

**Sit with us for a moment and remember:
Winter**

Thank you for joining me on this bench today.
We haven't got long.
I'm sitting here with you now.
I've always been here.
Watching over this place.
I've seen it change. Like the seasons.
I've seen the water ebb and flow.
I've seen the leaves come and go.
I've seen images of this place.
And I'd like to describe them to you.
I'd like you to imagine them with me.
Perhaps you could picture yourself here.
When they were taken. It is 60 years ago.
A Winter. In the 1960s. The lake is frozen.
And the clock is set at half past 12.
Some of the students have taken to the ice.
Four of them holding hands.
Skating towards you.
The blades leave lines upon the surface.
Churned up by the skaters that day.
In the distance a young woman looks at the camera.
And across the lake, under the arches.
A snowball fight is taking place.
On the grass slope opposite you there is snow.
People are watching. Waving across the ice.
To the people skating.
To the photographer standing in front of you.
Who is probably wearing ice skates too
And about to join her friends on the ice
Who are smiling at her
I want you to imagine someone.
There is a man who comes here.
He has visited this place before.
Walked around this lake.
Sat next to where you are now.
He arrived in England after an ocean journey
A winter in the 1960s.
The same time as people skated on this lake.
He had never known cold like this before.
He remembers his school days
When earth stood hard as iron.
It reminds him of rugby matches
Playing fields with frozen imprints of boot studs
Terrifying to rugby tackle on the abrasive ground.
They play rugby here too
And the boys skating on the frozen lake
Would have known the shock

Of sliding on frozen ground.
Clouds of breath rising
Like bruises on their skin.
Grazing the memory.
This man is looking at you now. He is smiling.
He rubs his hands together.
There is another image in the archive.
The same view. 10 years ago.
It is Winter. In 2010.
The clock is set at 10 minutes to two.
The lake is frozen again.
But this time there is no-one on the ice.
But there are footprints. Evidence of activity.
And signs of skating or skidding across the frozen lake.
Too big for birds.
Although they too have crash landed.
The footprints carry on across the other side.
Up the hill towards the university building.
To the steps beneath the clock tower.
As if students returned to their halls.
After a night of illicit ice skating.
Dancing to the light of their mobile phones.
In some places the ice is melting.
Frost on the grass is thawing in the morning sun.
There is green emerging around the trees.
Either side of the building opposite you.
Either side of the park benches opposite you.
The same trees in the photo from the 1960s.
The same trees standing there today.
The same trees who have seen the lake freeze.
A few times over the last century.
And those skaters on the ice.
When the lake turned solid.
Or the photographers who watched them skate.
Or who saw the footprints left behind.
And added that moment to the archive.
Were standing near where you are now.
Looking across the lake.
At those same trees.
At the clock tower.
At half past twelve
Or ten to two
Or whatever time it is now.
Marking time.
Marking moments.
Marking seasons.
Until the lake freezes over again.
There is a man who comes here.
He has visited before.
Walked around this lake.

Sat next to where you are now.
Later, he remembers working
On a market stall in town
Selling house and garden plants.
Every winter they sold Christmas trees
In an alleyway across from the stall
It was a channel for icy wind
Which would cool his hands and fingertips
Until they were full of pain.
Now he's lived here many years
And he comes here to sit and think and remember
Things and people that have gone.
Winter still means painful hands.
The ice churned up by skaters at your feet
Metal blades sing against the frozen surface.
For a moment. As the water turns to ice.
Time seems to stand still. Like a photograph.
Or a single frame of film.
Or the silence before the bell sounds.
Or you meet someone who may have been here before.
Where you are now.
Like the man with the painful hands.
Or the people in the photographs.
They look at the camera as if to say.
We have always been here.
Thank you for joining me on this bench today.
Sit with us for a moment and remember.