

# Hey, look at this!

**Neil Richardson** writes 12 articles about his own poetic work and what people, ideas and influences led him to write some of his poems. The series will last for the twelve months of 2010.

## **Ada Aurelia Hodgson Kaye, nee Vickers**

How can this child,  
this five year old,  
be my grandmother?

Holding her father's hand,  
and with a toy  
or play thing in her other hand,  
this innocent,  
this dreamer,  
became my mother's mother.

Enduring two world wars,  
a depression, (or two)  
with a shattered husband  
reeling from the trenches,  
and with a wounded child,

Ada Aurelia,  
You, more than anyone,  
glued me to reality  
as I threw my private world  
at all I saw and knew in Manchester  
as I pushed and grew,  
in the Kardomah,  
and the Central Ref  
and school, and girls, and fear, and hatred  
and defeat and

There you were,  
at 19 Horton Street,  
Close to the canal,  
to Jimmy Green Teeth,  
and yet  
so open and so free  
and so expansive  
and so full of vision.

It felt like you had always been there.  
And in some way, you had,  
though not in body,  
perhaps in spirit?

You are the firm standing,  
the launch pad,  
the spring board,  
and without you,  
none of all this life was possible.



My grandmother was a very important part of my young life. Because of the failing marriage between my parents, my father was often absent and, even worse, he was painted by my mother as a monster, and this created in me a fear of my father, opening up a gap in my support systems at home. Into this gap stepped my grandmother. Her house was only a few yards away from our house, and she spent most days with us, helping my mother with child care, washing, drying, ironing, cooking, cleaning and the emotional presence of my grandmother was vital to my own well-being. In some way, I would assess my grandmother's contribution to my early life as that of a second parent, supplementing my mother and replacing my father. I was, in fact, brought up by two women.

In my childhood I was unaware of just how poor we were. Children accept what they find and regard what they are accustomed to as normal. But in fact, my grandmother's father was in business as a publican, and so she must have been brought up in somewhat better-heeled circumstances to me. He managed several pubs, including, to my delight, The Morning Star pub in Shaw, Oldham, where his name is inscribed on the wall in a list of former publicans, from 1890-1899, just as mine is inscribed in the list of rectors of Greenford Magna! My great grandfather was called Thomas Vickers and his wife, Sarah Ann. Thomas Vickers died in 1900, in his 71st year, and so presumably was born in 1830. On 28th August, 1882 he married my great grandmother Sarah Ann Hodgson of Dewsbury, Yorkshire, at East Crompton Church, Shaw. I don't know how many children they had apart from Ada Aurelia Hodgson Vickers (pictured with her mother right) who was born on 16th February, 1886. This photograph must be dated about 1886.



My grandmother and her father were photographed outside one of his pubs, The Gardeners Arms, not sure where exactly, but in the Shaw and Oldham area.

In the photograph outside the Gardeners Arms, my grandmother appears to be aged about five, so it could be dated around 1891. Thomas Vickers is wearing a rather long beard and he stands holding the hand of his daughter in the doorway of the pub. The House appears to have living rooms upstairs where I suppose Thomas, Sarah and the family lived. I remember my grandmother telling me that her mother didn't like pub life and wanted to move the

family away from the influences which may be found in any pub when people have been drinking.

This rather scanty history cannot convey just how important my grandmother was to me. When my mother was ill or emotionally disturbed as she frequently was, Ada would be there, representing stability and normality, but also offering vision for my future. She saw beyond the poverty and reduced circumstances of our life then and pointed me to education, university, careers, ambitions, future successes and I feel still the motivation she gave me, which nobody else in the family was giving me, when it seemed I was destined to failure at the 11+, then failure at O level and failure at A level, then failure in life. My grandmother saw in me something which very few other people could see, and to her I am deeply grateful.

"You are the firm standing,  
the launch pad,  
the spring board,  
and without you,  
none of all this life was possible."