

## Between the Esplanade and the Seashore

by Lel Meleyal

In this place I love life. A tree canopy sheltering a neglected looking bench on a mossy path is where my wife and I watch the birds. The usual suspects turn up, blackbird and robin, starling and finches and the herring gulls always noisily demanding to be noticed. All give us moments of joy.

Every inch of the South Cliff Gardens is steeped in stories of love. I gather the stories told on uncountable numbers of memorial benches peppered along every path and nestled in nooks with stunning headland views.

The cliff-face paths were never designed to be a route from A to B but a meandering, romantic promenade. A place for Victorians to be seen in the new, fashionable spa resort of Scarborough. Olive and John walked the paths. Records are lost so we don't know much of their story. We know they promenaded together, loving Scarborough and each other, because they donated a bench saying so.

Not everyone in the gardens wants to be seen. How many illicit kisses and secret trysts have been shared in the thirteen pavilions and arbours? How many stories of forbidden romance are hidden in the fabric of the shelters dotted along the paths? Does the bench plaque of Glen and Roy for whom a shelter was where it all began, hint of such love perhaps?

George Beeforth loved roses so much he planted fourteen hundred of them. A century later, friends restored his Rose Garden, planting eleven thousand more. Romantica, Blessings and Good Tidings gift the vibrant, fragrant backdrop for those like Mary Beckett and her dog Folly who loved to walk among the blooms, and for Walter who proposed to his girl there.

In the Italian Garden parents missed are remembered on bench plaques as are young people tragically lost. We don't know 25-year-old Chris Green's story, but we know he is missed by his family who leave flowers for him on his bench. A place to pause and reflect perhaps about the preciousness of family and of life.

I stop at a bench with a brass plaque that always makes me smile.

'This Keighley man was quite amazing, made his brass in double glazing, a man of modesty and wit upon this cliff he loved to sit.'

A woman joins me. She is smiling too.

'It is one of my favourites' she tells me. 'I think I would have liked Mr John Wilson Balmer.'

Angela Grassham loved both the sea view and the scones at the Clock Café. Her bench is near the newly built children's playground. From it I hear the happy noise of children enjoying a birthday picnic shriek with delight as candles are blown out. Their unbridled joy sounds like love feels.

I chat with a woman on a mobility scooter, and she shares her story. Meera Singh loves what she calls the yellow brick road - the new accessible path which allows her to travel all the way from the clock tower to the Spa. In the gardens she feeds peanuts to the squirrels. 'They take them right out of my hand!' she says. She shares friendly nods with the other rebels who ignore the 'do not feed' notices. Meera has never seen a name like hers on any of the benches along the path. She has saved and left instructions. Her plaque will say 'Meera Singh from Bradford. She fed the squirrels.'

My wife and I will one day have a bench plaque. It will read 'Lel and Caf loved watching birds, and folk can make of that what they will...