

‘Working Lives’ by John Darwell

This Manchester issue of *Occupational Medicine* features a selection of photographs by John Darwell. ‘Working Lives’ was commissioned in 1986 by Stockport Museums and Gallery Service as part of ‘British Industry Year.’ John’s aim was to look at the clothing industries around the Stockport area, historically famous as a centre of the hatting industry, but also other traditional industries such as leather production and clog making.

‘Looking back on these images from a gap of almost 20 years it seems impossible to imagine such working conditions today; in fact one of the locations is now a museum! As society has changed so have people’s workplaces, and interestingly, their physicality. It would be fascinating for me as explorer and documentor to be offered the opportunity to revisit these locations to see what has changed over the intervening period, but perhaps what would be of even more interest would be to see what hasn’t.’

John Darwell is an independent photographer working with museums and galleries on projects that reflect his interest in social and industrial change and his concern for the environment. He is a lecturer and researcher on the BA Hons Photography course at the Cumbria Institute of the Arts.

His work has been exhibited in London, Amsterdam, the USA, Mexico, South America and the Canary Islands, and has featured in collections including the National Museum of Photography Film and Television, Bradford, the Victoria & Albert Museum, London and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

His past projects include ‘The Big Ditch’ on the Manchester Ship Canal, ‘Regeneration’ on the demise of the steel industry in Sheffield, ‘Scratching the Surface’ on the quarries of the English Lake District, plus a trilogy of projects based at locations that have become notorious due to their nuclear connections, including Los Alamos, the Trinity Site, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Three Mile Island, Sellafield and Chernobyl. He has a forthcoming exhibition and book titled ‘Dark Days’ documenting the impact of foot and mouth disease around his home in north Cumbria and later this year his book ‘A Black Dog Came Calling’ will be published. This is an allegorical ‘journey’ through the process of depression and is being produced as part of John’s practice led PhD research into the depiction of depression through contemporary photography.

For further information and to view images from all John’s projects please visit his website at www.johndarwell.com. The book of ‘Working Lives’ is available from Stockport Museums Service .



Lunchtime: clog makers. The dinner plate is the photographer’s! (Reproduced with permission from ‘Working Lives’ by John Darwell.)