

JOHN PAUL KIRKHAM

IN VIOLET



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Cover image: *In Violet* by Jan Kalinski

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There are gems here

Poetry Space

These poems are beautiful and the collection has the intriguing quality of an autobiographical set of poems. In particular, I love the fact that the poems evoke a sense of place and yet the places written about are so disparate and conflicting, e.g. contrasting 'A Suffolk Summer' with the poems about the war-torn East. There's a sense of yearning in the poems that refer to the past, e.g. 'Bury'. I also love the simplicity of a short poem such as 'Absent from a Friend's Wedding'.

Catherine Chapman - Smashwords

I am once again struck by the child-like wonder in them ... refreshing ... endearing ... many of them are ravishingly beautiful in their simplicity and accuracy.

David Price - A Master Class

The poetry is like a gentle breeze that caresses the face and tousles the hair slightly. Sometimes the words create a storm of emotions so intense, that the reader will be forced to sit up and read again and again and again.

★★★★★ A.G Chauderi - *Shining Dawn*

An entertaining and touching read

Fran Macilvey - Scottish Book Trust

Stimulating, thought provoking, endearing, rousing every sensation that poetry should evoke within the reader. They made me laugh, cry or just feel the beauty and raw emotion behind the words. Amazing.

Lauren Drew - Canadian Journalist

This is a beautiful anthology

Jessica Jade Burton - The Library Living

Introduction

This collection of poetry includes works from the 1970s up to the present day and those poems which have factually based themes were historically true in the period they were written as in *Sarajevo*.

The reader will find on these pages a revealing eclectic mix of poems that are autobiographical, nostalgic, environmental, occasionally lyrical, reflective and thought provoking. The poetic style varies throughout and placing the work alphabetically allows the reader to discover things in a more spontaneous way.

Born in the 1950s, growing up in Merseyside, training at the Laird School of Art and as a photographer in Liverpool, the north west of England is a special place with hints to nostalgia that can easily be identified in poems such as *I Dreamed of Going to Sea*.

As a photographer, capturing the environment's light or bleakness has always been a fascination and likewise with poetry whether it's *Ghosts of the Atlantic* or the anti war allegory *The Punt Gunner* there is something visual

about verse that can make a stark or abrasive subject appear serene.

Blake Morrison (poet and author) once interviewed me for a feature in the Sunday Independent Magazine and I ended up being a real life character in one of his stories in the book *"Too True"*. This taught me more than ever that real people have a place in poems and nearly all of those in my work truly existed like *Lawrence* and *Mr Moon*.

So as photography frames an image, poetry transforms the mind and whilst we think we see and understand what we see, the mystery and intrigue are sometimes at the fringes of the scene; so when we look at a beautiful panorama we see in clear shades of blue skies or green landscapes but right in the corners or the edge of the spectrum lies violet, barely discernible but there just the same.

John Paul Kirkham is a poet, writer, photographer living in the city of Liverpool and is the author of twenty books and collaborations including the autobiography *I Saw Her Standing There*, further books of poetry and is the official biographer of two Italian saints: Clare of Assisi and Gemma Galgani of Lucca. John Paul has written journal editorial, film and book reviews and has appeared both on television and radio.

Thank you

To Bryter Layter - The Estate of Nick Drake for allowing the reproduction of lyrics within the front and end pages.

Prologue

A day once dawned, and it was beautiful

A day once dawned from the ground

Then the night she fell

And the air was beautiful

Night she fell all around

So look see the days

The endless coloured ways

Go play the game that you learnt

From the morning

(Nick Drake: From The Morning)

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A Game of Football (aka The Tin Whistle)

Not far from Grange road
there's a park and a field
where they play Sunday league
all proper and skilled
we went for a stroll
me and my Gran
just around the corner
with mothers and prams

Whilst watching the teams
I blew my tin whistle
the players stopped dead
annoyed and puzzled
the referee in black
furious and wild
screaming "*you bugger*
where is that child"

I tried to look innocent

but ready for a maul

then Gran said ever so calmly

"pick on someone your own size

after all, its only a game of football"

A New Clear Day

The early morning clear violet sky turned suddenly
brighter than a thousand suns

People caught, fraught, unaware
running in the dust of a blistering heat
odours arose to dull the senses
a pain, a pounding
and then serene

Aberfan

I was seven when you were seven
as the wild winds carried away saddening voices

Slowly, slowly as I sleep at night today
I dream less and less of that charcoal cloud

But in the stillness of the darkened skies
I know the silent souls of the little ones found their peace

Winking and flaxen in the first blush of sunrise
beneath stumbled slopes
and the soft Arcadian sepulchre rows
the candescent bronze dawn gently reveals
after mist essence rain, the Spring daffodils
respectfully genuflecting to those reunited in their
deepest slumber

Absent From a Friends Wedding

On this a special marriage day

I will be seven thousand miles away

So from some far flung eastern shore

I wish you well and love some more

After Midnight

The sun goes down
the city is dark

The damp streets are silent
a cold wind blows

A lonely stranger
walks on
looking for someone
to love

All For An Empire

All for an empire
loyalty and lies
setting sail by the moon
at the turn of the tide

Battles in the sand dunes
fought for an empire
landings at dawn
thrusting forth the sons fire

Charging and crawling
through wire and trenches
all for an empire
and hearts that are wrenched

All those left behind
touched no more and the reason why
all for an empire
a plume of ash in a blue sky

Arabian Nights

The 2.00 am skies are clear as we descend
fairytale lights punctuate the night
sparkling off white minarets and marble domes
shimmering on the waters of the Gulf

Excited and tired many passengers resist
the adventure in transit
and prefer to sleep whilst others reap their bargains
from within these caves of Aladdin

The doors open to the desert
a hot furnace wind wallows round the apron
tonight its Dubai, last time Sharjah
and alas Abu Dhabi and Bahrain
the rules are always the same

Duties done announcements are made
"Please go back now to the plane"
and those brave explorers of the night return
clutching their clinking carton treasure

Time at last to settle down to sleep perchance
and gently dream
and ascend into a distant ruby tinged dawn
as the Emirates drift and fade
with the rising of the sun

Ariana

A foreign land times are hard
Politician's shuffle cards
east or west has a better hand
what about the people in a foreign land

A highway heading north leads to heaven
a child puts a rose in an AK47
the days are cold the skies are blue
there is a man on the mountain watching you

People queue all day for a loaf of bread
a soldier's belly's full with a piece of lead
Ariana waits with her DC10
she's the last one out with the all the president's men

Arm in Alms

Arm in arm, lets arm an army
arming theirs, harming ours

Are we the hosts? or are we the hostiles?
selling arms and preaching peace

Alms for the poor, arms for the powerful
listen to the man for anything is possible

Fighting for a cause or dancing for your master
fuel for our engines to drive us to disaster

A man of peace talks to liberate
whilst forces wait to seal his fate

There are plenty of shells but no mother of pearl
as we follow a light to the end of the world

Autumn

As autumn gathers round the meadow fair
the smell of wood smoke fills the air

The heather turns crimson, berries cherry red
teardrops like diamonds in a spider's web

An auburn landscape slowly yellows
farmers gather in the long tall shadows

As dusk dances on sienna fringed leaves
a golden orb silhouettes the trees

Avalanche Seen From a Dam at Kaprun

On top of the world across a mirror glass lake
a faint tremor sounds

The sun melts the spires
of ice and snow
as it turns into a tumbling whoosh

The avalanche, a sliding cascade
crashing into crystal blue waters

an echo then silence

Bangkok Blues

Blurting a cacophony of noise
phut phut tuk tuk chariots to drive

Inhale the blue polluted haze
rising at dusk as smoky waves

Beneath The Surface Lies

Those who polish their car at night in November
in the dark have many secrets

Those who sit patiently at traffic lights
are caught in impassive emotions

Those who observe those
will never know

Bruges

Church spires and tall brick towers
ringing bells chime the hours

Silent twisting cobbled stone lanes
dark beers, chocolate and lace

Bury

From the end of Grange road
we would often take the bus up to the Rock
alighting to the smell of them black puddings
floating like bloated hoses
in huge steaming cauldron pots
on a Saturday morning under tarpaulin canvas
on a busy Bury market

Then to Sam Taylor's toy store
a treat to explore
wide wooden stairs
glass cases with awe
containing treasures and more
or summat promised to me

The moist days that often seemed like most days
made the soggy garden too sad to play out in
the only games would be dominoes and cards at the table
and coal rescued from the drizzle

would cough, spit and hiss

so a teaspoon of gran's gin kept at bay the damp chills

On match day at Gigg Lane rickety turnstiles cranked
the creaky wooden stand benches where home to the fans
rain coated, flat capped and smoking old men
watching the "Shakers" the best game in the land

Gran's shop on the corner

sold lucky bags and sherbet dips

Cadbury's Bar 6 and much later the Twix

then skip over the old railway bridge

to Elton reservoir and breeze rippled waves

distant grey dinghy's with bobbing white sails

legs dangled on the water slapped wall

where my father chiseled his name in 1944

On Sundays a visit to Granny Grimshaw

and her sister May

in the Radcliffe flats on the council estate

greeted by the smell of gas on the hob
kettle whistling away
to play contented with the ashtray
the one with the button
propeller like centre for fag ends a dungeon

Auntie May would tell me tales of her life in the twenties
of far away exploits and romance in the Fiji's
South Pacific adventures and Island natives
then returning home to a landscape of chimneys
clutching hand tinted pictures of dreams forsaken
a box of memories, letters and proposals untaken

Butterfly

Stinging nettles

singing boys

with nets on poles

they capture souls

of little angels

with coloured wings

who gently whisper

don't crush my heart

oh! can't you see

our time is short

please set me free

Cheese on Toast

I used to live off

cheese on toast

simply melted under the grill

hot and gooey giving the taste buds a thrill

Today it's a trendy panini and flatbread

or two artisan slices welded together

with a molten pepper pesto roast

how I long for cheese on toast

Chelsea Pensioner in a Chinese Restaurant in Greenwich

Sitting alone in a corner of “The Vietnam Restaurant”

I thought it was Father Christmas

he looked like Father Christmas anyway

Dakota red coat, cuff trims and bushy beard

I heard him order a pork bun dim sum

and some more, sweet and sour

I wanted to thank him for

fighting for

in a war

but I somehow got distracted

by his arriving plate of hot sizzling beef

Well done, well cooked I saw

not like meat that drips blood

he’s probably seen enough of that

I struggled to guess his age
calculating by wars fought
Sword Beach, Korea or Aden maybe

As I was leaving I sneaked a farewell peak
over my left shoulder
of a Chelsea Pensioner in a Chinese Restaurant
in Greenwich
keeping warm in a corner
with his memories of far flung eastern places
or a jungle perhaps

China Star

Rhyme and song the dragon nears

China wakens people's fears

rhyme and song the lion's dance

torches light Hong Kong hands

Midnight approaches seconds away

China's elders on parade

midnight falls red flag hauled

for the Governor departure calls

As fireworks celebrate

the edge of an empire slips away

City of The Dead

Tenant's of the tenement tombs
lying under lichen green
liken thee
to a merchants dream

Beneath the dark granite Mossman stone
where legions froze
Glaswegian's roam
in circumspect solitude

Mausoleums weather beaten
old empire decaying grilled museums
toil now soil thy rich bequest
angels guard the souls at rest
in this the great Necropolis
the memorial City of the Dead

Comet

A clear April night
amid the sky and stars so bright
there gleamed a comet
haloed by a misty tail of white
captured from afar a light
a streak and stream of paled glare
now and in ten thousand years

Conversation with a Ghost

It was that Jubilee summer of 77

and despite several misty Mersey mornings

Liverpool was preparing to receive a Queen

My task, to shoot the past

recording the architectural nuance splendour

of wood panels and light of an empty Birkenhead

Central Library

A casually dressed handsome young man from an era

distant appeared and was captivated by

my contraption on stilts and he mused:

"well I say this is quite marvellous for 1935, just last year the

King opened this place and everything was just ... well so big

what does it do?"

I replied *"It captures you"*

Our parallel chat across forty years revealed we had
just down the road
a mutual abode
the Villa Arcadia in the park
which inspired the builders of New York

Later that day frame by frame
I searched in negative vain
to find a trace but only found perfection
of vintage oak and glass

The only proof
the only truth
the memory of my brief conversation with a ghost

Convocation in Cambridge

A cold bright and sunny morning in May
families dressed to the nines like a wedding parade

In Caius College square stands a rosemary tree
defying the years standing wise valiantly

Measurements taken for hundreds of gowns
red hemmed and purple the cream of our towns

The queue finally moves towards the great hall
creaky benches and chairs within academic walls

Hours of Latin from masters with ease
a thankful reciting and decrepitation of knees

To spectate the partaker rise in elation
clutching the parchment at their convocation

Coup

A so called bloodless coup leaves a bloody mess
neighbours watch with interest

Passports and tourists airlifted to safety
the rest the innocent eventually wasted

Borders closed there is no solution
only years of war and revolution

Mortars and rockets overhead
children huddle together on rags for beds

Those left behind will never thrive
each day a race, a battle to survive

Curriculum Vitae

If all one achieves
can be written on a page
is the sheet worth more
or does its value decline with age

Dawlsh Before the Great Storm Came

This day in May

Brunel's tracks are and tunnels are still as safe
from wind and rain and dirty grey crested waves
crashing and splashing through iron rails
when gulls squawk and rise above the diesel engines
ticking and humming of the Great Western

The black swans preen mid stream
in ballet trance along the brookish Dawe
and trail in vanity with lipstick beaks in petulant pouts

Permian orange sandy cliffs and sad worn sea faces
peer over star crossed lovers who beam and dream
as wild violet's await a longed for arrival or departure

Death of My Father

My ageing father is in his final throes
in the critical care unit
and we have been summoned to see him one last time
he is hanging on to see us before letting go
he fights now to prolong his last lap
and survive for one more day
as each ascending hour of breath brings more pain
and he wishes no more to go on any longer

The East Midlands train from Liverpool to Norwich
that is carrying us to him crosses a lifetime
as its diesel engines shuttle, puff and belch slowly for
five hours across thirteen counties

The flat midwinter fenlands
that my old dad knew so well these last nineteen years
look forlorn and barren
the wind turbines stand silent, still and mournful under
greying skies

The fields once more at Welney are flooded
bathing the stark skeletal trees
aged stumps leaving their mark on this weary
landscape

The Chaplain came to see him late last night
and after 83 years of unbelief
he makes peace with God at the end
he remembers clearly his own grandads death
when he was given half a crown
to spend on summat good

And last night he said his own dad who died 50 years
ago came to him
and is ready and waiting to take him home
this entreaty made him weep for the first time
as we wobbled and welled up as well at the bedside

The nurses turned a blind eye
as we smuggled in a bottle of Adnams Lighthouse pale
ale as a last request

"I have need of nothing now" you say after all your years
of hoarding

*"take it all or give it to the Red Cross in black sacks
all my shoes and neatly packed shirts, jumpers and jackets
unless you find a flat cap that fits"*

No more, only the memories of all that retail therapy
at John Lewis and TK Maxx as you would always ask
*"is this a good buy lad clutching another bottle of cologne to
add to your collection"*

Your hands are quite warm, it's mine that are cold
as we clasp them together
in thanks for all your support
and helping us out with new telly's
meals out and such like
for giving more and taking nought
but my grumpiness sometimes

Malcolm your grey blue cat
who strayed over your threshold three years ago
looked desperately sad as he watched you taken away
in the ambulance never to return to the bungalow
today he mooched about eating crumbs from the carpet
that had tumbled off my Greggs egg and cress butty
before climbing, curling and sleeping again on your
faded brown leather chair

You have made sure that your final wishes are to be
cremated
wearing an eccentric bobble hat
the one that took the chill off your head
in the air-conditioned critical care room
and to hold in your hands
a rosary blessed by the Pope from Fatima
that I had just given you as a comforter

If you hadn't broken your tibia as the Lancashire
League's leading scorer
just before you were about to sign
for Manchester United
would you have survived Munich?
Instead you became an England armchair manager
shouting and kicking instructions at the TV screen

If you hadn't helped design the Vulcan bomber and
Cold War nuclear bunkers
and worked with asbestos and other dodgy dusts
would you have survived the lung disease that claims
you now?

When you hold a dying persons hands
they appear translucent ... glowing
so dad finally departed this life, this winter
completing his journey into the Light
comfy and cosy at the last
.... asleep now
with his grey and white stripey bobble hat

Death of My Mother

We had made the same journey by train
just two years earlier
then it was against winter's bleak charcoal laden
landscape
to lay my dad to rest
now it's June and the fields are swollen with spinach
and tatties
just about ready for the McCains frozen chip factory
lying and frying between Peterborough and March

As the same East Midlands train chugs slowly
under the wide silent fenland skies
itself in its last throes
as it has just lost its franchise bid
for stealing staff pensions away
we puff past paddocks and sentinel's of white wind
turbines
the elements are kind today
as blades swish laconically

and diminish into the quiescent flatlands
finally we spot our landmark ahead
Mr. Moons old windmill
for grinding daily his wheat and corn

We are a long way from Besses O'The Barn, Lancashire
with its brass band and record breaking cold winter of
1933, the year you were born
and the Salford bus stop were you broke a heel and you
met our dad
who offered to fix it with his engineering skills and
resin glue
a lifetime of stories discovered after death
finding your legacy of tales and love letters to Jack
hidden in a drawer's of old envelopes from 60 years ago

Home was life in those gritty northern streets
your dad was a good friend of Lowry
and posed bowler hat and red pocket handkerchief
*"The Man on a Bench", "The Man on a Wall" and
"Piccadilly Gardens"*

I wish you could have cadged one of those paintings
of matchstick men and dogs, markets, match days and
prams

Spanish and Irish ancestry gave you restless energies
pulling pints, selling fountain pens at T.J. Hughes
a spot of nursing and catering for Alvin Stardust
was it your craziness for hoarding Mars bars and a taste
of Scotlands finest grain
that helped you beat cancer twice
only to succumb to a broken heart that even Papworth
couldn't fix

Your long days concluded not fighting and raging
against the night
or the approaching encircling gloom
but at dawns early light
after a bowl of porridge and a cuppa tea
sitting quite calmly in your armchair watching the
sunrise

holding with affection your companion cat Malcolm's
Russian blue paw
as you slipped silently away on Mother Mary's Church
Feast Day
peace ... now that your earthly challenges and labours
are over

Malcolm finally appeared from his solitary hiding place
to see off the hearse
from the end of the gravel driveway one last time

You asked for bright colours
so our funeral cavalcade follows in a dayglo orange
Volkswagen caddy van
winding through those lazy Suffolk lanes
past the old country pubs where you feasted on lasagne
and salad with chips in Chippenham
you witnessed the 20th century transform for better or
worse around you
but you remained unchanged

Is it our faith that has brought us all here today
whether that is simply faithful memories
faithful friendship
faith in God ... or faith in the journey that lies ahead
And so as the veil closes in the Risby Chapel of stone
and oak to "*Let it Be*"
a nod to my home town Liverpool
you start your trip to the Light
wearing your pink dress and pink shoes
with a neatly folded blue silk hanky in your pocket
your right hand clutching my mended broken rosary
entwined with your favourite vintage tortoiseshell
comb
oh yes ... and in your left hand
a jumbo Mars Bar to be reunited with dad

Diana

You lived with the spring of youth
and glided through the days of summer

But autumn colours of sunset gold
will never now be yours to hold

The flowers will blanket and comfort you
from winters ice and snow
and the future shivering years

As jasmine blooms
we will think of you
as death brought an angels view
and we suffer your sorrow too

Beneath willowed trees
and royal oak
surrounded by an island moat
you slumber deep
beneath the fallen leaves

Eurostar

St. Pancras terminus concave and steel
silvered and sparkling upward
to a glass canopied crystal

Eurostar's stand streamlined in rows
yellow tipped
a match waiting to ignite pulls away slowly
almost silent in its shushing

Everyone Knows Penny Lane

I happened upon a stretch of quiet beach
the mantis green palms flayed lightly in an uncertain
breeze
the coarse abrasive sand now cooling in the early
evening under a purple sky broodingly framing a round
tangelo sun
slowly setting over the striated etched horizon
and the South China Sea

I sat upon a clutch of rocks worn to a smooth hollow
by centuries of the gorging tide coming and going
behind me a small array of attap houses on stilts stood
still
from which a Malay family took to the water
laughing and splashing in the foaming surf
swiping from the air and feasting on the live leaping
sweet translucent prawns

They seemed careless carefree and simply happy
in worn cotton shorts and torn tee shirts flapping like
flags

As the wind turned eastward
they stepped out of the waist high waves to
acknowledge me
with a smile and greeting words
“Wer fom”

I normally just say UK it's easier somehow
but this evening, thoughts turned to what home is
and where home was
“Liverpool” I say causing arms to wildly splay and
display
and in turn a broken English reply
“aaah Penneee Wane, Stwar ... bwee Feel”

Exmouth

Phear Gardens, fear not
as I forethought to walk
along Trefusis Terrace
to view the red rock cliffs
amid the mist and dissipating morning dew
and spy the rising sun

A turn around the town and Strand
by the Imperial and the Grand
a South Devon scone and tea
is sought and bought and enjoyed
and after clotted cream and honeyed jam
the Beacon beckons
to the vermillion tulip guard
above the Manor Gardens

A western wind blows from the Teign
causing skies to bluen
and turn to pink and purple hues
late lofty clouds billow and bloom
then slowly fall to settle beyond the Exe Creek banks and
hills

Fields of Fire

Fields of fire are fields of freedom
into the night and on to forever

At the waterhole sits a desert traveller
beyond belief are the miles in his hands

The caverns stir by the reach of the moon
the flame shelters by the shivering dunes

Windswept and fanciful are the rhythmic dancers
the starlight shines and the veldt stares

Firefly

The palm fronds twitch
lightly in a sunset breeze

The South China Sea caresses
gently it's twilight shore

The firefly shines and dances
slowly, glimmering, guiding

The spiral comet tail
vanishes to the moon

Firenze

To the banks of the Arno I flee to take the flow
of the crystal river
as Ariele echoes the distant faint sound of opera
where the Ponte Vecchio shimmers in a sultry sky

Forbidden City

Imperial Palace how open are your gates
how high are your walls through courtyards and
corridors of heavenly peace

Forbidden City reveal your secrets
to the whispering breeze of concubines intrigues
and Emperor's dreams

For Gyula Horn ...

The Man Who Tore The Curtain Down

A Magyar stands high above Kings and Queens
from the plains came horsemen chasing dust trailed
dreams

Boulevards wide lead to Heroes Square
monuments tall of legends that dared

Soviet occupation with bullet holed walls
shadows in doorways the communist calls

Through the red star and sickle flows the great Danube
scything the city apart in two

Protesting revolution and party unrest
reclaiming the streets of Budapest

At the border stood Gyula Horn
with cutters he tore the curtain down
and by dusk a new republic born

Four Lakeside Italian Towns

Varenna is a watercolour mirage
where steep cypresses lead
to a tranquil harbour of worn marble cooling to heal an
afternoon lethargy

Bellagio where between shaded shrubs and statues bare
the sweetness of the fragrant balm
and orange blossom exudes the air

Garda awaking from a misty September dream
as each sunrise brings the fishermen's early catch home to
the Padre's blessing

Bardolino below olive groves and vines making the fine
red wine
lapped by shimmering waters and a calming peace of a
shady afternoon siesta

Free

Peace and silence wanders

through the forest trees

not a sound nor or a rustle or a scream

just then

for that moment

we were free

From a Short Stay in The Isle of Wight

Layers of sand
bright colours in bands
quartz crumbling away
litters Alum Bay
between harbour and bar
turns the twists of the Yar
castles and fort
guns facing north

The ferries arrive at the pier at Ryde
a hand drawn clock tells the time of the tides
fossils discovered in wavy lines
buried in chasms in the walls of the chines
Tennyson went down to Freshwater Bay
where guillemots nest far up and away
winding rows of Ventnor's lanes
smuggler's paths and steep hill ways

From a Window in Hoxton

Sunrise over the city
casts its light over my shoulder

Twists of smoke curl up to the skies
as wispy charcoal strokes and commuters scuttle

Sundown over the city
casts long shadows over anonymous faces
until they vanish
leaving a mesmerising glittering panorama of the night

Ghosts of The Atlantic

Able Seaman Adams left Liverpool
that September of 1940
bleak grey skies lay ahead
wild and foamy as the swells heaved
and the dazzle ships to stern constantly rose and
crashed back down into the icy waves

Skipper Donal leaves Killybegs today
ten days a trawling the ocean to sonar the shoals
his hull housing the creel that holds the wasted Krill
used to bait the haddock and hake

But today an autumn detour is to be made to Rockall
throwing a wreath to the west
to float away under anodyne skies
putting to rest, the weeping cold souls of the Benares

Gold Coast

Along the Pacific Highway past dream and theme parks
man made glass malls and fishermen's wharfs

Miles of white sand, sun blazing bright
wind and the waves a surfer's delight

Grandad

All those years ago all those moors explored
me and grandad walking forever out of doors

Lancashire's wondrous landscapes
hidden country dreams
grandma's in the backseat to pay for petrol and ice cream

Climbing hills and chasing clouds roaming wild and free
collecting all the acorns and planting them for trees

Picnics in empty lay-bys shandy in a quiet pub
I always had a shilling which grandad made two bob

Today and never forgotten the decades they have passed
that 1965 summer that would be my grandads last

Great Wall of China

Great wall rising from the northern plains
across provinces wild and rugged you wander
ramparts high and steps steep
cut deep from ancient times a fortress way
what tales you must weave through this fabled land

Heat Wave

Like summer fruits the summer brings
long hot days and wedding rings

In the country or the coast
pressure rises, bodies roast

Traffic jams for miles and miles
tempers flare, children smile

Caravan convoys head to the beach
thousands of lobsters pink in the heat

While all the hoards slowly head away
I find contentment in my garden shade

Hedgehog

The hedgehog snuffles and stumbles around
blind as night he listens for sounds

The hedgehogs hungry all those bugs and grubs
a gardener's friend eating slimy slugs

The hedgehogs peaceful calm and sleepy
away from the winter dreaming deeply

Herbs (for being most useful)

Mint for tea and the belly and caraway too

thyme for the throat, hyssop for a cold

basil for the salad, parsley on a dish

lemon balms are calming and fennel for the fish

Hospital Stay

Taken to hospital only five years old
a terrifying ordeal down Clatterbridge Road

Separated from home with little explanation
"what are these things tonsils? what's an operation?"

Trolley off to the theatre over pine whiffy floors
a sleepy injection swirling faces and walls

Past midnight I wake a full moon lights the sky
dazed and bloodied I moan and cry

A night nurse appears and comfort is given
but what have I done to be in this prison

White coats gather looking and peering
I want to sleep, go home, carry on my dreaming

After visits the days unfold boring and slowly
playing with teddy and old Mr Campbell telling me
stories

Late night commotion

doctors and screens but nothing said

by dawn on the ward Mr Campbell's gone

leaving an empty bare bed

Those five days remain to this day a great scar

and my reward for all this was an Aston Martin James

Bond toy car

House Dust Mite

The life of the house dust mite is quite biopic
a considerable feat since they are microscopic

We eat and breathe and sleep each night
with at least two million house dust mites

Up close and magnified
I guess we should be terrified

They thrive on flakes of skin we shed
and love the warm and cosy bed

They're in the air and in the mattress
causing allergies rashes and asthma

Themselves are harmless though they look such a sight
our enemy are the particles known as dust mite shite

Humber Bridge

Seen for miles around
your span and crown
twin towers and cables
red car light tails
the suspension
apprehension
of crossing the Humber Bridge

I Dreamed of Going to Sea

I used to play on the east and west float quays
and the four bascule bridges across the
Wallasey and Birkenhead docks

Slipping through the sliding warehouse doors
to rummage among the gunny sack cargo
of Joseph Rank and Spiller's grain just unloaded from
the east

The allure and smell of the thick oily rope
suspended from the dockside bollards was intoxicating
beautiful, almost an addiction

The Japanese cook on the "Yokohama Maru"
cleaver in hand
waving from his galley balcony half open door
against the setting sun cries:

"Haarow, chop, chop, come aboard"

Negotiating the rickety plank
safe from the deep dark waters below by the drunken
sailor nets

I stood on the red leaded deck
of a Nippon Yusen Kaisha freighter
waiting in vain to be shanghaied
and set sail to the seven seas

The “Hu Lin” from Canton was always out of bounds
but the Blue Funnel giants
“Perseus” and “Titan” were always welcoming
with bilge pumps gently gurgling out water
lapping back against the keel
and swishing the plimsoll line

The salty air mingled with molasses at Tate and Lyle
as the dock gates swung open
and the “Brocklebank” tug
towing the towering behemoths
drifted slowly but surely out into the Mersey

The docks are almost empty now
save for a small tramper or two and a laid up ferry boat
the ghosts of the deckhands and idle cranes
cry out to me today

Tonight I shall dream of going to sea

In Violet

The being envelopes the mystery

The curtain is raised to reveal

The leaves are vulnerable

The grass is to caress

Holding the green orb of enlightenment

Sitting delicately on the barely visible precipice

Is she an elegiac memory or a ghost?

In Zermatt

Nobody drives in Zermatt

a traffic free zone

peril free

only perilous tourists

scouring in summer

for swatches

or

visor-clad in winter

for descending pursuits

January

A dense fog at dawn
folds slowly across the town

Monochrome figures like bare branches
bend in the breeze
stooped and worn yet young

June 5th 1968

I went camping that half term
as far as the back garden
setting up my tent
secured by stakes
cosy cushioned solitude

Just settled in then a shout

"food's ready"

from the scullery stove a pile of chips
home cooked served in a plain white paper bag

About to enjoy this slightly overcooked feast
the chips as always were a bit too crispy
and sharp as spears
when the seclusion ... shattered by a muffled voice
straining through the canvas walls

My mother came out into the garden
something's going on here I thought
I clambered out tripping and twanging the guide wires
to be given instructions

"Run next door" (but one)

"and tell aunty Pat" (she's not really my aunty)

"that Bobby Kennedy's been shot, but not dead ... yet"

So I sprint next door (but one)
and hammer down the knocker
probably waking "uncle Bill" from his Vauxhall Motors
nightshift sleep in
and despite an urgent panic I remember my lines and
blurt out

"Bobby Kennedy's been shot, but not dead ... yet"

A pink then pale face stared back
I realised that this bulletin had a destiny
so unrehearsed I stuttered *"put yer radio on"*

Performance and anxiety over
message delivered I returned to the tent
but when I got back
my chips had gone cold
so I called for some more
but they turned out white, hard and raw

The tent was too hot so I gave it up
to sleep in my bed fair comfort instead
at dawn I learned that Bobby was still hanging on
yet those who knew looked too forlorn

That morning I put the tent away for good
and folded the flapping shroud swaddling the poles
and pegs
and put it to rest in a drawer in the shed
drifting round the garden I found my white chip paper
bag set free, blown, surrendered
and plastered to the fence
transparent now by too much vinegar

Kent's Residents

As Princess Pocahantos was put to rest
at St. Georges, Gravesend in the chancel
it was by royal declaration
that all forms of dancing and leaping
were to be actively encouraged
but that bowling which was as bad as bear baiting was to
be forbidden

As Samuel Wyatt watched for ships in distress at
Dungeness
shingle and stones were swept in by the gales
and only when the fog finally settled on the Romney
marshes could the ghosts of smugglers and their
phantom horses be heard

As Dickens penned Copperfield in Broadstairs confines
from a from a solitary bleak house of walls hidden behind
walls

the twin sister towers of Reculver remained
to guide mariners to land from the seas that plunder

As Churchill in his Chartwell garden sat in a boiler suit
painting bridges and woods

his day job some said was saving the nation from wear
and tear and war

but it all ended badly in defeat at the ballot box election
until a surprise reprise after a demi – decade rose again
through a blue Maduro haze

La Rocca di Passignano

Dawn breaks

the castle awakes

the grey walls stand erect in the sunrise

the inhabitants have long since died

Dusk settles

the stone grows cold

battlements stand like a petrified army

watching and waiting for the approach of the silent
enemy

Lament of a Yorkshire Maiden

She sat upon a stone
so rugged and worn
mossy by the mould
and the cold
and the west wind blown

Deciding whether to
spend her life
to weep and mourn
to wander or wonder
about what life may hold
in any future shown

I saw her sitting there
old and fair
upon the Yorkshire stone
as she had sat and stared
across the moors
all those years

about what might have been
if he had from war returned

Land der Berge, Land am Strome
(Land of mountains, Land by the river)

Austria with its silver dish lakes
waiting for the summer fruits
where cable car bahns dangle like bright red cherries
over newly mown lime green pastures as meadows turn
to mountains

The Ziller Valley's fields its marigolds
Rattenburg swelters heat from the furnace
and crystal erupts from the glassblowers trumpet

The Prater Wheel turns like a slow clock hand
clandestine meetings of lovers or the third man
and rivers wind then roar
through pine and logs and forest floors

Glacier dazzling pure bright white
reflected blue against the sky
and through shifting ice slow and cold
marmots live in the fissures and folds

And as a soft moon settles over Shutteldorf
the sounds of the distant clatter of a horse and cart
the clink of schnapps glasses and a rushing mountain
stream

Lawrence

A cripple is made racing a home made kart
down a tenement hill
practising for the Preston Guild

1914 the Government calls
fit young men
fighting spirits with strength

A cripple looks in with an offer to help
maybe making factory bayonets, bullets and shells

But recruited immediately ordered to the station
King's shilling in pocket with tin can rations

No time to get a message home
with rifle and helmet to Flanders bound
never to return from foreign ground

And on a Preston pantry table lay
Lawrence's cold untouched tea time pie

Leasowe Life - Parts I and II

I. Dangerfield Behind the Brickworks

Dangerfield if your dare
real cartridges brass and rare

Hide and seek such great fun
I even found the barrel of an old sten gun

Overgrown and wild by day
trespassers forbidden to walk and play

This was our jungle, childhood war
keep one eye open for the arm of the law

With sticks for swords the games were real
all that danger is today is a playing field

II. Market Garden Opposite The Twenty Row Inn

Wicker baskets with lettuce and cabbage
marrows in furrows and freshly hung rabbits
allotments, compost and follow the pong
sacks of tatties sold for a song

Leaving

Waiting alone on a station platform at this time of night
to catch the last train from here

Travelling at this crazy hour through countryside I cannot
see

bypassing industrial towns, jewelled, I thought about our
..... past

Trying to sleep in this empty carriage thinking of you
all I have is a reflection in the window reminding me of
what once was

Leccy and Gas

Leccy and gas plus VAT

fuels the cost of heat for the elderly

Hypothermia putting lives in jeopardy

bitter winter enemy of the elderly

Leccy and gas a necessary energy

it should be cheap or free for the elderly

Letter Writer

Write a letter and save a life
across the world like a satellite
write a letter and save a life
to save some body from a butchers knife

Write a letter to South America
to save the man behind the steel bars
the government keep the prison keys
so write a letter to set him free

So many people held in chains
a pen is the scalpel to ease their pains
the candle burns, the barb wire stings
words unwritten darkness brings

Lottery

Yer pays yer pound
yer takes a chance
yer entertained
by song and dance

Balls spin around
and one by one
yer tick em off
its only fun

Win or lose
well someone did
the best I done
was just ten quid

Profits to good causes
or to charity
or in directors pockets
that we can't see

Lucca and Saint Gemma

Renown for Puccini's birth
and virgin oils and city walls
enclosing your intricate and graceful pattern
of weaving streets, multitude piazzas
staging beautiful Basilica's
and pink hue stone churches and gardens aromatic

The amber glow terracotta roof tiles
seen from the city walls at sunrise and dusk
silhouette the Alpi Apuane hills
three seasons you exude the heady fragrance of jasmine
that grows in abundance

On a hot summers day the weary take harbour
in narrow lanes and shade for their passeggiata
siphoning the cooler breeze off the artery cobbles

A wedding cake white marble St. Michaels
or a comforting quiet and peaceful lofty copper domed
green sanctuary
as Santa Gemma took refuge to hide
from prying eyes
her Wounds of the Passion

Matterhorn

Rising beyond the mountain streams flowing at speed
high above the pinion track trains
encapsulated like a slow release drug shooting out into
the sun
carved by nature, a snow capped pyramid blue diamond
trapped in September light a monarch enthroned
Matterhorn

Meadowside Cup Final 1968

In kits and jeans
we'd pick two teams
by dip dip dip
and my blue ship

Although quite small I'd play in goal
hoping that we wouldn't foul
then a trip inside the box
and big Pete rolled down his socks

Whack! a casey fast and low
I flew and saved this great penno

Memory

Yesterday I held a dying persons hand
and the rains came

Today I stood under tropical skies
and the breeze came

Tomorrow I am
returning home

Milan

Galleria ... bastion of fashion

perfume, Fiat and secret passions

La Scala bathed in rouge and gold

Verdi's tales sung to be told

tempura mural by Da Vinci

behind courtyards and cloisters sleeps the supper's last
sitting

Modern World

Money for the rich, sure!

it's not a problem to print some more

this is a modern world

We use a satellite dish to catch our fish

we have toxic waste to kill the human race

living in a modern world

Away from home we use our mobile phone

attacked by texts and apps what's next?

we are all happy in a modern world

We make the rivers flow forth

we make the rivers flow back

what's the use of this in a nuclear attack

in this our modern world

All this disarming that people find alarming

and the last sound we heard was a three minute warning

wasn't ours a modern world

Mr. Moon

Mr Moon

grinds wheat and corn

from early morn

barley mown

sails go round

Great cog wheels crush

the grains and husk

while Mrs Moon of ancient hour

bags by hand

the rough hewn flour

Mr. Pettigrew's Cure

In an old hotel
by the old seaside
Mr. Pettigrew stayed
or some say reside

With windows open
and bracing sea breezes
it did well for Pettigrew's
wheezes and sneezes

My Mersey

Merchant ship cranes
unloading their grain
Confederate ships built at Cammell Lairds
opposite sits the Liver Birds

Ferries glide across the Mersey
supporters wear their red or blue jerseys
high above the Albert dock
cathedral bells peal over their flocks

The world's greatest seafaring city
land of the Beatles and birth of the sixties
today's excitement is its calm reflection
designer walks and regeneration

New Brighton to Seacombe a fair old stride
a pint at Egremont by the tide
Fort Perch Rock out to Liverpool Bay
to the west, West Kirby and old Hoylake

Nan's Cabinet

The light cherry-wood display cabinet
always stood in the same place
in the corner of Nan's front parlour
the pale glossy polished wood
and the fragile glass shelves
holding the crème of her souvenirs

Best china brought out on Sundays
or days when Uncle Harry came to visit ... sometimes
unexpectedly
to be greeted by "*eee you could have knocked me down with
a feather*"
gifting his tin of red salmon
to compliment a salad of celery, lettuce and a tomato

It was always something of an honour to be given the
long hollow key and
asked to "*fetch summat special or best*"

my favourites were the blue and white stripey and
stoneys west country tea set
from a 1962 foray to Penzance

The top shelf was always reserved for porcelain things
the lion and tiger bought by me for her birthday
with pocket money saved or more often given on the
day

Post mortem the collection was given away
the lion and the tiger now live in a wooden box like
coffin found in the attic just prior to a recent move
I also got those blue and white bits for everyday use
until they finally broke and came to rest like a Cornish
ship wreck at the bottom of the garden years ago

New Age

Percentages and air pollution
interest rates are their solution

Rolling stock and fighter planes
their rhetoric is rather lame

Glossy shops and credit cards
pay next month that's not so hard

Hungry children roam alone
to a cardboard box that they call home

A boat from the east carries sugar and spice
a mask and a sign are the dealers dice

Courage and speed to fuel injection
and all that's left is a specimen section

A hole in the wall a hole in the sky
the rivers are flooding and we cannot hide

The villas and deserts are scorching today
watch for the iceman to show you the way

Night Caller

They sleep during daylight
because they walk out the night
attracted and addicted and high on the city lights

They like the hot nights to feel the sheet glass burning
the skies are empty of clouds
the stars are on fire
and they like the crescendo

It is almost dawn the night lights are fading
home beckons
who knows about their secrets until the next night

North to Noosa

Northwards via the Bruce, Ettamogah and Yalinda
bush country taverns, ladies on the veranda

Gingertown beckons pineapple plains
thunderhead rocks sugarcane trails

Tumbleweeds scatter to Glasshouse Ranges
in the distant sea, white horses are dolphins

November 22nd 1963

My name is Pete Smith

but 'cos of my size my nickname is Smidge

I am 7½ years old

and this is my story of my day out

It was a warm November lunchtime

the day before, the Dallas rain had pummelled our
tarmac drive

but today it was different

the large neon sign on our Texas school depository
glowed 67° F

I had been made to dress smartly

just like the time that we went

to my cousins wedding picnic

blue and black check sweater

grey shorts and my best tan sandals

at least the grassy knoll had dried out in the noon sun

It was a big party
but I had the best view of all of the crowds
as all the hoards were squashed in shop doorways
or cramming the sidewalks

The cars came into view edging into the plaza
on Elm Street
high up I thought I glimpsed a sharp sparkle in the red
brick store window

As the parade glided towards us
I saw Jackie in her pink suit "*Chanel*" ... my mum said
like a bride waving to the masses
I guess we all came to see her really

The sounds of cheering, ringing and whizzing
then a shuddering thunder from the trailing motorcade
I thought I saw and heard an orange flash and crack
maybe it was just the sun in my eyes but it sure smelled
of fireworks

Then a shower of wet
crimson confetti poured out
of the violet sky
and showered me in silence

Ochre Eyes

So goodbye from me for now
and I will dream of you too
and perhaps those sparkling lights
and ochre eyes
will see and find the truth
and with sealed kisses
end in delight

Ode to Fish and Chips

For choice and with tea
the quayside at Whitby
facing out to the sea
eating Britain's great delicacy

For quality and tripled cooked taste
try the Chinese takeaway
scoffed in front of the TV
with rich red sauce from HP
then washed down with pleasure
by a brown ale in good measure

The best one ever
was a northern endeavour
"A Higgies Special" in Chester
fish, chips, mushy peas, bread and butter
..... nothing better

Ozone

There is no zone for what its worth
where ozone's safe on this our earth

Prime Ministers and Presidents meet
to limit all their CFC's

But until these nations all decide
is tomorrow too dangerous to step outside?

For all the talk and lessons learned
through scorching skies our planet burns

We must act now not hesitate
if not for us then our children's sake

We must all learn to change our lives
recycle now or wave goodbye

Panda

Oh panda were would you rather be
in the wild or in the zoo
eating bamboo
or rice from a bowl

The choice is ours not yours you see
only we control your destiny

So panda teach our children true
to save the woods and not to lose
your precious smile
for when you are gone
we'll follow too

Paris in The Spring

Paris in the spring is alive again

petals profuse the Tuileries

lovers and artists steal glances and kisses

at night in ruby and gold

glow a million lights

Penny Deposit Bottles

Collecting old bottles for the penny deposit
carrying mums basket and pushing my trolley
knocking on doors *"any empties to spare"*
I'll recycle them all to fill my pockets so bare

Laden with glass my trolley was full
Tizer, Corona and Vimto to the shop I would pull
the shopkeepers face would drop when he saw me
more vessels returned that's a bag brimmed with pennies

Petticoat Lane Market 1969

Blankets and sheets cheap as can be
buy one of these and the rest come for free

Kitchen devices for slicing and carving
a dinner set for six a guinea and a farthing

Hang on to your purses or wallets will fly
my bargain that Sunday a lime green and yellow wide
kipper tie

Pisa

In Pisa a pendulum swings
lost to the stars in an astronomer's dream

To wanderers you reveal a world's great wonder
your leaning tower tilts and points us to ponder

Light is Pisa
coloured yellow of sand
then as forever
Galileo's land

Polar Bear

Four months beneath the winter snows
slumbers deep in dreams of icy flows
the night sky's aurora waves and glows

Blizzards whistle across terrain
in this the polar bear's domain

Poppylands

Above what lies beneath the far country fields
a plume of ash rises to noble empyrean heights
as the final pounding and screaming fades into the
contrite violet twilight sky

Fresh frozen ground thaws each early spring
and the ploughs furrowing divulges a trenches secret's
locked away for a century or more
preserved in deathly silence
a shattered shuttered shelter

Without family or mourners
the forlorn fallen finally returns from Flanders
by train and cortege and the Union Flag
to the loneliest headland North Norfolk Church
and a cliff top grave
carried on a rickety cart down the crunchy gravel path
home at last

watched in silence by eleven local school children who
have only ever known peace

The corporal corpse is lowered to rest again under
sodden earth

the wild sanguine poppies bend in a bitter easterly
wailing wind

in remembrance to the end of time

Preston Treat

The other day I took a train to Preston
we used to visit there in the sixties to see Harry and Dolly

Uncle Harry worked for the Bus Corporation all of his life
from Conductor to Inspector in charge of Union rights

Harry loved his lemonade ordered by the crate
stored away in the pantry the Corona was great

The other day I walked and rediscovered
those same streets
the end Victorian terrace was still there
an island surrounded by new uni buildings
but at least the door and the wonky stone step
was now straight

Clutching a faded photograph of me standing on the
same doorstep
in short trousers and tan sandals

and holding the clippies ticket machine that I had been
given all those years ago ...

I was tempted to knock at the door

My knock was answered by a lovely lady Benita Patel
and after a daft explanation I was invited in
the family offered me a cup of Lancashire tea
and a cheese barm
and then I blurted out

"have you any cream soda in the pantry"

Rainbow

Myriad of rain droplets on a window pane

beguile the light

tantalise and refract

Reconciliation

In the quiet Olberg woods and hills above the
weaving Rhine Valley
in it's meandering paths and lanes
I met a shabby old man at a bus stop

Eager to speak in fast flowing torrents
I hadn't a clue
so we talked single sided
Germanic versus Anglo
until we slipped into broken English

I mentioned Lancashire the place of my birth
and then I surrendered to his words "*Blackpool*" and
"*Prisoner of War*"
he was moved to declare that he had been treated
kindly in internment

The Germans had blitzed the chip shop ... my Gran had assured me

then I thought of our bombs on Bonn and Dresden and falling across the river here at Cologne but I was too young to be contrite for our father's victories

And as the empty bus approached
he held out his hand
in an act of reconciliation and peace

***Reconciliation** was selected by Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral for filming and broadcast as part of a series of meditative reflections.*

Remembering that Christmas

The snowman brought the snow that winter
to illuminate the ground
at night I gazed towards the moon
and wondered about Father Christmas

I was searching for signs of proof
those telltale tracks upon the roof
I crept into the bay window
and caught sight of a shooting star
no sign but the sound of Santa's bells
(rung by my dad hiding in the garden)
to excite and drift me off to dream
beneath the midnight blue
and the lavender flock wallpaper

Waking up early on that Christmas morning
presents in a candy stripe winceyette pillowcase
oh ... and an orange and some walnuts
with the Cadburys selection box

a bag of gold foil choccy coins
and a red box of maltesers
which I would save up and use as ammo in a pop gun
for shooting into open gobs
which was a dare, scare and smashing fun

Then time to dress up as Wyatt Earp holstered in leather
or the Cherokee enemy with bandana and feather
the best on the telly was Mr Pastry ... again
but Batman and Robin was my fave
then if I was best behaved
I could stay up late chewing some Rolo's
with Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo

Rome

Eternal dawn in the Piazza Republic
wakes the doves like fluttering rockets
in a chattering sky

Sarajevo

Families and friends torn apart till the end
now there is only sorrow in Sarajevo

Nations debate but it is all too late
for enclaves and slaves the mist never rises

Where has life gone to a far away haven
where brothers weep and sisters cry

Rockets and shells, meditation of bells
tolling for lives once lived

Now there is only sadness in Sarajevo

Scarlet Light

Into Schiphol and then by tram
to the heart of Amsterdam

Canals weave as a maze
under bridges that lowly laze

Spheres of edam and gouda cheese
or a puff of some legal herbal leaf

Tall thin houses with hidden seams
revealing Ann Franks tortured dreams

Blue and white delft in the potter's hall
Van Gogh paintings adorn the walls

Tulips disguise forbidden sights
undressing windows through the night
to lead beyond the scarlet light

Scent

Scent of the earth

scent of the seas

scent of the sky

inhale

enjoy

Scotland

Land of legends

Picts and Gaels

mystical mountains

mythical isles

silent lochs and shivers

in the depths of winter

fortress cradled winds

on misty morn moors

echo's of old battle cries

your remoteness beguiles

Searching for Suzi Wong

At Causeway Bay the noon day gun
there stands the solitary Englishman
one o' clock sharp champagne salute
traditions past resolute

Sampan sail through the boat community
floating lives with no continuity
Aberdeen and fragrant harbours
oyster sauce and other odours

Shopping plazas skyward loom
a dazzling display in old Kowloon
night falls in old Hong Kong
exploring Wan Chai and Suzi Wong

September Time

September time has come again
with watercolour skies of sapphire blue
indented by powdery wispy clouds
as white felt sown into a crinkled cotton dress

At Saddle Bow the fields newly turned
have brought the soil inside out
revealing a dark chocolate rippled landscape of furrows
as the seabirds flown from The Wash
follow perilously close
to the tractor and plough
gathering and gorging on earthen worms
and last spring's un-sprouted seeds

Behind the station platform and paint peeled picket
fences at Watlington
the sunflowers begin to stoop sadly
as the first winds of autumn
caress the flatlands of the eastern fens

Shangri La

Listen

the far distant melodies travel

across the still serene waters

waves lap upon the sun setting shore

a light breeze brushes through the palm beach terrace and
trees

Shopping

The super market
what have you got
you've got it all
everything we ask for

Won't you come inside
the aisles are long and wide
food and fashion waits
through the automatic gates

All you ever thought you needed
but even that has been succeeded

forget the complex shopping mall
welcome to the world of digital
fingering our glowing screens
to order up your wildest dreams

Silver Birch

The silver birch grows tall and thin
it's peeling bark paper thin

Waving branches catkin tails
velvet leaves like a thousand sails

Soap

I love the smell of cheap soap in all those
B & B and hotel bathrooms
from summer holidays on the seafront in Scarborough
and Bridlington
and those boarding houses with wooden stairs polished
and tidy
serving fish for dinner because it's Friday

Then at the end of the day
being called from play
on the greens, in dirty jeans
to be bathed and scrubbed down in haste with that small
white block
the aroma of clean

Soham

Soham sits

east of Cambridge

away from the spires

amid meadows and droves

Soham sits

south of Ely

away from shadows of lanterns

amid pastures and groves

Soham sits

north of Newmarket

away from the races

amid quiet country roads

Soham sits

west of Bury

away from the sugary sweet beet

amid fens and lodes

Southend Pier

Southend Pier

in flames

again

oh dear!

But you are the longest in the world

so we will build you back

and thousands more can tread your boards

or ride the tracks

to the end

of Southend Pier

again

Spring

The grass forever green
in a fine English spring
willowed by a wind chime breeze
wave the daffodils in a ring

Herbs suddenly hasten
and beckon charismatically
feathered, leaved or balmy
fragrant aromatically

Buds and blooms early flowering fruits
dampened by an April shower
forever silent sculptured friends
statues mossy in mosaic ochre yellow

St. Wolfgang

A paddle steamer from St. Gilgen sojourns gently against
the quay

wooden homes and balconies

and open windows waiting for the face of the cuckoo

but all that appears is the farmers wife

looking across to Strobl with the smell of apfelstrudel

Lakeside castle and palace asleep

empty walls within against yellow alabaster

the gardens are my retreat

Up ahead a puff of steam winding ascending

Schafbergbahn, oil and coal

fires burning, pistons turning

pushing, shushing

rack and pinion round ravines

then blue skies open summit bound

revealing five magic lakes across the Salzkammergut

Steam Train Journey of One Stop (and being allowed to stand on the footplate)

Standing on the footplate real not a dream
coals to the fire the puffing and the steam
just through the cutting a steamy hot thrill
A 2-4-2 from Lime Street up to Edge Hill

Storm

An electric storm rages
far distant
lightening the night
of a Sumatran sky
deep orange hues
the colour of a tiger
whilst stars blaze through silver eyes

Roaring thunder
the unheeded tiger cries forlorn
waiting for the silence
and the calm of dawn

Summer in Suffolk

Fields of wheat turn to golden
barley heads whispering folding

Pink washed cottages neatly thatched
Tudor beams with oak door latch

Villages of tranquil charm
haystack's gathered on the farms

Byways silent past ford and mill
Kersey's lost in time stood still

Long Melford and its sister Clare
in elderflower lanes white clusters stare

Cavendish for old antiques
Lavenham church for a Suffolk tea

The evening sun yellows the hour
abbey gardens display their flowers

The silhouette of age old trees
evenings fragrant scent on a genteel breeze

Summer of Love

In the summertime when the days were long
we used to travel far and sing our songs

Carefree were those long hot days
with the yellow sun and the mellow haze

Wild then in the summertime
nights of love and days of wine

Today perhaps wherever you may be
do you treasure still that memory

Sunflower

A sunflower grown
whilst lawns are mown

A black and white seed
shoots at first like a weed

How something so small
towers now tall

When the rays hit your face
standing boldly with grace

But when the autumn rains near
you fold and shed your tears

Sydney

Opera House fans out in great white sails
on Bennelong Point the queen of New South Wales

Monorail twists around Sydney's streets
pedestrian's below strive on their feet

Botanical gardens carpet Macquarie's Chair
the "Rocks" markets and merchants wares

Darling Harbour a taste of the future
crisscross ferries ply back on the water

Skyline horizons thee antipodean view
silhouette of the bridge dusks bronzed gold hue

Tales Betwixt the Axe and Exe

To Seaton to sit on
the electrifying tram
that glides around the town
in colourful liveried display and
cranks to higher downs and Colyton

To the westerlies of Salterton
marine and commando garrison
training to derail the opposition
now only ghosts of D-Day past
and Neptune's waving hand
a solemn farewell to loved ones and liberation

Nearby where on rich red loam
donkeys roam
and revel in their safe haven
above the caves and coves
while cattle droves
and all day graze beside the Axe and Ox
and cyclists laze in Devon's
elderflower lanes in season

Ottery, whence Pricilla and Laurie came and went
and sailed in clearer skies
by Imperial Airways to the Orient
narrowly missing exploding comets
and came to rest
in Italy
in Pescallo upon their twilight fading years

Tale of Two Tortoises

Harry and Tiny were good friends, taking all day
to chew a tomato and doze and chew a bit more

One summer we almost lost Harry, he crept away
but was brought back at the end of the day
I guess it was the number seven painted on his shell
so all was well

Small Tiny ever content to stay and never stray
seemed to smile when the lettuce leaf rose
to tickle his nose

Quite suddenly no notice given they were gone
I pestered and cried "*Where's Harry and Tiny,*
handed to who?"
sent away to soon

Weeks went by but I never forgot and then a day out
to Belle Vue a zoo
riding on an elephants back
gliding down the water shoot splash

And then on display
in the house of reptilia
were Harry and Tiny
just as familiar

I tapped on the glass *"Harry, Tiny, look it's me"*
as they nodded and sucked on more tomatoes
two together in their glass room
and my happiness returned
late that afternoon

Tanjung Rhu

At Tanjong Rhu

I rest to the lap of the waves, calmly, peacefully

At Tanjong Rhu

I watch at dusk the fluted fishermen casting nets from an
endless shore to a sinking sun

At Tanjong Rhu

I sleep to an ocean breeze, caressingly, dreamily

Tears and Smiles

Water washes away tears amidst the memory of years
reflecting on decisions sought, some taken, some thought

Nostalgic days, moments in time
pathways travelled entwine
people and places in mind

The sun dries the tears leaving a fading stain of past years
put aside the decades for awhile
and let the tear turn to a smile

Temple of Heaven

With marble and gold
you write out the past
whilst dragons and lions
guard you forever

Lanterns like sentinels
show one the path
to the Temple of Heaven
the colour of the sky

The Apple and The Greengage Tree

The apple and the greengage tree
grow side by side
arched and bent together
almost seemed entwined

The summer sun swells
and ripens all the fruits
cluster bunches green
and red speckled suits

As autumn approaches
thoughts of gathering the crop
the gentlest of caresses
and the harvest will drop

The leaves now turn to yellow
to the wind and leap
the apple and the greengage
will retire now and sleep

The Ballad of Johnny Robinson and the Black Rock Mermaid

To the wind and the tempest
screaming from the Orme
blew in on this fair gale
a wild heart of storm

And I sing to you Johnny Robinson

And I sing to you from the sea

And I call you Johnny Robinson

I call you unto me

Appearing on the foundering deck
she promised to guide him home
and so washed upon a Hoylake shore
released from savage surf and foam

And I sing to you Johnny Robinson

And I sing to you from the sea

And I call you Johnny Robinson

I call you unto me

Through mist and rain and clear skies

and waters cold or warm

eyes blue as the ocean deep

will wait for him at dawn

And I sing to you Johnny Robinson

And I sing to you from the sea

And I call you Johnny Robinson

I call you unto me

To the sound of midnights submerged bells

to mariners one and all

the creature of the sea

sits on Black Rock Leasowe shore

And I sing to you Johnny Robinson

And I sing to you from the sea

And I call you Johnny Robinson

I call you unto me

Charmed by the mermaids song

to accept her coral ring

he slips out at night to New Brighton beach

to be never again be seen

And I sing to you Johnny Robinson

And I sing to you from the sea

And I call you Johnny Robinson

I call you unto me

So when the moon is full and tide a turning

and the wind be still and calm

you can still hear the mermaid singing

from Black Rock all alone

And I sing to you Johnny Robinson

And I sing to you from the sea

And I call you Johnny Robinson

I call you unto me

The Coach Trip to Blackpool

A day out by coach somewhere not too far

New Brighton to Blackpool booked by Grandma

At some village in the Ribble we would stop for a while
the half way halt for the toilet and a meat and tattie pie

Hundreds of coaches we must remember its number
then off to the pleasure beach or promenade bingo

Ride on the rails the cream and green trams
the top deck to Fleetwood or Lytham St. Anne's

Hot dogs or candy floss and pink sticks of rock
the golden mile's shimmering Ripley's "*Believe it or Not*"

Tattooed ladies and two headed pigs

Madam Tussaud's and families in digs

The tower stands high above the circus below
old fogey's go dancing in formation and rows

7.00 pm crowds back at the bus station
excitement of gliding through illuminations

The long day ended we head for home
into the night with chips in a cone

The Computer (on a bad day)

Bip bip bip bop bop bop

all booted up but the password's wrong

Finally in to write, file and save

send to the printer a further delay

Return and exit won't let me delete

system malfunction, scream at the screen

Remain calm don't stamp on the floor

It's the fountain pen and sheets of A4

The Dales Descending Light

It is fitting as Lent is but three days hence
that the purple cyclamen survived severe frosts
to rise between the damp lichen rich tombs at Ripon
Cathedral surrounding the tree as the gardener burns
his cuttings and the wood smoke ascends from behind
the garden wall and drifts across the graves

A panorama of trees, stark, dark and alveolar
like a thousand lungs waiting to breathe life into spring
for it is late February now
and the fast flowing Ure buffets the lone angler
standing waist deep below the bridge at Masham

The worn landscape strewn with bronzen tufts on
hillocks and last autumn's coppiced hazels
are shadowed by clumps of trees that shelter the sheep
from the sweltering summer sun or winters frozen
moon

while from time to time a howling wind tears through
vacant windows and portals of the dry stone field barns
screaming at the souls of the fells and dales

The moist green mossy branches
precariously point with sharp bent brittle fingers
at the weary wanderer or passer by
to hasten their journey
as the remoteness of life and light
slowly slips away to silhouette the peaks
and the ethereal glow dips for another day
and the last train from Garsdale Station slinks away in
twilight to Settle and the distant sparkling lights of
Leeds

The Dancing Creatures of Celandar

Between sand and stones

I caught a dancing crab

scuttling among scattered shells

Between border and bricks

I clocked a dancing cat

grooving in gyrating grass

Between poppy and pollen

I beheld a dancing bee

buzzing behind bobbing buds

The Day that the Schools Closed for a Day was the Day that Changed us all in a Kind of Way

May the 1st 1997 the heat wave was intense and laconic
the hottest day in any May ever

things were going to get even more red and hotter still

After an early lunch we went to quietly vote, we had the
afternoon off

two by two a slow trickle now before the evening rush
the elderly, mums pushing prams

and a policeman in short sleeves looked on casually
taking refuge from the sun outside

Just before the polls closed at 10.00pm a knock on the
door

I thought this is canvassing late a party with rosettes

"I'm sorry to bother you but a cat is dead

the old man on the corner has put it in box

a motorist ... a late voter ... probably ... intoxicated ...

probably ...

sped off into the night" he said

I said "Try next door three cats live there"

Live on TV politicians beamed in

I stayed awake till one, the first twenty results

carrying the flavour of all our labours

then early to rise, a sweeping landslide

A new government formed

this is what we have all waited for

on the day that the schools closed for a day

the day that changed us all in some kind of way

but as one party was mourning its loss

a funeral took place in next doors garden

the only guests, two cats, in silence

The End of Spring

I watch for you
against a darkening sky
now passed

The taint of wet grass
hangs heavily in the air
a cloud tumbles and out pours
a blue sky

Clear and still and warm
and spring is put to slumber

The Folding Chair

The folding chair for sitting, nay
but for carting around and standing on
and pushing up the loft lid cover
only then did I discover
its cold up there
to be perching on
the folding chair

The Last Days of August

These last days of August and the golden barley
nods towards sundown high in the East Ridings
where tractors haloed by the hazy coppery dust
cut and mow the wheat to sharp stubble stumps

Sunlight slips through alabaster clouds
effulgent finger beams sweep across the soft undulating
landscape causing the stationary coach party waiting to
cross the bridge at Stamford to shield their eyes from
glare

The gathered wheat is towered and perched into perfect
cubes or rolled into cylinder drums sitting in random
rows waiting for winter beneath the odd solitary wind
turbine turning slowly in a lethargic breeze
shadowing the edges of the still young cornfields
between Driffield and Burton Agnes

The long summer day softens and slowly starts to sink
and gentle purple skies cool slightly now
as the early evening light drifts in from the sea
and the smell of eventide descends on the village green

The Lesson

By the crossroads up yonder Lowe

I spied the school kids going home

With bags and satchels coloured gaily

and packets of crisps and fags that they crave daily

Laughing and joking counting pocket money earned

with their folders and textbooks with lessons they've
learned

The Only Bit There is of The Cheshire Coast

Child of Hale stood nine foot three

a gentle giant by the sea

Disused lighthouse amid rock strewn sand

warned distant ships from distant lands

Runcorn bridge hovers over the ship canal

pylons and wires and chemical plants

Ellesmere Port and Stanlow Banks

great floating vessels unload their tanks

Refineries miles wide

towering fires light up the skies

The Painter and The Seagull

The Painter sees within
through peeling frames
resting on a crumbling sill
what time has hid revealed

The Seagull glides
with outstretched wings
to an empty space
painted by the brushes of time
we can only stand transfixed and gaze
oh ... to be that seagull, to move, to fly

The Powder Monkey

In the silence of the violet morning
and the shadow of the fractured clouds
broken only by the seagull's squeals
to fool the foes

The canvas flaps and seeping oil
into coils
of friction fraught and taught
hemp and jute
creaks to drown the sounds of those below
as victory seems so far
to fill the shells not shoals
to tailor, stitch and mend the tunics worn

The boys in bells
not teens but tens
the sounds and smells
of black graphite carbon
sparks and fire

quell the tempest of the seas
and enemies

Bang and crash
fuse and flash
recoil and rebound
the Powder Monkey swings
to canons from gallows beams
and England's shores still will be
forever so far away from home

The Punt Gunner

A fissure in the clouds at dawn
casts a sombre curtain over
the damp sodden November trenches

A pastel mist drapes leaden over
the wide expanse of the dank dewy fens

The verdant hands of the marsh willows
washed by past fallen drizzle
waver below the caress of the towering heavens
to raise the early birdsong chorus
as the punt gunner splays out his single oar
in the stillness of the Welney waters

Calm now the breeze rushing through the reeds
lest the waters of the Ouse lose their prey

Fingers now frozen through fingerless mittens
prime the gun and trigger ready
finally gliding to a stillness of the soul
in morns pale afterglow

A flash of citrine and a single shot
shatters the silence of the dawn
and the deed is done
and one more son will not return

The Rhine

Rising in the Drachenfels

misty forests and castles dwell

blue skies over grey Bonn

where statues point to a soldiers gun

Steep terraces of verdant vines

producing luscious sweet white wines

fast and flowing bends the Rhine

The Ring Pull

The beaches of Weston-Super-Mare

were bare that year

I discovered the ring pull

the froth hissed out

a malted lava flow

of fine pale gold

the colour of sand

as the tide moved away

beads of chill set in

leaving the beaches alone

that year I discovered

the ring pull

The Shed

In our close every house has a shed but ONE
and oh what shapes and sizes they do come

One for gardening
one the size of a Swiss chalet
a fridge freezer in another
and Malcolm keeps in his, dreams
locked away and safe
but me I am the ONE
no need of such a thing
I let my garden live

The Turtle's Tale

Fishermen's net catch
the great leatherback
today only the few
out of once thousands get through

To Rantau Abang
a long sea trek ends
with a crawl up the beach
with only flashlights to greet

Is it pain or fear
that causes your cries and tears
you must know rely on man
to hatch your eggs in the sand

Generations lost almost extinct
a life and species right on the brink
as you slip away slowly and submerge under the waves
is it you or us who should be afraid

There is an Apartment in the Barbican that Shall Remain Anonymous

Each morning the casual commuter taking a shortcut
can witness if concentrating, the clientele
surreptitiously slipping out into the stairwell
quickly, sheepishly, guiltily
descending to the dawn chorus
of the early rush hour traffic
below the London Wall
then sloping off through the narrow lanes of Smithfield
or the City's square mile

Tin Money Box

A small young boy taken to the bank
to open an account
to save money in
is given a tin
with animals on
to keep copper and silver
of all legal tender

When aunties and uncles came around
I was often given half a crown
for looking sweet "*and oh how he's grown*"

I filled that tin with treasure and careful thought
because once put in can prise out nought
and when its full got taken to bank
to the TSB tiller with a smile, tin opener in hand

A cascade of coins stand on tip toe to look
handled with care a stamp in my book
savings secured

I'm handed a new tin

and given a penny to start all over again

Tors ... Clints ... Grykes and a Good Brew

Crawling out of Glossop's stonehousey streets
the Snake Pass winds, climbs, then hollows
to the Snake Inn waiting to ensnare the casual passer-by
with a pie and a pint

Nestling below peaks lightly tipped
with tors, clints and grykes
formed by a million frozen winter rains and nights
lies Lady Bower with its whirlpool overflow
swallowing the funnelling fast water
to the centre of the earth
or simply siphoning to Sheffield around the corner

The River Derwent partly hidden by sunlit shade
appears as black treacle
with sharp, dark, star point sparkles
the bronze conifer tree tops
over the valley appear like Doddy's brush
tickling the blue skies dusting away the clouds

The lambs with jelly legs
shelter from the blustery breezes
against the dry stone walls whilst the pregnant ewes
lie slump like plump fat seals grounded on green grass
sand banks

In Bakewell the ducks drift downstream
then stutteringly turn and dart forward
as targets in a twopenny shooting gallery
fighting against the current in a stationary paddle
before taking to valiant flight lowly and skilful like
under the footbridge

The sticky rich, for some sickly sweet pudding
sold in brown paper bags with glistening oily stains
clutched by tourist bus hoards
better to be taken to picnic in the crescent by the river

Matlock's graceful station is silently awaiting
the hourly service of the Derwent Valley Line from
Nottingham
it's vintage platforms paying homage to the Edwardians
who came for a day out from Derby or Belper
to see perhaps the riverside gardens
luminous in bloom with yellows, reds and purples and
beds still to be planted watched in shade from the
seated wooden cupola hut

Spring's late warm sun
has brought the crowds to Buxton
flocking to the pavilion
lining up for ice creams
like a petrol rationing queue

An old gentleman
seemingly the self imposed guardian of St. Annes Well
is regaling tales of the public perpetual flowing waters
commentating on its flow and temperature
as one and all fill their plastic five litre bottles

and informing those willing to listen just how good it
makes a brew of tea

Then home via the A6
through Stockport and later in the evening
a Cheung Wah takeaway
of king prawn chow mein and fried rice
oh and a good Ceylon
brewed with Buxton spring water
and the sage was quite right
it does make the most perfect cuppa

To The End of The Thames

Canons look out at Coalhouse Fort
guarding the reaches protecting the port

Oil tankers and caravans berth side by side
a refiner's flue breathes fire in the sky

Chalkwell to Westcliff a great pavilion
pretty flower tiered gardens spring through to winter

The world's longest pier it's starting to rain
so walk to the end and return by the train

Boating from Thorpe Bay breeze sails to the west
messages in bottles at Shoeburyness

Lovers of solitude windswept and wild
shrieks of the gulls at the rise of the tide

Tunbridge Wells

Pantiles and antiques

wooden floors creak

pavements and columns

spa water in volumes

while away the day

in tea shops and cakes

with walnuts and dates

Tupperware and Gonks

Plastic boxes round and square
clear, pink and blue Tupperware

Parties for the mums smarties for the kids
all you'll ever need beneath those airtight lids

The only reason I ever tagged along
was the promise of a homemade gonk

Indestructible after all these years
is all my mothers Tupperware

Years and years turn into yonks
what happened to those friendly gonks

Tuther Side of Valley

Tuther side of valley from Burnley
above the Ribble meadows
giant clover, big and thick as thumbs
creeps and climbs towards Clitheroe

Pendle Hill

prone
like a drowsy dragon
under midsummer lenticular clouds
invade the earth
with irisation beams
and reams
and rays
in the sweltering heat
waiting to be cooled
by the dew of the dales after sundown

Two Sides of the Yarra River

High on a rise Kangaroo Point
across the river city glittering lights

But under the bridge shacks hidden away
for migrants and settlers on arrivals day

Venice

The waves of the Adriatic rise
and lap gently across San Marco
washing away the mist and the masks

Bridges and sighs canals weave their life
past towers and squares and crumbling facades

By night from the moonlit marbled magic
and old chandeliers
catch a glimpse of the
ghosts in floating gondola's
calling their silent cries for help

By day to most you are a memory
to those who stay you are a part
discovering in the maze
of passage ways and places
your deep beauty
your very heart.

Vickers Viscount

Waiting for a plane there was such a delay

something with the engine they needed to replace

An announcement is made "*it may take sometime
so we will fly in our spare plane*" and all should be fine

A distant approach we all rush to the balcony
to see propellers and tin descending noisy but gently

Ready for boarding in great leather seats
with two foot high portholes with curtains and pleats

Through rattle and vibration we take off to the sky
in an un-pressurised cabin so we can't fly too high

Levelled out at 12,000 over valleys and mounts
Flying Air UK's last and only Vickers Viscount

Waiting For a Train at Brussels Midi Station

Brussels Midi

once while waiting

to connect

with the Cologne Express

I sat and watched

these great iron engines

pulling in

rolling out

then the biggest of all

a great grey green eastern machine

rumbled in slowly

it's old creaking wagons

faded in gloom

dusty chandeliers

empty

except

in a dimly lit carriage

an old lady

hidden

behind veil and lace

a countess perhaps

returning to Warsaw

Waiting For The Sun

Its cold outside
the streets are white
I walk for miles
with the thought of warmth inside

The rain is falling
the avenues are wet
faces are cold
nobody cares

The wind is blowing
storm laden but silent
branches beckoning
but the gardens are private

How long have I travelled
through seasons of changing
how much longer
shall I be waiting for the sun

Wakes Week Seems Like a Lifetime Ago

Morecambe's fresh air and fun
from industrial towns to the sun

Whence paddle boats once steamed
now only in dreams

The art deco Midland Hotel
across the bay to lakeland dells

Vikings were Heysham's legacy
now day trippers sail on the Isle of Man ferries

Blackpool's treasure, pier and tower
pleasure amusements fill the hours

As the wild wind whips up the sand
the pies and chips are in demand

Promenade ablaze with bulb webbed lights
burn long and well into autumn nights

Wales

Land of valleys

and dams

hills and moonscapes

wild rugged castles stand firm on the shores

flags flying high

flapping in the wind

whilst a dragon breathes its flame

and watches over destiny

Washed Ashore

Riding the waves
for many years
adventures and seas
and sailors tears
only to be washed ashore
in some tropical land
as paradise declines
lies the barnacle covered
Guinness can

Waste

Don't drop the waste in my back yard

says who

says the people

say I

but not the government

Contamination

under our soils

in our seas

but not on the steps of Whitehall

please

Fall out

drop out

reports what a wash out!

all that's left is

a population wipe out

Water

In these times of drought
what about the water underground
reservoirs to catch the rain
all our rivers streams and lakes

Are we an island all at sea
or just the victims of a utility
Water Boards and water rates
why don't we desalinate

Water to drink, wash and flush
consumption high the profits rush
health and hygiene sanitary
rates or meters for the wary

Old mains are cracked causing leakage
replacements needed to stem the seepage
dripping droplets from the taps
left unchecked will fill the bath

Toxic nitrates from our farms
contamination causing harm
they add the fluoride and the chlorine
if it kills the bugs it must be poison

Still water from a bottle or artesian well
to cleanse the body to bathe our cells
pure and precious this is our right
as water keeps us all alive

Waterfront at Liverpool

Lights across the river
shimmering silently
on waves of dreams

The sounds of the city
for an instant
call me
to their heart

Waving at Trains Between Grindleford and Hathersage and The Peak District Cowboys

The East Midlands diesel venting its smoke
rattles for 46 minutes between Sheffield and Stockport
or sometimes a little longer with that stationary wait
between stations for that freight train running late

Its wondrous journey exposed
to those unplugged from android devices,
mobile tablets, gadgets and the like
rumbling through the Edale Valley

In a suspension of fine misty drizzle and foggy hollows
or when the sun shines on the mossy high peak hills
and the shimmering electric shale grey crags
the dry stone walls blanket the steep viridian fields
like my granny's best patchwork quilt

And on those bright clear days
a child peering from the upstairs window
of a sandstone cottage waves excitedly
at my passing train
between Grindleford and Hathersage

The embankment fern fronds
wilting on last nights dew
welcome one to Chinley
with its single young copper beech

And then the beauty is brought suddenly down to earth
by those skeletal pylons
standing in menacing rows like dual holstered cowboys

Welcome to Hanoi

Lanterns on Lantau to guide them to sea
can't the world realise they are all refugee's
typhoons to ride when the going gets tough
pirates to battle when the going is good

Flying low over palm trees and sand
not long to go now before they land
the sun is shining the skies are blue
welcome back to Vietnam

Back to their homeland let's see what they bought you
a box full of grief and a suitcase of torture
the city gleams of one million bikes
suppression supreme there are no lucky strikes

Some faces are happy but most look depressed
the fighting is over they all need a rest
the soldiers have guns and the tanks are their toys
welcome back to happy Hanoi

What's In The Bag Man's Bag

To most he was just a tidy Bag Man
carting his mysteries
in his bright orange Sainsbury carrier
(this was before the new biodegradable ones came out)
hence he got a lot of mileage out of his and when worn
then a new bag was placed over the old ones
creating an ever increasing layer of history
a new micro generation
he once allowed me to feel its weight
talk of black holes it was like lifting a breeze block

So to many he was a kind of accepted outcast
as he regularly attended Mass, Holy Days of Obligation
and devotions in the parishes mother church
in his uniform donkey jacket and scuffed brown shoes

He was slick and thin and had the sharp appearance
of an ageing rockabilly star with a ginger greased quiff

many thought he was unworthy of whom he was
and the life he lived

In his younger days
he deliberately left the riches of Cornwall
to sleep in hedges by roundabouts
or a skip in a Jersey car park
from where he was once rescued

In latter years he rented a modest ground floor flat in
East London
where he opened the doors and shared with strangers
feeding them food meant for him whilst surviving on
coffee and biscuits
giving sanctuary and shelter to even more worthy
outcasts than himself

He was a master of the arts
tramping around London's galleries by day
with his bright bag before resting a while in St. James,
Spanish Place

Eventually motor neurone disease took hold
and he refused to see those who could help him
"They are not cutting open my skull" he would say
"and turn me into a cabbage"
and then abruptly discharged himself from hospital
in NHS pyjamas on a bus with a fare scrounged from a
passer by

So housebound he became
until upon a visit I had to call an ambulance
as intensive care called him into a coma
the life signs on the screen got excited
when the Lords Prayer was recited
by the hospital chaplain
and someone said
they saw angels in white around his bed
getting ready to carry him home
then the bag man expired he was 59 years old

Unexpectedly there was a big turn out at his requiem
It came to pass that in his younger days
he was a respected mathematician
and teacher who inspired many into grand professions
and positions

I read the scriptures at his Funeral Mass
and a horse and posh cart carried him away to rest
it was a drizzly grey and muddy day underfoot
so there was newspaper in my car
to protect my floor mats
the Telegraph and the Express would have kept him
warm in the past

When all was said and done and aired
there was a revelation to us all
he was quite (well a bit) rich
his bag hid his wealth
and was full of bonds and shares
a small fortune really
more than just a whizz on the stock market

I only wish Sean

had lived long enough

to own one of those new indestructible jute bags

to carry his dreams in

Where The Wild Garlic Grows

A solitary fell runner
weedy and bearded
against the elements
on stick legs
prances like a pied wag tail
over the cattle grid
and shattered shale
through a gap in the gorse hedge
then disappears by ascension
into the suspension
of low slung grey cloud
hanging over the moist verges
where the wild garlic grows

Ruskin's tomb, rising looms
aloft his companion's graves
tickled by the trickle of rain
with scenes of his life
etched in Honistor's green slate

that today finds it's form
in gaily fonted house number plates
but still, aside the resting stones
the wild garlic grows

A single bluebird
sits atop Campbell's headstone
beneath Coniston's Old Man
where water runs cold and gold
in glistening iron reams
in streams
and dreams of speed
where ghosts in the mist
remember that day now long ago
and just a bit in
from the sheltered shore
the wild garlic grows

In this wild wind swept land
of late lake spring black lambs
the craggy portent profiles
of resting giants
face the heavens
and betwixt trodden paths
and rich dark grass
the wild garlic grows

William and Mary
entwined
among the roots and clusters
of yellow daffodils
lie together in peace
beside their river
free in a garden breeze
and from in between
some simple sepulchre slabs
I picked some fallen seeds
from where the wild garlic grows

Winding Lanes ... Shingle and Shale and Whiffs of Ale ... Oh and Those Corpses in The Cliffs

A winding lane to old Pin Mill
the Orwell sits in beauty still
"The Butt and Oyster" rests ashore
whilst old Thames barges look forlorn

Aldeburgh's beach of shingle and shale
turns a mariner's thoughts to mermaids and whales
fishermen bring the catch of the day
straight to the scales for sale and away

Walberswick pier and the bridge above
painted by Steer on the beach he loved
Dunwich where the ancients lived
bones of corpses roll out of the crumbling cliffs

Southwold postcards in colourful inks
whitewashed cottages and delicate pinks
a quiet breeze laden with salt
a whiff in the air of beer famous malt

Winter

Wiping the condensation away
from the eyes of the house
the window reveals
the frost and the snow
in a frozen quartz forest garden
undauntedly feline
indented with a pattern of paws across the lawn

The gales from Scandinavia
cut harshly over the land
white petals twirl in a frenzy
in a swirling hostile dance

The sun so readily surrenders
early to the night
the wind rustles through the laurels
into the cobalt coloured sky

Ypres

After the dying seconds of war had ebbed

Peace

But news travelled late to the sniper in wait

as the final round tolled from a rifle in haste

to take a young life and cause decades of waste

After searching all day beneath a sombre sky

we found his name

etched within

the Menin Gate

a life so short so sad in vain

Epilogue

Have you seen the land living by the breeze

Can you understand a light among the trees

Tell me all that you may know

Show me what you have to show

Tell us all today

If you know the way to blue?

(Nick Drake: Way to Blue)

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About the cover art

The painting is by the celebrated UK artist Jan Kalinski. In 1992 Jan was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) resulting in permanent numbness of his fingers. He can no longer hold a fine pencil or write his own name but will not let go of a paintbrush.

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In Violet
The being envelopes the mystery
The curtain is raised to reveal
The leaves are vulnerable
The grass to caress
Holding the green orb of enlightenment
Sitting delicately on the barely visible precipice
Is she an elegiac memory or a ghost



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