

# Seisin: Guest Soaps for Trespassers

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It is lockdown and I'm as landlocked as the common frogs and wildfowl, over-wintering on this amputated island of ghost fish and ghost trains; Brexit's grey-areas are lingering in today's newsprint like the chain-smoking narrowboats, puffing hot fumes into my freezing lungs as I run through the marshes, ploughing an infinity-symbol-poke-tattoo loop with my *Asics* sneakers which are named after clouds. Sea shanties are trending on *TikTok*.

These lockdown days, I'm looking longer at the local; my running routes are paced by the wheezy beat of swan wings flying above. My soles pump rhythmic CPR compressions on mud that was once lammas land; commons which ordinary people had rights to use for things like livestock grazing, twig collection, or the cutting of turf for fuel. Now we forage for freedom, dispensed daily by the state... rebranded Power Hour by the latest influencer's tome. *Walthamstow Wetlands* are a *Site of Special Scientific Interest*. PhD-grade protection from the developer vultures pecking over Stratford. *Tufted Ducks, Great Crested Grebe, Gadwalls, Shelducks, Peregrine Falcons, Marsh-Marigolds, Greylag Geese, Pochards, Grey Herons, Cormorants* and *Comma Butterflies* punctuate public rights of way over *Thames Water's* private assets, whose largest shareholders are a Canadian pensions group and investment companies in Abu Dhabi, Kuwait and China.

*How local am I?*

I can't see them, but far up above me, Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos fly a little higher, in a battle for supremacy over the cosmos via *SpaceX* and *Blue Origin*. "How strange. Well, back to work...", Elon tweets as he becomes the World's richest person. Reverse vertigo...I'm spinning on my axis; drunkenly inhaling the malty mysteries of the new brewery quarter...*Truman, Signature, Wildcard* and *EXALE*. The wellness podcast I'm listening to rebrands breathing as 'breath-work' - an economic reification of the space in my bronchioles as I vape airwaves tinged caffeine-y by Nitro Cold-brew berries steeped in the estate's coffee brands, *Minor Figures* and *Square Mile*. The latter refers to the City of London banking district, where *Londinium* was established around AD 43. A square foot there is in the global most expensive top-10. The Romans derived units of measurements from military marching, and the Anglo-Saxons used the distance from the tip of King Henry I's nose to the end of his outstretched thumbs-up. A yard. *This is my yard*.

Back on asphalt, I ramble *NIMBY*-ly through *Uplands Business Park*, the industrial estate where my running route ends. It is right across the road from my home, and it's become my pandemic habitat. Snooping around with the daytime-foxes (stand still and they can't see you), I am trying to find out what goes on inside the warehouse units on this grey and pleasant land. I am slaloming through hordes of *Hermes* parcel-couriers who are cramming *ASOS* into their *Priuses* for zero hours minimum returns. Their kids wait in the backseat sometimes, on weekends, when the boss isn't around. This gig economy is moving fast, but a rock band tour bus in the car-park has had its gigs cancelled; headlight-eyes looking as impatient as the perfectly-preserved woolly mammoth that's pinging my newsfeed, breaching Siberian permafrost with ancient strains of bacteria threatening to quit the cryosphere and join *Covid-19* in Unit 18 (a local soap factory, which secretes vats of gel sanitiser and janitor supplies for *Sechelle.com*).

I read an article about how decades of over-sanitised living have spiked autoimmune disorders in rich countries, making us more prone to allergies and infections and therefore more likely to buy soap. The doctor interviewed in the article advocates "not just picking your nose, but picking your nose and eating it". Puerile but prudent, because today I am making my own dirty joke; an artisan competitor to the *Smiffy's* prank-soap which emits muddy sludge as you wash. The more you wash the more you need to wash...a perfect business model for economic ironists. The provenance of my ingredients is key to their value. The soaps I am making are embedded with grit and soil from the Uplands estate. Nestled by the reservoirs, small and large businesses of every kind flourish here...a whirr of *EFI Nozomi C18000* single-pass LED corrugated printers, the simmer of vegan ready-meal subscription services, and a silent events company waiting indefinitely for *Field Day* festival to boom through the former *BOC* gasworks upstream. It's exciting. A place where people actually make stuff. I wrestle with the lusty guilt of creative compulsion; an artist's desire to make, make, make for a world already full of it.

This local business park is a 'creative hub', where artists and furniture fabricators carve out livings alongside bookbinders, funeral directors and a *Cash & Carry*. *Waltham Forest Council* are doing their best to support an ecosystem of independents. It's the place to be, local estate agents proclaim - encouraging you to grab a piece of it while you can. *Shiba Inus* and *Frenchies* paws for selfies on social media, giving dog-friendly apartments the mud-on-marble seal of approval.

The dirt I have collected for you probably isn't from here anyway, it's likely from somewhere that isn't 'the place to be'; imported from quarries via C&S builders' merchants on Blackhorse Lane, or landscaped by a property management company, high on service charges. This rubble is local the way the *Blackhorse Mills* are; the *Legal & General* owned luxury rental apartment blocks overhead, with their rooftop swimming pool and shuffleboard common room. A new form of commons (for the urban elite) is befitting of the post-geographical terrain of 2021, when a few companies have larger turnovers than countries, and lobby for greater influence.

A dense forest of *Teak*, *Poplar*, *Burr*, *American Walnut*, *Zebrano Microberlinia Brazzavillensis*, *Red Gum* and *Alpi Macassar Ebony* is stacked in wafer-thin slices at *Exotic Veneer Ltd*. *Capital Granite* purveys polished geology to match. The damp, matte tarmac of the road surface tarnishes my fingernails, as I scrape rubble from Uplands into a blue plastic bag from Jan's convenience store, like a poacher with geophagia (earth-eater) picking up something for supper. The estate, and these clods of tarmac in my fist, are owned by *BlackRock UK*, a branch of the global asset management behemoth *BlackRock* - the international financial heavyweight that's been scrutinised for allegedly taking advantage of its close ties with the *US Federal Reserve System* during the coronavirus pandemic response efforts. *BlackRock* recently handed Ex-Chancellor George Osborne a £650,000 contract for giving 'advice' one day a week. Good business sense...riddled with conflict of interest concerns?

Since the pandemic struck, my feelings about this 'place' have been as mixed as my feelings about the *Iron Bru* flavoured beer available at *EXALE's* taproom, and the tangy dark rye bread from the *German Deli*. It's so tempting, and the closest I will get to adventure this year, but a bit alien. It's a place where cinematic gangster scene tropes cohabit with luxury Gelateria chillers, and beam-me-up new-builds appear rapidly like UFOs; named after mills to evoke Britain's industrial past, the residents wield *WiFi* instead of the weaving shuttles of the West Yorkshire mills that my Nana worked in, when capitalism was still a young lass. She would approve of the bespoke denim factory across the street in *Blackhorse Ateliers*, perhaps. It promises the gourmet burger equivalent of jeans... local and handmade... great (for those who can afford them). Faster fashion's on offer in Unit 15a where *Blue Inc's* head office pedals the cheap stuff online - workwear for the furloughed, feeding Britain's insatiable thirst for a clothing industry that produces 10% of global carbon dioxide emissions and 1.5 trillion litres of water annually.

Percussive raindrops tap the Lockwood Reservoir on the horizon, as it begins to pour, and I am hurriedly cramming as much of the surface of this industrial estate into my pockets as I can, performing a slapstick ceremony about the absurdity of owning land, or water, or air, at all. Guy Shrubsole explains in *Who Owns England?* that "land is a scarce resource – as Mark Twain put it, 'they aren't making it any more' ...ownership of it often confers wealth, power and influence". His book exposes how the vast majority of the country is owned by hereditary aristocrats appointed by William the Conqueror, as well as international investors and offshore companies. Who owns the land determines what we eat, how we live and what we breathe.

I am scratching about in the earth of the industrial estate, like a pigeon.

Picking the best bits for you.....

A subversive bouquet of flowers?

I will embalm it alive, in a perfect bubble of *Certified RSPO Sustainable (SP-SG)* soap suds.

A mycological microcosm, which you're invited to slide over your body.

An exfoliating guest-soap for tolerated trespassers who don't care much for bylaws.

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This guest soap I have made for you is enriched with the symbolic seisin of soil stolen from the (global) *BlackRock* on my (local) Blackhorse Road, via a flurry of *YouTube* tutorials made by prosumer eco-soap enthusiasts eager for a side-order of physicality with their screen-time. It is as local as your bellybutton and as global as the off-Earth tax-heavens bubbling above; a *glocal* gesture of care, trust and risk, in response to an uncertain world.

*Seisin: Guest Soaps for Trespassers*, Louise Ashcroft, 2021

Text and soap embedded with stolen industrial estate surface. Use at your own risk