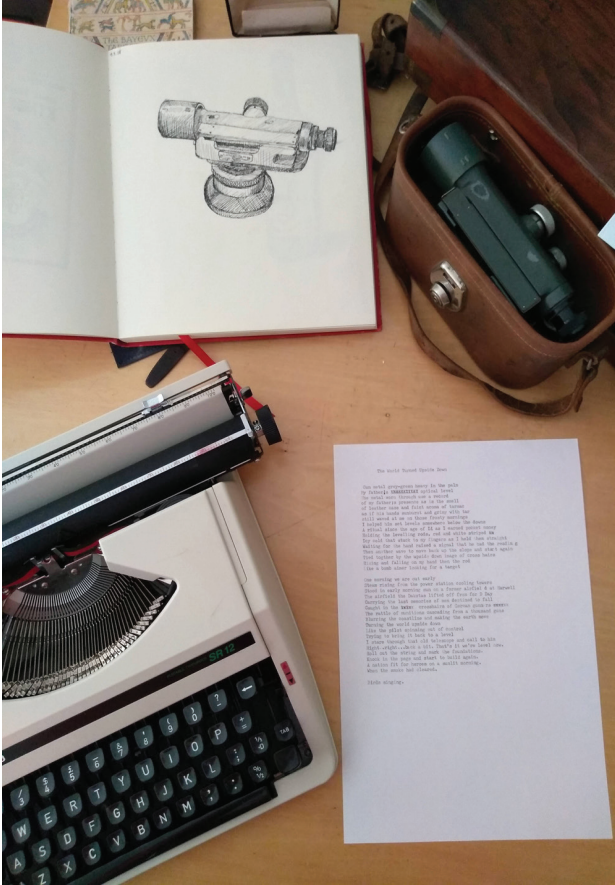


MY FATHER'S THINGS



**MY FATHER'S THINGS**

**SHAUN BELCHER**

SHAUN BELCHER

**DEDICATED TO**

**Ivo Charles Belcher 1932 -2004**

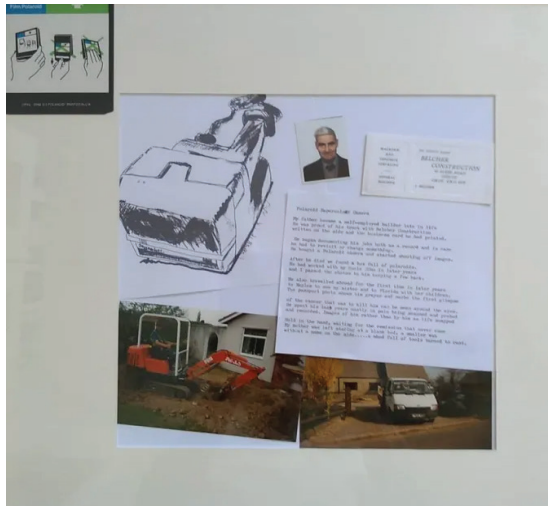
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## MY FATHER'S THINGS

A series of illustrated poems titled 'My Father's Things' created in Summer 2019 for a show called Castle Ruins III at the King Billy pub Sneinton, Nottingham. The exhibited works included ephemera related to the objects. The whole sequence are the first time I had attempted to deal in writing with the loss of my father aged 72 to pancreatic cancer in 2004. My mother then passed away from Carcinoid Cancer in 2012.

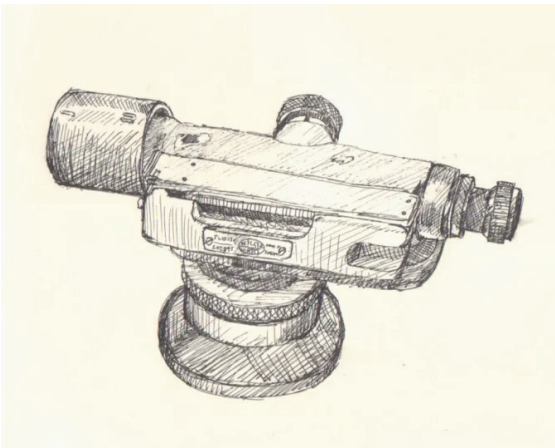
I was influenced by my reading of Richard Ford and Blake Morrison's memoirs of parents.

I produced the original drawings and wrote poems during a period of crisis in my relationship with my wife who was suffering from late stage alcoholism. She passed away in 2020.



## The Optical Level

Gun metal grey-green, heavy in the palm  
My father's optical level  
The metal worn through use, a record  
of my father's presence as is the smell  
of leather case and faint aroma of tarmac  
as if his hands sunburnt and grimy with tar  
still waved at me on those frosty mornings  
I helped him set levels somewhere below the downs.  
A ritual since the age of 14 as I earned pocket money  
holding the levelling rods, red and white striped  
icy cold that stuck to my fingers as I held them straight  
waiting for the hand raised, a signal that he had the reading.  
Then another wave to move back up the slope and start again  
tied together by the upside down image of cross hairs  
rising and falling on my hand then the rod  
like a bomb aimer looking for a target



## MY FATHER'S THINGS

One morning we are out early.  
Steam rising from the power station cooling towers.  
Stood in early morning sun on a former airfield at Harwell.  
The airfield the Dakotas lifted off from before dawn on D-Day.  
Carrying the last memories of men destined to fall  
caught in the cross hairs of German gunners.  
The rattle of munitions cascading from a thousand guns  
blurring the coastline and making the earth move.  
Turning the world upside down.  
Like the poor pilot spinning out of control  
trying to bring things back to a level.  
I stare through that old telescope and call to him.  
Right, right..back a bit.  
That's it we're level now.  
Roll out the string and mark the foundations.  
Knock in the pegs and start to build again.  
A nation fit for heroes on a sunlit morning  
when the smoke had cleared.  
We heard birds singing.

## **My Father's Watch**

A gold Limit Silhouette watch leather strap hardly worn  
A dress watch for a man who never dressed always working  
Most times he didn't carry a watch as it would be get damaged  
or snagged whilst working..too dangerous...

A man who cheated death twice..first a burst duodenal ulcer  
I remember him being taken in the ambulance  
It was touch and go. The Radcliffe saved him..the surgeon  
told him later he found carrots before cutting him to save him.  
Convalescence in Didcot Hospital..now housing..long gone

Later a wall collapsed on him he was two feet away from death  
Was catapulted out of the way just in time..battered and bruised  
He joked about it later..even the Lotus Elan that smashed into him  
Or the spinning car in the rainstorm that missed him and Uncle John

Neither made a dent but then his luck ran out at 70  
A soreness in his stomach was scanned..revealed pancreatic cancer  
Too advanced for surgery..he grew greyer and weaker..could no longer  
Get into the garden..chemo making him vomit black bile  
He died in the extension we built in that last year defying the odds  
to the end..he died on a bed in that building...almost perfect  
like that watch stopped at 9.05 but hardly used

He died at 7.10 a.m.

The time he left for work every morning rain or shine  
Kept perfect time until the end.

MY FATHER'S THINGS



**Butlin's Pwllheli 1956**

A small silver and pink enamel badge  
showing a welsh woman in traditional dress  
and the words Pwllheli 1956  
all that remains of my father's holiday  
as a 24-year-old farm labourer  
travelling with mates by steam train  
to North Wales .

Years later he spoke of it fondly  
as a brief respite from rationing and post-war austerity  
The camp was originally built by Butlin for the Admiralty  
like so many other camps, Butlins was founded on war camps.  
Some even housed prisoners-of-war; Pwllheli was training.  
It was the second time he had strayed beyond the Thames Valley.  
The world was opening up. My mother was three years away.

In the darkness below the stairs years later I found  
a cracked copy of Rock Around the Clock, Bill Haley  
Amongst his treasured 78s and his record player.  
That and Doris Day and Frankie Laine were the soundtrack to 1956.  
Across the land belts were being loosened, petticoats swirled

as the first post-war generation started to dance  
beneath bikini clouds.



MY FATHER'S THINGS



### **North Berks Premiere Division Medal 1956-57**

Football was something I grew up with.

From the tins of dubbin to the boots caked in mud on the step.

My father played for Long Wittenham into his thirties.

Before TV the radio commentaries would be heard throughout the house.

My earliest memory was my father jumping up and down as England won the world cup in 1966. He rented a TV for it.

Years later we would both sit in the kitchen listening around a small transistor radio. Poland 1975 I remember especially. Always the chat was around how the Arsenal were doing (usually badly) .

Then the moments of pure joy. Charlie George scoring at Wembley.

Moments I shared with him.

Even when I living in Edinburgh the chat came back to footie.

Gazza's goal in Euro 96 against the Scots. Laughter.

I have a small tin with his medals in.

A photograph of him at Reading's ground for the North Berks Cup Final 1956.

They lost but it doesn't matter.

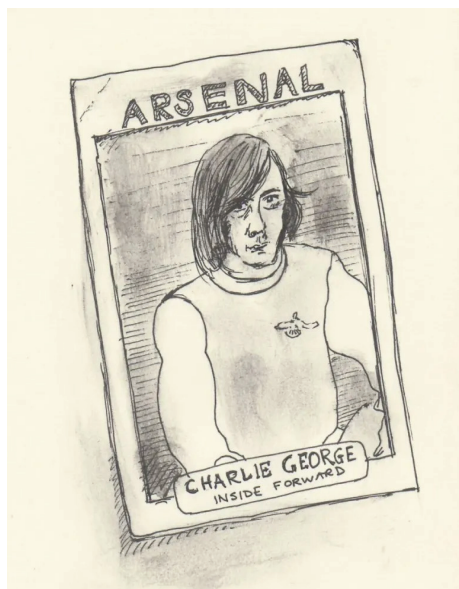
Images of him fit and happy.

Before the decline.

The last match.

Then the long walk down the tunnel. Game over.

MY FATHER'S THINGS



### **Polaroid Supercolour Camera**

My father became a self-employed builder late in life  
He was proud of his truck with Belcher Construction written on the side and the business card he had printed.

He began documenting his jobs both as a record and in case he had to revisit or change something.  
He bought a Polaroid camera and started shooting off images.

After he died we found a box full of polaroids.  
He had worked with my Uncle John in later years  
and I passed the photos to him keeping a few back.

He also travelled abroad for the first time in later years  
to Naples to see my sister and to Florida with her children.  
The passport photo shows him greyer and maybe the first glimpse

of the cancer that was to kill him can be seen around the eyes.  
He spent his last years mostly in pain being scanned and probed and recorded.  
Images of him rather than by him as life snapped.

Held in the hand, waiting for the remission that never came  
My mother was left staring at a blank bed,  
A smaller van without a name on the side.

A shed full of tools turning to rust

MY FATHER'S THINGS



Rabone Chesterman Teak Level

A small hand held level for small jobs

I remember my father using it

It has the Rabone Chesterman logo on

which with three triangles signified Hockley Abbey

from the original Birmingham firm

that had existed since 1871

Later it amalgamated with Sheffield firm Chesterman

the inventor of the automatic rewind tape measure

Rabone was an enthusiastic industrial moderniser

introducing steam machinery in the face of opposition

Their tools are robust and long-lasting

But like all things now swallowed up by Stanley tools

This level is pre all that, pre offshore, downsize

and seven hundred levels of capitalist re-selling.

It is worn through use, the three spires dulled with age

But still capable in the right light of sparkling

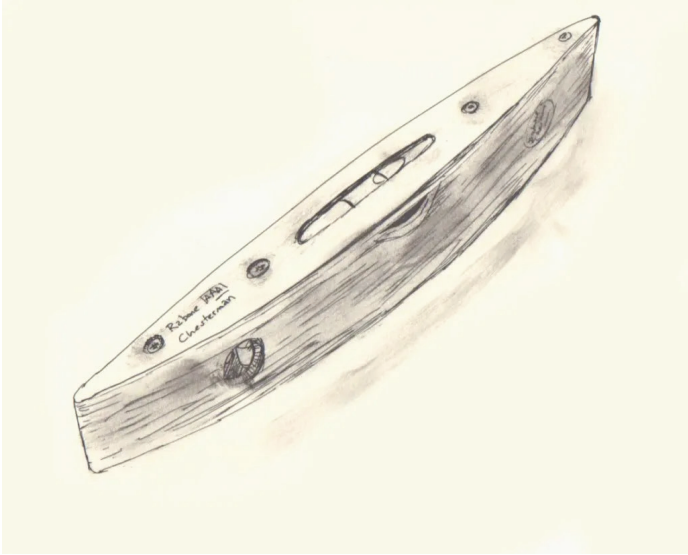
a reminder of older ways,

the combination of church and provincial hard work

that laid the foundations

Before the bubble stopped shaking.

MY FATHER'S THINGS



SHAUN BELCHER



**GRASS CLOUDS: POEMS 2002-22**

MY FATHER'S THINGS is also available as part of  
**GRASS CLOUDS: Collected POEMS 2002-2022**

Available to download at  
<https://shaunbelcher.com/writing/>



MY FATHER'S THINGS



Ivo , Maureen, Shaun and Janice.

The Belcher family at Sunny Lees farm near North Moreton  
Berkshire about 1965.