daniel Meadows was a central figure in these new practices. He attended Manchester Polytechnic with a group of now influential and important British photographers including Peter Fraser, Brian Griffin and Martin Parr, with whom he collaborated with. In 1972, Meadows established a free photographic studio in a former barber's shop on Graeme Street in Manchester's Moss Side. Opening on Saturdays through a period of two months, Meadows photographed the inner-city population of the local area, giving free copies of the photographs to his sitters and exhibiting the photographs in the shop window.



***Daniel Meadows. From The Shop On Graeme Street. 1972***

The Graeme Street portraits established a template for Meadows' groundbreaking Free Photographic Omnibus project. For this, between 1973-74, Meadows travelled around England, running a free photographic studio from a double-decker bus which also served as his temporary home and gallery. The photographs he made on his journey are very special. Timeless, yet rooted firmly in their time; subtle, yet profound; they have grown from a genuinely heartfelt affection for the subjects. In these two bodies of work, Meadows redefined the possibilities of portrait photography and set new standards for how subjects should be depicted.

Curiously, despite the power of Meadows' work, it is not an approach that has notably endured. Issues surrounding class, political agendas and the vagaries of Arts Council funding meant that work that was gentle and respectful of those at the margins of society was seen as insufficiently proselytising. Tough and edgy became synonymous with revelation and truth. Considered, collaborative and involved work was pushed to the margins in favour of a more brash depiction of the less privileged and poor.



***Daniel Meadows. From The Free Photographic Omnibus. 1973-1974.***

Very rarely does a body of work surface that addresses this imbalance and shows how portrait photography can be liberating, meaningful and of lasting importance. Jason Wilde's *Guerns!* realises all of these through a combination of his warmth for his subjects and deft use of the camera. London-based Wilde was commissioned in 2015-16 by Guernsey Museums and Guernsey Photography Festival to make new work on the island of Guernsey. Stereotypically associated with high levels of wealth, the banking industry and as a tax-haven, the realities of

the constituency of Guernsey are quite different. Wilde was born on, grew up and still lives on a council estate, and his experiences inform much of his work.

For the Guernsey commission, he proposed to make his work with the island's social housing communities to address the under-representation of these communities in the photographic history of the island and, to focus on the women in particular. Wilde's experience was that women formed the backbone of these communities, binding them and giving them form, while their contributions remained overlooked and unrecorded.

Furthermore, he sought to involve the communities in the process of their representation, establishing a free photographic studio as well as photographing individuals and families in their home environments and frequently in the private domains of their bedrooms. In the spirit of collaborative exchange, all the subjects were offered a free portrait from their sittings.

Wilde's photographs are a remarkably fresh and optimistic portrait of these communities. He has avoided the cliches of destitution and chaos, showing instead the binding properties of family and community. The work is joyful and there is a sense of ownership of the photographs from the subjects as much as from the photographer. In this respect, the photographs are an important testimony of the island's states housing communities and history of Guernsey, as well as making a hugely important contribution to the tradition of documentary portraiture. Furthermore, by treating his subjects with respect, Wilde shows us how the power of photographs are revelatory, as well as a celebration of life in a cynical and suspicious time.

**Daniel Meadows** - *"A multi-layered work, I think, you do a lot in 60 pages. Congratulations. I look forward to spending time with it, unpicking its many mysteries"*

**Helen Conlon, Fine Art Curator, Guernsey Museum and Art Gallery** - *"Being invited into people's homes is a privilege that is earned. Jason Wilde's skill as a photographer is equalled by his ability to engage with his subjects, allowing them control over the process and gaining their trust. The photographs reflect this openness and makes the 'Guerns!' collection a valuable addition both artistically and socially"*

# Vera & John

- 2017, Vera & John book published by Butchers Hook Books
- 2017, Source
- 2017, the Vera & John photobook becomes part of the V&A Art Library
- 2017, Athens Photo Festival
- 2017, BBC Radio London, Robert Elms Show
- 2017, The Guardian on Saturday
- 2017, Photobook Show, St Petersburg
- 2017, Photobook Show, Brighton
- 2017, Moose On The Loose
- 2017, Thats Not My Age
- 2017, The Woman's Room



Vera, the youngest of three girls, was born on July 7th 1940 in Somers Town in the London Borough of Camden. A few days after her 14th birthday she started her first full time job on a production line in a biscuit factory. Vera then went on to work in a needle factory, a lightbulb factory and after a short stint checking football pools, she juggled a number of part-time cleaning jobs with motherhood.

John, the second youngest of 9 children, was born on September 28th 1938 in Penrith, Cumbria. In 1942 his parents divorced and John was sent to a boys home where he stayed until 1953. In the same year John started full time employment cleaning steam engines for British Rail. At 21 he transferred from Carlisle to London where he was promoted to a railway Fireman, shovelling up to three tone of coal a day into a steam locomotives firebox. After five years as a Fireman John became a Train Driver, retiring in 2004 as a Train Driver / Train Driver Instructor.

Three years after they met in 1960 Vera and John married and moved into their first home in Somers Town; a 'two room gas & electric' in Polygon Buildings that shared a doorless washroom housing three concrete sinks, three cold taps and three toilets, with five other homes on their landing. Their second home was on the same street as Polygon Buildings, while their third and current home is a stone's throw from both, and is where their three children grew up.

Vera and John are my mum and dad and the idea of making a project about them came to me while visiting their house in 2005. With no one home I had a rummage through the fridge and food cupboards before making a nice cup of tea. Leaning against the wall next to the kettle was a message written on the back of a used envelope outlining the evenings dinner arrangements.

That first note became 'Vera & John', a collection of still-life montages made with a photograph of a note layered over a photograph of a paving stone. Without Vera's knowledge and with the help of John, between 2005 and 2014 I collected 112 similar notes that focus on the general comings and goings of their day-to-day lives. Always written on the backs of used envelopes, these private notes are a mix of instructions, statements and requests that offer an intimate take on London's working class culture and outline Vera and John's mutually supportive roles within a close-knit family.

The paving stones were photographed on streets that have a connection to Vera and John. These colourful, quarried slabs of imported Yorkshire stone trace the experiences of five (possibly more) generations of Vera and John's family in and around Somers Town, mapping the streets where their lives have played-out over the last 100 years in the London Borough of Camden.

## Richard West, Editor, Source Magazine Vera & John Book Review Summer 2017

How should we live? How do we weigh the values and ideals that give meaning to our existence against the external pressures and daily routines that shape our day to day lives? Can the bonds that draw us to one another and keep us there weather the violence of the antipathies that antagonise and push us apart? And if society tells us that we must be and do certain things in order to be properly human, what do we become when we strip the complex business of living back to its most basic elements?

Vera and John are the parents of photographer Jason Wilde. They married in 1963, had three children, and have lived in London's Somers Town area for more than 50 years. Between 2005 and 2014, Wilde collected over one hundred notes that Vera is in the habit of leaving for John. Scribbled on the back of envelopes, Vera's notes tell John of her comings and goings ('gone up the town wont be long...'), remind him of plans for the evening meal ('steak and chips for dinner' ... 'wash some mushrooms' ... 'put the dumplings in the slow cooker') or gently chide him ('the

blind is upstairs in the bedroom one for sitting room big window, don't put it up upside down or inside out I know what your like put your glasses on ...').

Vera & John tells the story of a long, loving relationship, of family and friendship and a traditional working-class way of life. 'Family albums deal with the rites of passage, the celebrations,' Wilde remarks. 'This is about those bits in between that everyone can relate to.' In an age of electronic messaging, handwritten missives like Vera's are increasingly rare. Her brief messages may be a 'celebration of the mundane', as Wilde quips, but they also a poignant record of the way that smaller intimacies add up to much more than the sum of their parts.

### **Praise for Vera & John**

- *Vera & John was featured in the 2017 summer issue of Source, the Photographic review; on BBC Radio London's Robert Elms show on Friday 17th February and in the Guardian on Saturday 28th January. Photomonitor also interviewed me about the project in July 2017.*
- *"A moving and important project" Greg Hobson*
- *"A wonderful project with my 3 favourite L's - language, love and London" Karen McQuaid, curator, the Photographers Gallery*
- *"Probably the sweetest, funniest book published so far this year".*
- *"Truly lovely, the bits of life and love that get forgotten".*
- *"A fab portrait of family life. Written on the back of everyday envelopes, Vera leaves notes to John. Funny, ordinary, addictive & touching!"*
- *"I laughed out loud at the note about the barbecue bar! Brilliant idea for a book".*
- *"Absolutely wonderful. The whole thing made me smile—a lot".*
- *"Thank god there's always the real world. It has become so easy to forget that".*
- *"Lovely idea for a book. We should all do this. Before we self delete. Is there a way to save and print our texts?"*
- *"Absolutely, Beautiful Idea. Beautiful Life".*
- *"Your history, our history, London 'istory"*
- *"Anyone who can't see the warmth and family values I feel sort of sad for. This is real family lucky for them".*
- *"Vera & John - a reminder that life, like love, is in the little things!"*
- *"Delighted to receive my copy! Thank you and well done to Jason Wilde I couldn't wait to read it and it brought tears to my eyes as I thought about the notes on scrap paper that me and my mum and dad used to communicate with before mobile phones! Wish I'd kept them"*

# Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio



- 2018 - JWFPS 02, second edition of JWFPS magazine published by Butchers Hook Books
- 2017 - JWFPS 01, first edition of JWFPS magazine published by Butchers Hook Books
- 2016 - The Kentish Towner
- 2012 - The New Review - Independent on Sunday
- 2012 - The Kentish Towner

*'Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio'* was a mobile photo studio that ran from 2009 until 2017, making documentary portraits of visitors to a variety of venues in and around London. In return for taking part in the project each participant was able to receive a free A4 black and white print. The initial idea for Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio was as much about travelling as it was about taking photographs. My plan was to spend a few summer weeks over a number of years traveling around the coast of England making portraits of people in front of a white background. In 2009 I left London for my first two week trip but after chasing and wrestling my 9ft x 6ft collapsible backdrop in windy rain along the promenades of various south-coast towns I decided that an outdoor project was too chancy.

Around the same time Professor Val Williams invited me to set up a series of portrait studios inside her Hastings gallery. Accepting Val's invitation to move the project indoors I held three free portrait studio sessions in August during the 2009 Hastings Old Town Carnival Week. Those indoor studio sessions meant the addition of lights, laptop and assistant into my setup and unlike the the outdoor sessions, whereby I worked alone photographing up to 2-4 people in an hour, the indoor Hastings sessions were very busy with queues of people waiting to take part in the project. The success of those first Hastings studio sessions influenced me to develop my original idea from an outdoor project into an indoor mobile free portrait studio that was set up 51 times in a variety of venues between 2009 and 2017. The 183 Hastings gallery portraits are now part of the 2224 portraits that make up the *Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio* archive.

## **Synopsis**

Itinerant photographers were an accepted part of English street life in the latter part of the 19th and the early part of the 20th centuries. Part of the Victorian floating world of peddlers, tinkers and travelling entertainer's, their sitters were frequently photographed in temporary, makeshift studios that were set up in a variety of places.

My initial attempts at emulating these early travelling portrait photographers with my Free Portrait Studio were farcical. I started out making images along the south coast of England setting up my equipment outdoors where I would be highly visible but not present an obstacle. I would then ask passers by to take time out from what they were doing and have their portrait taken.

Putting aside sceptical policemen, bewildered street wardens, comedic drunks and talkative pensioners, my main enemy was the wind. On more than one occasion I ended up either chasing or wrestling my 9ft x 9ft collapsible background along the promenades. I now hold my Free Portrait Studio events indoors.

Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio is a non-commercial mobile studio that continues to follow in the footsteps of the early itinerant photographers. Visiting a variety of venues throughout the London Borough of Camden Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio invites visitors and passers by to temporarily discontinue their daily routines to take part in a short informal photography process.

Equal parts English history, cultural anthropology and human narrative, the photographs eschew the overtly conceptual motifs of much contemporary portraiture in favour of the descriptive powers of the medium. This ongoing body of work aims to reflect the complex nature of contemporary English society through multiple individual portraits.

**Luisa Le Voguer Couyet.**  
**Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio**  
**March 2018 / Part 1**

### **What is Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio**

Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio was a mobile photo studio that ran from 2009 until 2017, making documentary portraits of visitors to a variety of venues in and around the London Borough of Camden. In return for taking part in the project, each participant was able to receive a free A4 black and white print.

### **Can you tell me how the idea for JWFPS came about**

My plan was to spend a few summer weeks over a number of years traveling around the coast of England making portraits of people in front of a white background. In 2009 I left London for my first two week trip but after chasing and wrestling my 9ft x 6ft collapsible backdrop in windy rain along the promenades of various south-coast towns I decided that an outdoor project was too chancy. Around the same time Professor Val Williams invited me to set up a series of portrait studios in her gallery during the 2009 Hastings Old Town Carnival Week. Accepting Val's invitation to move the project indoors, I held 3 portrait studio sessions over a week in August and made 183 portraits. The success of those first studio sessions influenced the creation of the indoor Camden focused version of Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio.

### **Why Camden**

The addition of lights, laptop and assistant into my setup made the project too expensive to tour in the way that I had originally planned so I decided to stay close to my home in the London Borough of Camden.

### **What is the process of JWFPS? How do you approach people**

JWFPS consisted of two parts, the photo studio and the 'reception' area, which was a table displaying assorted project information and images made at previous events. The photo studio was set up in full view of the public while posters were used to advertise that days event. Finally, along with handing out flyers, my assistant and myself would discuss the project with anyone that expressed an interest, respectfully trying to persuade people to participate.

### **How many people took part in the events**

Some boring facts: a total of 2224 portraits were made at 51 events which averages out at 43.6 participants per event. The least amount of participants at one event was six, the most was 103. The least amount of images made of an individual was one, the most was 67. The shortest event time was four hours, the longest was eight hours. An average of 15 portraits were made of each person which means 30,000+ were made overall.

### **So many images - did you use film or digital**

I used a medium format Leaf camera coupled with a Leaf Aptus digital back. Film would been far too expensive for this project.

### **How did you fund the project**

The project was self funded, which is why it was spread out over eight years.

### **What was your intention behind the plain white background**

I wanted to remove many of the elements that can influence the way a portrait is read and

create a visual framework that allowed the portraits to be viewed equally. With that in mind a backdrop was used to mask distracting venue backgrounds while the same lighting and translucent umbrella combination was used at each event to ensure uniform and even lighting across the whole project. In addition, the idea was to make portraits that encouraged speculation rather than fix meanings, so to avoid any link to a specific emotion (smile/happy - frown/sad et), or the ambiguous associations of a sitter looking out of the frame (thoughtful, pensive etc), all participants were asked to adopt a neutral face and gaze directly into the lens.

### **There's a very calm and composed feel to the portraits - was this deliberate**

Yes, the portrait making process was a very quiet one. Before any photographs were made each person was given the same brief explanation about how portraits work and why I did not want a smiley faces portrait project and they were also given the option of smiling for their free print. Once the participant stepped in front of the camera they were asked to adopt a neutral face and direct their gaze into the lens and that was it. Many participants asked "what do I do" and my reply would always be "up to you" and then I'd wait for them to compose themselves.

### **Did people like their portraits**

It's important to say that apart from the Kentish Town Health Centre, which required a slow and sensitive approach because of sick and vulnerable visitors, the free portrait studio events had a very lively and cheerful atmosphere and many people were happy to take part in the project simply to become part of the portrait archive. As for people liking their portraits, the professional looking set up of the mobile photo studio played a significant role in participant satisfaction as it raised expectations of what kind of images were going to be made. Unfortunately lots of folk were disappointed with their portraits which is both interesting and amusing.

*"No, I didn't like my portrait, but that might not be your fault - some old man seems to have stolen my clothes and posed for you! In a fit of excitement he's gurning as well, so what can I say? Do I really look like that?"*

*Matt Lesley, 2013*

*"Thanks so much for sending these to me I think your project of collecting the faces of society fascinating and will continue to follow its progress, I really appreciate their artistic quality, and if I saw them of someone else would think they are fantastic but as photos of myself I don't find them very flattering. I acknowledge that it is particularly vain but all I see is double chin and a very mean mouth and even if this is the truth i'm happy to pretend that it's not!! You are more than welcome to use the print how you wish and I really appreciate you taking the time to send them to me but I think a print would just get dusty"*

*Louise Russell, 2012*

*"Many thanks for your emails. I apologise that I could not write you earlier. To be honest I have not liked them at all. I was sad on that day; I have noticed that I had reflected this in the pictures. I do not want any of them and if possible do not use them please. I would be very appreciated if you could delete them. I know I allowed to but they are so ugly.....they are not me. I wish you best success in your work. May God bless you"*

*Ayla Nayir, 2011*

*"I think you did a great job. I have hated almost all photos of myself since I got Parkinson's when I was 60. One of the effects of Parkinson's is a lack of facial expression which I have relatively mildly (I think) but I am always very aware of it when I look at photos of myself. It's here in these images too - partly because you wanted a neutral expression - but I can't really say that I hate any of them and I actively like quite a number of them of them. I was a bit shocked at the extent to which I lean to the right - I do so in every frame but one. I am almost normal in number 10! This is another effect of Parkinson's known as Pisa syndrome. Not all people with Parkinson's have it - I'm just one of the lucky ones. I haven't made up my mind yet which image I'll choose - I have a short list of 4 at the moment. I will get back to you in a day or three"*

*Pat Kirkwood, 2013*

**Luisa Le Voguer Couyet is a freelance writer and editor of Hate magazine.**

# I'll Kill All Your Fish

- 2015 - Athens Photo Festival, Shortlisted
- 2015 - Source Photographic Review 2015
- 2014 - H Photobook Show, London
- 2008 - Group Show, Photofusion



## Synopsis

A room inside a home dedicated to grooming and hygiene has evolved as a response to fundamental needs for sanitation and our changing attitudes towards privacy and modesty. In 2004, while employed as a door-to-door portrait photographer, I surreptitiously photographed inside the bathrooms of strangers living on the housing estates of London and its satellite towns. In these bathrooms people eat, drink, smoke and workout. They leave messages, keep pets and play games. These images of universal intimate life celebrate the idea of the modern bathroom as a private place used by all members of the household for a variety of activities.

## An interview with John Duncan Editor of Source Source Issue 81

Jason Wilde was a watchmaker by trade who retrained as a photographer with a Masters degree at the London College of Printing and now produces photographs for Camden Education Department and magazines including the Telegraph and New Scientist. His own projects include Somers town, looking at changes in this formerly close knit community; Greenacres, a caravan site whose residents have a traditional 'cockney' ethos and portraits made in Clarence Way housing estate that attempt to counter negative media stereotypes of the area. Wilde also operates his own free portrait Studio in Camden. His first job after college was as a door-to-door photographer and for this issue we talked to him about this work and publish a personal project that came out of it I'll Kill all your fish.

**John: Can you tell me about your job working as a door-to-door photographer?**

Jason: The company I worked for pitched up on council estates, mostly London satellite towns like Tilbury, Southend, Watford. The sales team knocked on doors of these council estates and they had framed portraits of kids, a head and shoulders shot with a big smile, with a mottled blue or pink background and a sheepskin rug. The reason they approached council estates was because the portraits were cheap. They were fifteen quid, twenty five quid, thirty five quid and you could pay weekly, interest free and a lot of the mums – because most of them were mums – used to want photographs of their kids and would book an appointment for the next day. The sales team made eighteen appointments for the photographers, in between the hours of two or three and eight o'clock, three every hour, so twenty minutes per what we would call a 'take'. It was my job as a photographer to go to that little area. You'd knock on the door and then in you went and you made photographs of the people who wanted to be photographed.

**John: How did you get the job, how did you know about it?**

Jason: Through a friend, I was not long out of college. He knew the owner of the company.

**John: Were they interested in the fact that you had studied photography?**

Jason: We are talking a big cowboy outfit – it was in a barn in Epping – but a slick cowboy outfit, no interest in the degree or anything like that. It was just 'Get in and do the shots and get out and let's make some money'.

**John: What was the first day like?**

Jason: The first day I went round with the owner of the company. He's not a photographer, I think he used to work in a lab and went on to do door-to-door. He did two or three days work as a photographer and I shadowed him. For the other two days, it was my turn and he shadowed me, and then the next week I was on my own doing the work.

**John: How did you take the pictures? What was the set up?**

Jason: I carried a Bronica medium Format camera. Attached to that was a Metz flash gun that you could bounce off the ceiling. When you went into the room you had to make sure that there was a white ceiling. If there wasn't a white ceiling in the sitting room sometimes you ended up photographing in the bedroom or the bathroom or the kitchen, where the white ceiling was. You had a sheepskin rug and collapsible nine-foot backgrounds, one pink, one blue. You would get a piece of furniture, you'd put it in front of the background, you'd lay the sheepskin rug over it and you'd put the person in between the piece of furniture and the background and pose them. And that was it. I had four or five film backs and spare battery packs for the Metz.

**John: I'm surprised that it was being done on medium format film.**

Jason: I suggested to him to go digital but he didn't trust his photographers, he thought they would go behind his back and sell prints to the clients, he wasn't a very trusting man.

**John: How come medium format and not 35mm?**

Jason: Quality, I think he respected the quality in the print, some of the prints were three foot on the longest edge.

**John: Was part of your brief to convince people about the size, how they were going to be framed, the number of images?**

Jason: No, that was the sales team that got the takes, the guy's mum and aunty. These two lovely 'old ladies' used to knock on the doors and the after-sales team were very good looking young men. And it was their job to go along with the contact prints and try and get the sales.

**John: And did you ever get feedback from them about the quality of the images?**

Jason: Only if there was a problem, if I wasn't producing what was supposed to be produced i.e. that lovely happy smiley pose. That rarely happened.

**John: Was that determined then, the pose and the facial expressions?**

Jason: I don't know if you would call it a classic pose, the person would be kneeling or sitting behind the piece of furniture, both elbows would be placed in front of them, at a slight angle to the camera. Then make them smile and that was what you were after. It would look nice with a marbled background. But then you might photograph three people... and when you start getting about six or seven in front of a nine foot wide background... some of these pictures were terrible because you could see the wallpaper on either side of the background... and when you get a group of eleven or twelve, and some people have got their eyes shut and there are kids messing about... But it was brilliant. I loved it. It was a baptism of fire.

**John: How much time would you have had in each house to make these pictures?**

Jason: Twenty minutes in each place, so you'd be 'please be one person' and hope that person would smile on demand, because if they wouldn't smile, you would spend ages trying to get them to smile. But the person who was having the portraits made it. It might be the mum or the dad, they might want one of each kid – say there are three kids – then they might want three together, two together, they might want one with mum and dad in. Then nanny and granddad could be involved and they might want different combinations of a family of five. There could be potentially seven or eight combinations and that's much longer than twenty minutes. If that happened you would hope that one or two 'takes' would cancel because that would mean you would catch up. But it all seemed to work.

**John: Would the people have been quite formal, would they have dressed up in their Sunday best?**

Jason: Some did, most of the sitters were children. There were the odd few that just sort of threw them in, there would be tears and there would be dirt, they just didn't care. It would be 'just photograph them'. Maybe they had no intention of buying prints, maybe they felt they were forced into it. But a lot of them did dress up and dressed their kids up in what they thought were their best clothes. There were a few Africans and Indians and they would get dressed up in their traditional clothing which was quite interesting with their gowns and headwear. If they weren't ready when you turned up they would take ages to get ready. You would explain to them that this is a 'head and shoulders shot' but they still carried on ironing their trousers to make sure their trousers looked nice.

**John: Did you get a sense of why people felt they needed you there to take a photograph? What was the difference between your picture and a photograph that they might have made themselves?**

Jason: I think that they were sold on an idea that they would get this lovely framed print. The frames were quite ornate. The type that you would see in somewhere like the National Portrait Gallery and I think most people wanted that. Also that idea of a professional photographer coming in and making a wonderful picture of them and their kids. I think it's a tradition, I remember having it done when I was a kid, when photographers knocked on our doors, Mum would always snap it up and the school photograph as well. I think, especially in places round here, people always want professional photographs especially cheap ones. In terms of cameras, I'm from round here – I grew up in Somers town – and I know that as a kid I didn't notice that kind of stuff. But then, doing that job, I didn't know so much poverty existed in this country. Going into some of these houses was hell, it was horrible. Not horrible for me, horrible sounds like a stupid word, but very surprising. I didn't know it still went on.

**John: Were there any tricky customers or any particular awkward moments you remember?**

Jason: There were tricky customers in terms of men mainly, men with their snakes and spiders trying to scare me and shit like that, and their dogs as well.

**John: Why did they want to scare you?**

Jason: I don't know. It's men really, fucking weirdoes. I mean a couple of times I was surprised by girls wanting to have the photo topless. I didn't expect that to happen and that wrong footed me. It was like 'Oh really? It's for your boyfriend? No problem.' They just got their kit off and it was like nothing, that was very surprising. Not really awkward moments no, but I did get offered sex. Then there was the crying. There was a young lady there and she was in bits. She wouldn't

stop crying and her mum said 'if you don't stop crying I'm going to kill all your fish'. Another one was 'if you don't stop crying I'm going to stab your paddling pool'. One was 'oh please stop crying, go on please I'll give you some Calpol.'

**John: How did you feel about those in comparison to other portraits that you've done?**

Jason: I very rarely saw them. I gave the rolls of film over to the lab and it was only when I would go in to pick up new rolls of film that I would see prints and some of them were mine. There was much more of a fun element to the ones I was making for the company, I had to be chirpy, I had to have a load of spiel. If mum was shouting I had to have the skill to say 'come on mum stop talking, let me deal with the kid make the kid laugh'. When I do my other stuff, for myself, it's all a bit more silent, a bit more thought about.

**John: What did you think about the connection you were making with these people? Is that what made a good portrait?**

Jason: I felt it was pretty good. I was quite good at it and I became very good at it. And I felt that even though it was a commercial enterprise, nothing to do with art or documentary, I would say 99% of the people that I met, I'd treat them the way I would have done if it was my own project. It was just a bit speeded up. Sometimes I've been doing my own work and someone has agreed to the photograph being taken but they're not really buying into it, and you'll stop. With the commercial job I had to do it, I had to get the shot.

**John: Did it ever happen that you knocked on the door and the person decided they didn't want to be photographed?**

Jason: Some would have second thoughts, they'd say 'yes' to the two girls and then I'd turn up and you'd know straight away the body language they didn't want you in, but it was my job to talk my way in. Then one day I knocked on the door and the couple who answered didn't really have an awareness of what was going on. They should not have been booked in by the sales team and I said 'I'm not going to come in'. Also, I found out that the aftersales team – who would be collecting money on a weekly basis and getting invited in to have a cup of tea with the person – they would find out the birthdays of the kids in the house. Then, when the birthdays were coming round, when Christmas time and school holidays were coming round, they would offer loans to the people. The maximum loan was £300 but the payback was extortionate, people couldn't pay back the loan, they would sell on all the loans to a collection company. When I realised what was going on my take rate, which was 18 a day, went to about 4 a day over a period of a few weeks and I got sacked very quickly.

**John: How about the project that came out of this work 'I'll Kill all your Fish'?**

Jason: As soon as I was on the job, coming out of college, I knew there was a project there.

But because of the time factor, because you go from one place to another, it was very difficult to find a strategy for shooting. I couldn't use their cameras or their film so I carried a compact camera on my belt and in between takes, going along balconies, I would shoot over the balcony or I'd shoot up the stairs or down the stairs or out the window. Then one day, in a take, I needed to use the toilet. Whilst sitting there, I saw something, snapped it and when I got the film processed that image was the project. So everywhere I went, every take I went to, I would ask if I could use their bathroom, and off I went with my little contact camera, had a quick look round and if I saw something I shot it. Ideally I'd have loved to have done six months shooting on the project. I'd just got into my stride but I ended up getting sacked. I continued the project over the last few years, in homes I visited through friends, to get three or four images to end it.

**John: Have you ever talked to the company since or have you ever thought of approaching them to see if they still have the negatives?**

Jason: I have thought about approaching them again with a completely different project, just to shadow one of their photographers. I've also mentioned the archive to Val William and her ears pricked up, she thought it would be a great archive and it would be a great thing to get her hands on. But the guy that runs it, there'd be a price to pay and I don't trust the fellow.

# Somers Town

- 2004, The Lowry. 'Out of Time' (G)
- 2003, Tate Modern. 'Out of Time' (G)
- 2003, Museum of London. 'Council Housing' (G)
- 2003, Research Space Gallery, London (S)
- 2002, MAP Show, London (G)
- 2000, RISE Show, London (G)
- 2000, Islington Arts factory, London (S)
- 2000, Euston Station, London (S)
- 2000, St Pancras Station, London (S)
- 2000, National Portrait Gallery, London. 'John Kobal' (G)
- 1999, National Portrait Gallery, London. 'John Kobal' (G)



## Somers Town Professor Val Williams

Somers Town is a microcosm for the social flux and cultural integration that characterises inner-city London in the 21st century. First developed in the 1700's Somers Town has been a focal point of London's rapidly shifting social landscape ever since. It is a repository of memories, a testament to the movement of people both from within Britain and abroad; it has been a stopping point for migrants shifted through the centuries by industrial and agrarian revolutions, post-colonialism and general turmoil in the wider world. Today the area is an important feature of London's geography, a working class neighborhood bounded by Kings Cross, Euston and Mornington Crescent Stations. As plans for the redevelopment of Kings Cross go ahead, the neighborhood will see rapid change. This has been an important impetus for Jason Wilde's documentation of the area.

Jason Wilde grew up in Somers Town. After leaving London in his early twenties, he lived in Australia for five years. When he returned to England, he began a lengthy documentation of Somers Town, partly in reaction to press portrayal of the inner city: 'serious journalism is rarely interested in places like Somers town. Newsworthy incidents cause journalists to go through the motions and look for failure, deprivation and squalor. To many journalists Somers Town is inner city and inner city generally means poor reporting and stereotyping'.

The photographs Wilde has made of the children of Somers Town show them at school, at home and against the stern backgrounds of municipal architecture. They pose confidently, if at times a little querulously for the camera. Self-contained and self-possessed, they are the collaborators in the act of photography rather than the subjects. A girl in a red jacket stands in front of the huge backdrop of a playground mural - behind her, the history of Somers Town is spread out, and haywains, brick kilns, the gentry and the poor merge together in some kind of jumbled history. A girl in a long dress sits on a striped sofa while a flight of geese soar above her head. The school presents its familiar and imperturbable face, and in it Jason Wilde has photographed small items of institutionalism - a box of file cards, a stack of trays, a row of labeled pegs. He has caught these children at a moment of transition and together they have become part of the small dramas of city life.

# Silly Arse Broke It

- 2015 - Photomonitor
- 2015 - Athens Photo Festival, Shortlisted
- 2104 - Guernsey Photography Festival
- 2014 - Creative Review Blog
- 2014 - Doc Photo Magazine
- 2014 - aCurator / June



## Synopsis

The last thirty years has seen globalisation, mass immigration and economic upheaval transform societies across the planet on a scale and speed that is unique in modern history. Built in the 1950s, the Clarence Way council estate has been one of many focal points of this rapidly shifting social landscape. Located a few minutes' walk north from Camden Town underground station in London, the six orange brick-blocks that make up the estate, house 1297 people (2011 census) in 354 units.

I have lived here since 1997, and in that time I have witnessed the estate become 'home' to people from within Britain and abroad who have been affected by a variety of diverse global events and circumstances. In an attempt to build a multi-layered and nuanced project around this constantly changing community, in 2003, I started collecting and photographing handwritten notes that I found discarded on the estate.

On one level, these salvaged texts are simple records of the everyday; they function to remind, instruct, organise and explain. They tell of journeys planned and taken, and list items to purchase and food to take away. Some make grand political and philosophical statements while others are simply mysterious.

Using a digital workflow the photographs of these once-private texts were layered over photographs of bricks, creating unique still-life montages that invite the viewer to contemplate a small inner-city community that is a microcosm for the social flux and cultural (dis)integration that characterises 21st century Britain.

# Knocking Dollies Out Of Bed



- 2015, Encontros Da Imagem International Photography Festival, Portugal
- 2010, KTHC, London. Interim Show
- 2010, Arts Council England funding

## Synopsis

My former primary school, St Mary & St Pancras, was attended by my nan, my mum and my sisters. The school was recently rebuilt on the same site as the old school in a ward called Somers Town in the London Borough of Camden. I was a pupil there in the early 1970s when the ward was made up of 19 council estates, 13 pubs, 4 primary schools, two secondary schools, a few small shops and cafes and not much else.

The population was almost all white and working class and apart from baptisms, weddings and funerals, it was a predominantly secular neighbourhood. I grew up in this very strong and historically bonded community with traditional social structures and a set of relatively straightforward and shared narratives.

These social structures and rites of passage have been eroded by the rapid social and technological changes of the last three decades and it could be argued that without them young people are struggling to occupy a meaningful place within society. We build our identities on the stories that we tell and on the stories that we are told.

By carefully arranging two different sets of images, Knocking Dollies Out Of Bed sets out to provide the time and space for the viewer to reflect on the mixed expectations of culture and on a confusing set of narratives that society compels our children to take part in.

# Estuary English

## Working Title



### Synopsis

The Thames Estuary is the estuary in which the River Thames meets the waters of the North Sea in the south-east of England. The Greater Thames Estuary covers over 800 nautical miles and is one of the largest of 170 such inlets on the coast of Britain. It constitutes a major shipping route for large oil tankers, container ships, bulk carriers and ferries entering the estuary for the Port of London and the Medway Ports of Sheerness, Chatham and Thamesport.

The estuary is bordered on its north bank by the county of Essex and on its south bank by the county of Kent. These low-lying lands are characterised by the presence of mudflats, low-lying open beaches, salt marshes and many small coastal villages. Where higher land reaches the coast there are a number of larger settlements.

The limits of the estuary have been defined in several ways but for the purposes of this project I'm using the a line drawn from the port of Harwich in Essex down to North Foreland in Kent as the eastern boundary while the western boundary is defined by the stretch of water between Gravesend and Tilbury.

I have a rough idea of where I want to take the work but as yet no definite project outline. The plan is to keep tripping and shooting along the shoreline and to let the work and ideas develop. My starting idea comes from a sentence in Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' where he describes the estuary as the launching place of England's great ships of exploration and colonization and in ancient times the site of colonization of the British isles by the Roman Empire.

# How To Keep Mr Gounders Tea Hot In Cold Weather And Other Firm Beliefs



*'How to Keep My Grounder's Tea Hot In Cold Weather'* is a series of still-life montages made with a photograph of a note layered over the same photograph of a 'Camden' sky. The photographed notes in 'How to Keep My Grounder's Tea Hot In Cold Weather' were all found in the London Borough of Camden.

# Sweet Fanny Adams Working Title

This is a very new project that focuses on the London Borough of Camden.....



# Camden Folks Tales

'*Camden Folks Tales*' is the umbrella name for three different still-life montage projects made in the London Borough of Camden:

- Vera & John
- Silly Arse Broke It
- How To Keep Mr Gounders Tea Hot In Cold Weather



# The Never Never

'*The Never Never*' is the umbrella name for a series of projects that are connected through their focus on England's social housing. The Never Never is a multi-genre study, started in 2003, that continues to expand and develop.

- Knocking Dollies Out Of Bed
- I'll Kill All Your Fish
- Guerns!
- Vera & John
- Silly Arse Broke It

