

**Stephen Robertson**

**Peckham 1969—1991**

Of eighteen sixty vintage, the house is flat  
in face, no sign of the deep bay windows that  
adorn most later London terraced fronts.  
One of a block of four, it had been once—  
but they had filled the gap to make a join  
with the neighbouring block, leaving a row of nine.

In nineteen sixty nine the house was lit  
by gas, with open fires the only heat.  
The lino on the hall floor had been laid  
in nineteen thirty three, the newsprint said.  
The previous occupant, known as Mister Gray,  
(easier than his proper name of Gouriet)  
had come as a child sixty-odd years before  
(well before the start of the first world war).

Fifty yards across the park at the back  
a low embankment carries the railway track.  
(Down the slope to the end of the street and right,  
the line bridges over the road.) Sometimes at night,  
a heavy goods train rattles the windows and plates  
on the shelves. Later, the local rumour states  
that the train is carrying nuclear waste; at the time  
it is just the timing that disturbs. The line  
mostly carries suburban trains; more rarely,  
carriages decked in the blue and gold livery  
of the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits  
et des Grands Express Européens pass by.

In the end, it was the railway  
that contrived to send us on our way.  
British Rail announced that it would sink  
a hole to build the Channel Tunnel link.  
A monstrous hole, quite big enough to eat  
the park and all the houses down the street.

We joined the local protest, but to small  
effect. At last we felt we had to call  
a halt to worry, and agreed to sell  
for demolition, move to Camberwell.  
(Two weeks later, British Rail's plans  
were scrapped and redesigned. The house still stands.)