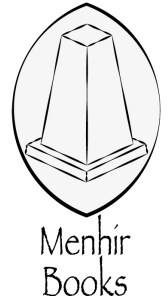


An Extract from:

# The Journal of Bran Ayton

By Michael Croft



## Day 17 - Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

*This is an extract from The Journal of Bran Ayton, a novel by Michael Croft. Find out more about The Journal of Bran Ayton by visiting [www.branayton.com](http://www.branayton.com) or by ordering a copy, emailing direct to [hello@branayton.com](mailto:hello@branayton.com) or through Waterstone's ([www.waterstones.com](http://www.waterstones.com)).*

*This extract is set in a cafe that also serves as a business incubator. The cafe is in a converted and redundant bank building in his home town of Elsternwick. He's waiting to meet his young friend Tess who's invited him to stay for the weekend. Essentially Bran is reflecting that no matter what changes come, people build on their inheritance. As Isaac Newton said, referring to Bernard of Chartres, 'we're standing on the shoulders of giants, however frail they may be.'*

### **Bran writes:**

I'm sitting in a cafe in North Bar, opposite St John's. It seems to be run by tattooed hipsters. The one who served me suggested lemon might spoil my earl grey. It is excellent without.

This cafe used to be a bank. It's part of a Georgian terrace stretching from the medieval North Bar gate to the marketplace. I think there were other buildings here before that. I imagine they were destroyed in Lilburne's siege.

They've kept the bank's motto over the fireplace:  
Viam prudentiae ostendit

I remember, the bank had a uniformed commissionaire. Mr Hetherington with his brass buttons and a black uniform. He was verger at St John's and had one arm and a limp.

Grandma called him, 'lame?'

We're not allowed to call anyone lame now.

We say 'disabled?'

I know from work, we have to take all 'reasonable and proportionate' steps to make buildings accessible, creating opportunities for people with disabilities. I've done the training. I wasn't convinced. I'm not sure the difference between 'able' and 'disable(ed)' is binary. Anyway, I wonder who really decides?

I'm not sure Mr Hetherington would've thought of himself as disabled.

He was 'able'. It's just that he had one arm and a limp. He was lame. It didn't matter.

'Lame' was descriptive not discriminatory.

Mr. Hetherington was in the war. He commanded respect.

Mr. Ormerod was the bank's manager when I was young. He lived not far from us. I remember his fantastic cream Rover 3.5 V8. A dream car. He had a bald head that twitched for no obvious reason. He'd hold it slightly on one side all the time, as if he had a permanent crick in his neck. He'd been something in the war too.

Mr Ormerod sang bass in the church choir. I sat across the chancel from him. His eyes seemed to pop out and almost explode as he sang. What with his eyes and twitching head, it was difficult not to laugh.

He was nice to me.

He took a belt to Simon.

There were those stories of how he'd meet all the new recruits and buy them a cup of tea and an iced bun. The girls used to say he'd just happen to squeeze past them in the stationery cupboard, even though he had a secretary. I seem to remember one girl telling me how he had her go round to his side of the desk and sit on his knee to take notes from him. I suppose it was just accepted back then.

My mind is wandering around the motto on the fireplace. It means 'Prudence Shows the Way'. I suppose the intended inference might be that prudence means 'caution' or 'care'. I hope it was more about making wise decisions, knowing the right thing to do. The bank's motto is really, 'Know the Right Thing to Do'.

I wonder if it was 'right' to turn the bank into a café? It's a far cry from Mr Hetherington's polished brass buttons.

There are posters on the wall about taking risks.

Dad always wanted me to take risks, to find courage and have an adventure.

I especially like these sayings on the posters:

'Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go.'

'In the end we only regret the chances we didn't take.'

I like this one from Mohammed Ali

‘He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life.’

Most of the tables are filled with people wearing headphones. I’ve no idea if they’ve read the posters.

No one speaks, at least not to anyone else in the cafe.

Grey haired men are hovering uncomfortably around the edges of the cafe in bright purple t-shirts. I notice, they have the word ‘mentor’ stamped across their backs. I half recognise one of them. I’m sure we were at school together.

The leaflet on the table tells me the café is a social enterprise and business incubator for digital entrepreneurs. I guess the people in the bright purple t-shirts are mentoring the hipster, digital entrepreneurs. Interesting!

I’m not sure how years spent wearing a grey suit, growing grey hair and working in a bank qualifies you as a mentor. I suppose it keeps them off the streets and does no harm, even if it creates no benefit.

It turns out a woman called Louise manages the cafe. She has a broad smile, over-sized glasses and a squint. I like her. She was neither digital hipster nor a grey-suited mentor in a purple t-shirt.

I’m reminded of Stuart who I met in his club in Mayfair. He was something in the dot.com bubble. We talked about warehouses in Shoreditch and how graduates with names like Julian and Jasper sat at wooden benches with MacBooks and called themselves technology entrepreneurs.

Anyway, the cafe’s tea and cake are very good. My cake is Polenta and Orange. There wasn’t Polenta in Elsternwick when I was growing up.

I wonder what happened to Mr. Hetherington and Mr. Ormerod.

With no sense of purpose, my gaze wandered out of the window, finding its way across the marketplace to the Elstern bridge, with its Victorian mock towers and portcullis gates.

My mind joined my gaze and thought about the bridge. It seems a crazy thing to build in a town like Elsternwick. It’s like a mini London, Tower Bridge. There’s an inscription on each tower. They’ve always struck a chord with me. On the East Tower, it reads, ‘Fear not for the future’, on the West Tower the inscription reads ‘Weep not for the past’.

I’d better stop writing now. I can see Tess walking across the marketplace. She has something of a nymph about her with that mass of ash blond hair. She reminds me of the girl in the painting in my hall.