



05.02.04 Chinese Cockle Pickers drown in Morecambe Bay

The tides ebb away from the Liverpool coastline into the Irish sea, draining far back into the dark Atlantic deep. Morecombe Bay empties out. It becomes a horizonless, walkable patchwork of sandbanks and mudflats.

The Chinese workers had been dropped off here to 'dig fish' at 3.00PM — to rake the mud to gather cockles, to bundle them up for the restaurant trade, for the seafood eateries of Liverpool, London, Paris.

From the Bay's edge, they worked their way in, scraping and scratching through the cockle beds, harvesting shellfish.

The dark descended quickly. The tides began to creep back as if by stealth, rolling in quietly mashing up the sandbanks, turning them liquid under the cocklers' feet. All round the rising waters close in. The tide sweeps in from its Atlantic lair, carrying in the Irish sea, filling the bay to the brim.

Some scrambled their mobiles to snatch a word with their families in faraway Fujian, South China. 'The sea is gobbling us up.'

It was less easy to call for help from the nearby Rescue Services. In what lingo? Who translates?

They were here without permission, without permits or visas, without passports, or IDs. Call them what you will: 'illegals, clandestini, sans papiers, dodgers, scammers, migrants, seasonals, casuals?'

Or casualties.

The network of canals, ducts, ridges in Morecambe add up to a vast suction drainage system.

A diurnal rhythm: 'Fill to the top. Empty to the lees'.

A deadly hydraulics, a day in the global labour mega-circulatory.

From 'China Sutras'
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