

## Wandsworth, My life, My world

I showed my back to the common as I turned down Belleville toward Northcote road. It was night – somewhere between very late and very early – and the orange glow from the streetlamps shimmered in anticipation of dawn. Silence radiated from road, interrupted occasionally by the distant rumble of freight trains and the unmistakably urban echo of railway signals spreading them in all directions away from Clapham Junction. These were the nights I loved, the ones with character, the ones with a cold that seeps insidiously into collars and a violent wind that strokes along the surface of an exposed face. I had left my friends at a club in central London. Leaving at one is a waste of five quid, my friend said to me as I queued for my coat. But I don't like clubs: for me, to be outside is the greatest pleasure, alone, immersed in the organic glow of midnight high-streets with the neon zig-zags of central London nightlife ringing softly into my ears from the near past.

In the veil of night Northcote road developed a kind of reflective humility. The overhanging signs of young mothers' boutiques were no more immune to the smothering frost than the grubby window of the one remaining chippy. Affluence seemed to sink down into the middle of the road as the wet cold of Wandsworth winter glittered on the tarmac and winked in the windows of darkened gift shops. I have always felt that there is something deeply personal to be found wandering the deserted streets of densely populated areas; a deliciously intangible feeling of loneliness and community. This night was no different. As I walked past Bennerly, Mallinson, Cairns, I thought of the thousands of people who were asleep and silent in their darkened rooms. I thought of their breathing and how the breath of the sleeping gives life to our night-time city. I saw the gentle exhalations of all Wandsworth's inhabitants in the orange haze of the streetlamps and I felt their warmth through the piercing cold – my closeness to them made me feel safe.

The whole road appeared to sigh as I huddled down toward the train station, and as Northcote road turned into St John's, and wine bars made way for charity shops, I thought how much I love this place; the way the detritus of suburban nightlife rolls drunkenly about your feet, the way the frost dresses decay in silver, the way we are all cold and lost, together and alone.