ZINE / 1989-1991



THE FURNACE HYMNAL, NOS. 1-3

Anonymous (the night shift)

APOCALYPSE CULT

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EDITORIAL, NO. 1

This is not from the union and it is not from management. It is from the night shift, who have the time.

You have noticed that nobody paints anything any more. You have noticed that when a man retires they do not replace him, they thank him. You have noticed the visitors in clean helmets who walk about with a clipboard and do not ask you anything, because what they are counting is not you.

We have noticed too. We are not going to tell you what to do about it, because we do not know. We are going to write it down, so that later, when they say nobody could have seen it coming, there is a piece of paper that says we did.

Take one. Leave one for the day shift. They need it more.

HYMN FOR THE THIRD SHIFT

To be sung quietly, to any tune you remember.

O thou who made the iron run
And set the night against the sun,
Look down on those who clock at ten
And count us, if thou count'st, as men.

The furnace is a patient beast,
It asks for coke, it asks for least,
It asks no pension and no pay.
Lord, we are cheaper every day.

They came with cameras to the gate,
They said the plant was truly great,
They photographed the crane, the flame.
They did not write down any name.

When the last cast is poured and cold
And all the scrap is weighed and sold,
Remember, thou who made'st the ore,
That somebody was here before.

WHAT THEY WILL KEEP

We have been asked what will happen to the site. Nobody has told us, so we have worked it out.

They will keep the gates. The gates are the part that photographs well. They will sandblast them and put a plaque on the left-hand pillar, and the plaque will have a date on it and the word heritage.

They will keep one chimney. Not ours. The tall one by the river, because you can see it from the road. They will put a light at the bottom pointing up.

They will keep the office block, because it has a clock on it, and the clock will be mended, which it has not been in our time.

They will not keep the rolling mill, the coke ovens, the canteen, the first aid room, the bicycle shed or the wall where the lads from the forties cut their initials. These do not photograph well.

They will build houses where the stockyard was. The streets will be named after things that were here. There will be a Furnace Close and a Bessemer Way. Nobody who lives there will know what the words mean, and it will not matter, because they will be nice houses, and somebody ought to live somewhere.

We are not bitter about the houses. We would only like it noted that we said so.

NOTICE

The following have been observed on site and should be reported to nobody.

- A man in a suit measuring the canteen.
- A second man in a suit measuring the first.
- The removal of the suggestion box.
- The return of the suggestion box, locked.
- A new sign reading OUR PEOPLE ARE OUR GREATEST ASSET, fixed over the place where the old sign said how many days since the last accident.

Staff are reminded that assets are things you sell.

LAST PAGE, NO. 3

There will not be a number four. This is not because they have stopped us. Nobody has ever tried to stop us, which tells you what they thought we were worth. It is because we have said it.

We wanted to put down that this was a place. That is all. It was hot and loud and it took fingers and it took lungs and we would not wish it on our children, and it was a place, and when you were in it you knew what time it was and what you were for.

They will tell you afterwards that it was nobody's fault. That is nearly true. It was nobody's fault in the way that weather is nobody's fault. But somebody looked at the forecast and bought an umbrella, and it was not us.

Turn the light off when you go. Force of habit. It will still be on the bill.

ABOUT THIS TEXT

TITLE	The Furnace Hymnal, Nos. 1-3
AUTHOR	Anonymous (the night shift)
DATE	1989-1991
TYPE	Zine
PUBLISHER	Self-published, Garrow Mills
EXTENT	Three issues of 8, 8 and 12 pages, photocopied and stapled
LANGUAGE	English
SOURCE	Selections transcribed from the only complete set known, lent by a former crane driver. Spelling and line breaks follow the originals.

The Furnace Hymnal appeared three times between the winter of 1989 and the spring of 1991. It was typed on an office machine, copied after hours on the plant's own photocopier and left in small stacks in the canteen and the locker rooms of the Garrow Mills works. Nobody signed it. The print run, to judge from the recollections of those who read it, was never more than a hundred. Garrow Mills is the name the writers gave their town, and it appears on no map we have found.

It is a hymnal in earnest. The writers took the forms they had grown up with, the chapel hymn, the safety notice and the union circular, and used them to say what no official channel would carry: that the plant was going to close, that everyone knew, and that the knowledge was being managed. The tone moves between grief and a very dry comedy, often inside one line.

The works shut eleven months after the third issue. The prediction in "What They Will Keep" proved accurate in every particular.

We present five pieces, about a third of the whole. They are discussed in the essay Rust Belt Metaphysics.

COLOPHON

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