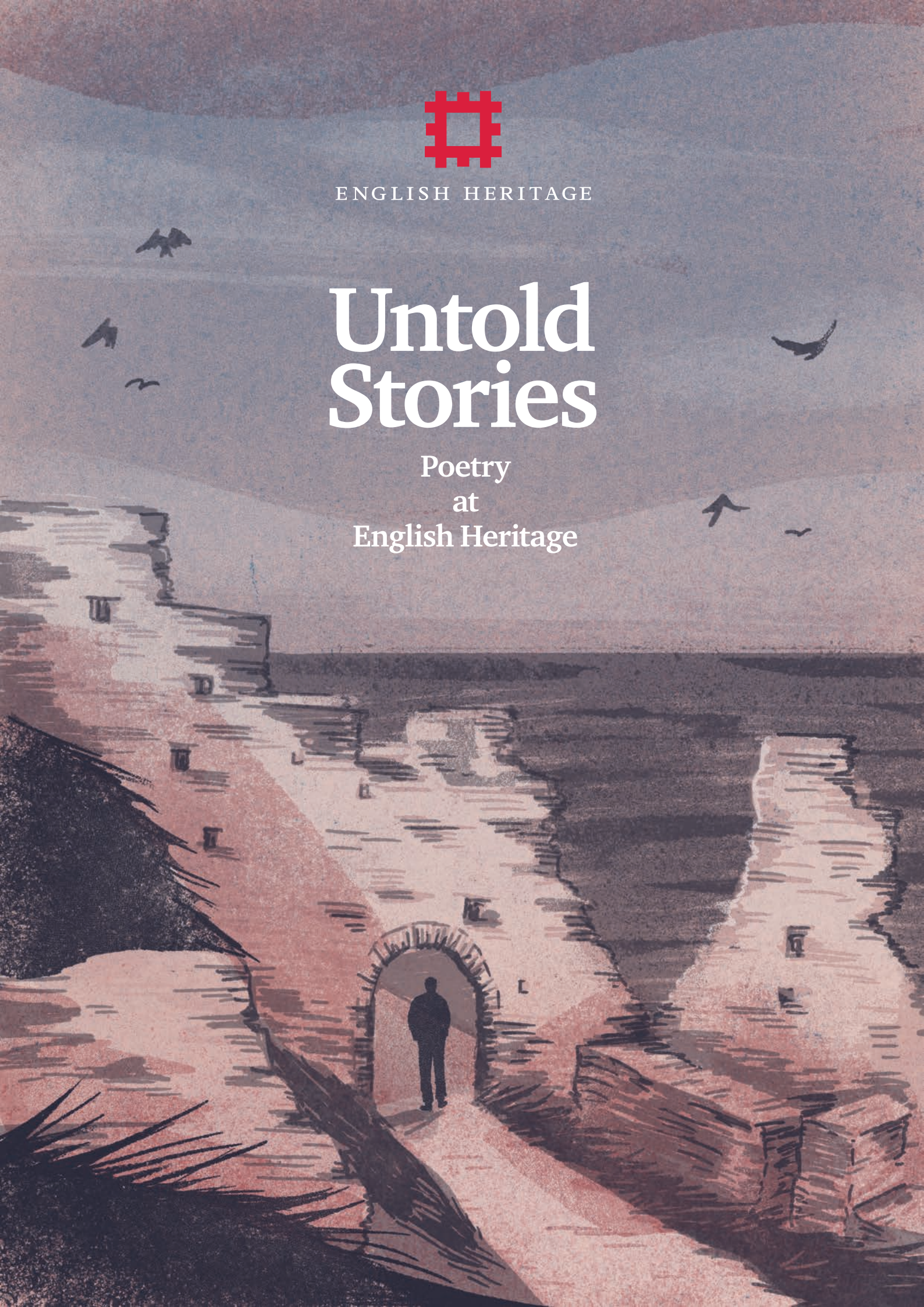




ENGLISH HERITAGE

Untold Stories

Poetry
at
English Heritage



Thanks

To historians Andrew Hann, Steven Brindle, Michael Carter, Paul Pattison and curator Kevin Booth for sharing their incredible knowledge with the commissioned poets; to Hannah Keddie for her work on the poetry competition; to Malika Booker for inspiring the next generation of poets; to the Shout Out Loud, Barbican Young Poets, Beatfreaks, ArtfulScribe and The Writing Squad teams for enabling the workshops for emerging poets to take place; to Forward Arts Foundation and National Poetry Day for their support and advice; to the commissioned poets for their powerful words and to Jacob Sam-La Rose for his commitment and passion.



barbican



barbican



Artful
Scribe

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Introduction

JACOB SAM-LA ROSE

ANY CREATIVE ENDEAVOUR typically shares something with the structure of an iceberg. You know the age-old allusion: faced with the part of the iceberg that rises above sea level, we all too often ignore its submarinal bulk, the larger part that remains beyond view. It's been a long road from the initial conversations I had at the end of 2019 with Dominique Bouchard, Head of Learning and Interpretation, about an English Heritage poetry residency. We spoke about digging deep into what Englishness has been and is becoming, and (with a nod to the submarinal mass I just mentioned) an effort to reach towards the unheard and unseen, those voices and narratives that are an irrefutable part of English history but have remained below a threshold of visibility or broad acknowledgement.

As we returned to planning later in 2020 and considered how to move forward in spite of the uncertainty of a pandemic, the vision for the programme evolved, and we engaged with the realities of making it happen. There were the

practical challenges that arose from trying to do justice to research and writing in response to English Heritage sites without the physical access we would have had at any other time. Beyond those practicalities lay other, more nuanced considerations: the increased sense of weight for those poets confronting painful narratives at the intersection of English and Black history as Black writers, at a time in which institutional racism, brutality and questions around the relative value of human life were once again foregrounded as present, lived experience. Suffice to say, much of the work these poems depend on isn't visible on these pages and yet deserves to be acknowledged.

There is a wealth of poetry and perspective gathered in this anthology, traversing history and heritage, pitching back through time while interrogating and even refuting reverberations of the past within a living present. These collected works speak beyond the pages on which they are positioned. And there's always more that can be said.



Shout Out Loud Poetry Exchange

As part of English Heritage's Shout Out Loud programme, poets from Beatfrees, Barbican Young Poets, The Writing Squad and ArtfulScribe responded to sites and historical narratives through a series of online workshops led by Malika Booker.

In paired groups, primed by Malika's creative research challenges and prompts, the poets responded to sites ranging from Tintagel Castle in Cornwall, to Stott Park Bobbin Mill in Cumbria, and Goodshaw Chapel in Lancashire. They explored beyond the historical record, reclaiming space for voices and histories that have been silenced or forgotten.

Shout Out Loud is English Heritage's national youth engagement programme supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.



An over-exposed image of the Old Baptist Chapel

FAHAD AL-AMOUDI

*There were days you couldn't see valley
for smog but you could hear the singing*

*all the way from Cribden Hill; the low
hum of a double bass making the dales*

*undulate in tetrameter and flaggestone
like vocal chords in the neck*

*of a country that swallows oceans
and calls them bottles; floating*

*prayers that raze cities
to a scattering of headstones*

*all in the name of smoke. See the heads rising
out the mills in bitter harmony, songs*

*that scored the South Wall un-
even as scales tipping the collection*

*box? They had keyholes for pulpits;
congregations huddled round a door*

*to be auctioned off – this was music
unravelling the flesh, music*

*grinding wood into pulp
for the bibles and singing pews*

*drowning the valleys in deafening
hymn – in Christianity and Commerce*

*this is God's own country;
what He gives can only be returned.*

An oak tree grows around the old chapel
pulling the gritstone back in symmetry

to where the old road used to meet the new
by the White Horse Inn. There you can see

the Larks of Dean peddling believers from a
rival church – *we've always seemed to have good*

singers – men and women spun together
in the finest cotton like air bubbles pushing

against the spines of slaves raising
their voices to the sun.

Only the elect can hold a note
and throw it away but if you look closely enough

you will see the shadows that guard faith
and be able to pass your hand right through

the windows on the first floor that were once
on the ground and once before that
slates carried on the backs of people
gathered in Lumb marketplace, watching
William Mitchell standing on an upturned stool,
(God's own rock)
fighting the bailiffs
as they
(God's own children)
tried to drag his body down.

witchknot

HELEN BOWELL

Merlin tied my hair in a witchknot and it
really messed with my day everyone in the castle
was like hey nice hair looking good today
and I was like I literally cannot untie this please help me
I guess it's a good form of torture like the endless
dancing curse or the one where you infect everything
with gold the hair that doesn't represent your true self
but nobody believed me everybody thought
I just had nice hair

*

when I woke up the bedroom was covered in reticello
glass threads everywhere what a nightmare
had to get Gawain's boy in to chisel through so I could
break fast must be an assassin failing again
weird one though Arthur didn't seem too bothered
we went hunting as planned I landed a deer
beautiful thing so sad you can't eat the skin

*

moilsome work says Rose my second most depressing maid
I get her to repeat herself ask where she learnt
moilsome feels like a slug to something that can't feel it
moilsome I seek out Morgan Arthur's half-sister
say teach me
in the grove she sits right by me
shows me papyrus and feather
how to bring language from quick little movements
again again to conjure sound
says it is no magic or not the kind Merlin taught
she sits right by me Morgan the half-sister

*

Merlin walks down the spiral staircase and says
how's it hanging he is wearing his evil look
so well today where's Arthur I ask
dunno he says have you checked with the horses?
there's a nice new stable hand
I want to scratch Merlin with ten fingernails to see

if he'd screech but that's not polite
he bites into an apple and vanishes
leaving six eggs in his place rolling
gently in all directions weird joke
Gareth tries to grab them before they smash
into something and I go to the stables just in case
Arthur's not been himself lately and even when you shake
salt rings outside the door Merlin has a way of getting in
but the stables are vacant as an empty hood
I take a torch from the wall and my knuckles are pink
like screaming pink like Merlin's cheeks

*

one night I ask Arthur if he ever thinks about how he came
to be which is to say how his dad decided Igraine
Morgan's mother was a door he had to open
a castle he had to take and not quite in the spirit of fair play
which is to say she wouldn't have
if she'd known it was Uther not her husband
Arthur says what do you mean
and I say well you were made to be blunt
not from love or even desire but trickery
a deception conception if you will a lie just to lay
he says well that's how it goes sometimes
the king always gets the girl
I don't open my mouth again
till morning and I don't dream

*

sometimes when everyone is asleep
Morgan tells me about Iseult
how she was shipped off
with a potion meant to make the wedding night
possible about Tristan in the middle
how his name spelled sadness but he couldn't read
how the bad dreams came to each of them
Mark not getting the punchline till the end
how love was a lily on a jealous lake
and the lance was a word
nobody could take back

no way to put it out she says
but sleep

*

Morgan's clothes are perfect
everyone else thinks they're weird or a lot
but leopard print really does it for me
and that torq that shines like Merlin's knees
that brooch the two birds
killing each other on Morgan's breast yes please
or well you know
I want them for myself I mean okay
I've thought about relieving her of that thick coat
from behind her hair falling loose over
her shoulder

*

Merlin says binate means doubled or coupled
as he ties up my doppelgänger someone trying
to impersonate you my lady he says close shave that
and I think but don't say you're the one
who cast the spell gave Uther the skin
of Morgan's father so he looked just like him
sounded so like him strange his sudden passion
did Igraine ever find out? presumably
the real husband died that night
doing something noble

*

one of Arthur's boys got kicked in the stables this morning
and everyone stood round wailing like crows
Morgan pushed through whispered something
made him drink from her pouch kissed him
on the lips and the stark white boy
turned pink later Morgan tells me sometimes it doesn't work
but once life is in a thing it doesn't want to leave
there is more life in her brimming like hot soup
than in this whole citadel I think this whole land

*

I need to get out
I am asking for help
into the unknown lands
how to speak
like a lion
Morgan
can you feel it too
a rubbish heap
Morgan
last week
she had it coming
are getting scarier
a wilderwoman
wearing nothing
and sleep on grass
Morgan I want

of this castle
Morgan take me
I want to learn
without feeling
Merlin-ed out to sea
something bad is coming
the badness mounting like
waiting to be burnt
Merlin took a pitchfork to a girl
said
the decisions
let me be
let me walk out
but my hair
I want to sleep
these dreams

Ghazal: Song Of The Sea

HANNAH BURROWS

Castles sit like nesting dolls
cast in thick grey mortar;
All is myth and all is found
beneath the seething water

History lives inside itself;
ripples through concentric walls
rubbed anonymous by grit
and water

Here we make our stand,
but words of beauty flee from me
like fingers run from water

An utterance is made in the mouth of a cave
A cliff sheds its skin like a secret
to the water

An unnamed storm lashes like a curled tongue,
in a spellsong of anatomy, a wave
fickle as water

She can only think of what is left to save;
The space between his self and lust overflows
with water

A body expands to fill its stolen space
No voice can break the hush
of hidden skins trapped underwater

Histories pass: two bodies build a bridge
towards each other;
Four stone arms stretched over halves
left torn apart by water

A tower lay here once, a sleeping stone,
a pillar of salt
Crumbled, changed, forgotten, rebuilt
in a decade's blink of water

Truth is a fickle thing to burrow through
But here, see it carve out stories
with the relentless gasp of water.

What I could lose in threads

TICE CIN

Pit my head against the whirr.
If you put my hands back one hundred, two hundred they'd be
the same but jammed but crusted but through a hole and winded.

Wood blocked raw.
Bobbin' up like wheat in a belly.
I'm a raw block of wood,
bloated wet by England.

Oh hands of a fool,
not cold but brittle.
Oh be kind to this fool
fretting in the seal.

Singers on my ears to remember my grandmother, spinning and weaving.
We lose ourselves in threads.
I took you from a tree and heard you figging:

*There were rows and rows of people sitting next to each other – like school!
People in front and by your side.
Seven-thirty start, four o'clock break.
Non-stop...
Check your stitches for the passer – before the ironing ladies,
– before the Hoffman – bobbin get the colours right, back up bobbins, 3
or 4.*

Where did we all go beee?

Tell the age of a thing
circled trunk
journey from tree
to bobbin
belt-driven machine
snapping back at me
snapping back at me
snapping back at me:

*London life to me is so easy.
Alright, is hard because I was a worker but after a while...
You sell your clothes to laundry...tax...
First two years I was working with Ahmet.
One factory in London, one in Birmingham.
I was doing ten thousand pieces a week.*

Oh they made me tool
not wound but lapped
Oh I'm more than a tool
turning in the sap.

If you put my hands forward one hundred, two hundred
they'd be the same but glitched but lean but under an arch and
blended.

A place my labour creates

AIDA FOFANA

I will enter a place as beautiful as the chambers of sin,
My labour seasons sweetly

A hothouse for me
A hothouse for we
With pineapples, cassava, and tamarind to eat
Dirt accompanies meals
As it sits at home under fingernails
Migrating towards limbs
The sun won't flog remorseful skin,
its rays will forgive
Cattle will walk on four legs and obey its position

Hibiscus flowers will bleed
Bay leaves a shade of evergreen
Spices will perform their aromas; your own private show
Aniseed will bring heat as home once did
In a place my labour creates

Burnt flesh sits thick like incense in the air
You arise, you have life
Plant a mustard seed for me
Plant a mustard seed for we
Faith dance as though to honour our feet
Greet the ground, prostrate to its rhythm
For the hums are my soul's provisions
Marble sits between the slats of discs and lashes
Marble rejects lashes
In a place my labour creates
Our back is the mineral/stone/

We will sail on liberty towards liberation,
Hope bright like turmeric
With two handfuls of it to light the passage
Fallen women in white fan banana leaves
Sustaining Ancestral chorus' that ring
In three part harmonies
They beckon for a return
In a place my labour creates

My father's house has many rooms
And, like my master, when i enter he will say well done

good and faithful servant
Streamlets abandoned by water
Ask for me to weep
This forced labour my ministry
Prepares a place
for me
For we

My blood fertilizes the ground for silk cotton trees
Not on your back, for its roots grew too deep
Growing pains gifted by your grandmother
The violations on her body
Pinch on yours
Sores packed with pus arise on skin
Souls seep through discharge
Wrapping itself around ankles before returning to the earth

Light will be the source nobody hides from;
the day will belong to us
Basking in the sun because we want to,
our grief engulfed by its rays
Like a bosom that soothes rage
In a place my labour creates
A Silk cotton tree for me
A silk cotton tree for we
Not on your back for this will give shade
Not shade you back

Nettles will never pirouette as sin did with Eve
Wails of suicide won't be the accompanying piece

For its shoots will not loot bodies that whisper
Of ashlar limestone,
archways painted by leaves
Welcome the end of a shift
Its fountain springs like my step once did
Rivulets on women's faces will run dry
Men will allow light behind their eyes
In a place my labour creates
White men wail hill an gully rider towards the gates

Where room is made on your face to smile
Keep the space
For my labour creates a place
For me
For we

Goodshaw Chapel

TABBY HAYWARD

God's house comes singing over Swinshaw Moor,
borne on backs, and lifted. From Bullar Trees,

you see it; innards of a church without its walls.
They bear it – shouldered like an infant, or a lamb,

logs for the fire, a spade, or tools, or lumber.
From one invisibility to another – a blacksmith's shop,

John Pickup's barn at Loveclough, then farmhouse,
cottage, anywhere plain-walled – this chapel sets up home,

roots down in a new body, like bread made host. And this
is faith, of course – is schlep through marsh and peat,

is heavy on your back, is hearing a friend singing at your side –
somewhere close in fog they are still there, holding up

the far side of the pew, shifting its weight to spare
your stiffened limbs, after a week of sweating in this earth.

It's work, it's trudge and slog across the moor; this burden
that they carry. It's hidden in the plain house of the body.

Tintagel History as a Series of Omissions

LYDIA HOUNAT

dozen or so; 1-metre-thick (3-foot); ~~him~~
~~an olive-picker, living from the ground~~
~~up; salting his tongue with the sun sliding~~
~~down that Tunisian back; a golden slide;~~
the bricks ~~slicked with rich oil~~ entrenched
in thick masonry walls; they were feasting
here, the Kingdom of Dumnonia; 5th and
6th centuries AD; ~~towelled the origami'd~~
~~Tunisian with his Tifinagh and his tattooed~~
~~children; yummy'd the sky they cloy dates;~~
~~them babies hushing livestock as whoever~~
living inside the Cornish complex lived
wealthy—royalty, even; a-could-be King
Arthur ~~slurping on the rind of black olives;~~
~~their vines meat'ing the soil~~ Immerse
yourselves in the myth ~~that is Phocaean~~
~~red-slip, Lydian-smiles pearling with gold~~
~~kisses; How they wrestled one war after~~
another, hounding future Anglo-Saxons
with ~~the cumin'd fingertips of waist-height~~
~~Amazigh tongue'ing the Mediterranean;~~
~~bluer than his blood—history's undulating~~
tail whipping Medieval fortifications—the
sinewy heart of English architecture laden
with tin ~~strapped Cornish backs resting~~
~~hands on camel-skin-sacks the cold night~~
~~sand peppering the Celtic spit; all the~~
complete shiploads glittering amphorae
they flock the coastline winking, temper
red wine to the entourage's lips; ~~them~~
~~suckling droplets from the bark rest easy~~
~~the caramel wine sifted from petroglyphs;~~
~~bent arms like liquorice sticks; the ancient~~
legend rests easy on the mouth, ~~and the~~
~~Tunisian, lies at the bottom of the bottle~~
~~like backwash; like softened grape pips~~

the cement reveals its recipe of trade:
~~oceans of Turkish pulled inside-out, herbed~~
~~the oars and seasoning—sailor's~~
~~teeth with sugared Maghreb the Bible; it~~
pulls her in, and in, the pages piling like
stones wrenched from beaches, blowing
holes and O's in the walls; rock stained-
glass—~~smitten hashish lines the banks;~~
~~crumbling in fantasy hands; the root~~
~~bleeds abjad script, the heritage dotted~~
~~like snakebite, the exchange glides its~~
~~fangs out and the Roman signposts jolt the~~
rocky peninsula—centurion was here; ~~how~~
~~all the centuries effervesce with origin's~~
multiplicity, the very place from brick
~~to mud to grassland, all mongrel'd with~~
~~meaning yet somehow reduced to an English~~
Heritage site, trademarked, uncovered and
archaeologically-perplexed, whose home
were you? No one has ever seen the face
of you; ~~but those merchants, with acrid~~
~~bones rattling far beneath have pierced~~
~~your wrinkles once or twice; pinned you~~
~~to a fairytale; dozen or so, collared sails~~
luffing Atlantic mood; they say rain fell
upon its unveiling, ~~the olive oil flaking~~
~~like dried scalp; shuddering in green glass~~
~~vials yearning; the curious call to timeless~~
eternality; I want you to place your hand
upon the castle's material, take its lung, its
metamorphic shard and ask if it is really here;
~~the perspectival nature of truth; how him~~
~~have hands like feet and eyes like ribbons;~~
~~no origin, beginning and end, like the way~~
land ~~is all and everything;~~
that baseless sum.

Chapel

GREGORY KEARNS

I

and like the dead I wake to find myself
lying in the grass – soil then sandstone.
Time folds and becomes toric, mistaking
millions of years for a few short seconds.

Scooped from the earth I am formed into
brick, gathered with other bricks to make
a wall and with other walls we make a
chapel.
A chapel that is half cloak and half clock.

Often the dead are hidden and timely,
and presently they are all that holds us
in place. The tools scrape then ring like a
bell across the moor. The day digs and
buries

the sun into the earthy horizon.
Tonight, I am back to my old restless
habits
I'm still awake when one day folds into
another. Who decided that we must

sleep when it is dark? History is just
remembering life before this one body.

2

One of my lifetimes was spent as a boy,
always wondering what might be unseen
about buildings – all the hands turned
to raise them from the ground. He visits
a chapel

where all the dead contained within the
walls howl – cohering into song – try and
name every single soul that stepped in this
room. Here he could point to the speck in
the brick

that makes his name a hymn – colours his
mind. He sees a village breakdown one
chapel to bits and carry it across the moor,
the pews held on their shoulders like
coffins

and from the rubble the chapel is reshaped.
To be human means to be buried – cloaked
by the earth – fully baptised in the mud.
Our hands reaching for the materials

for us to build ourselves, across the moor.
and like the dead I wake to find myself

Haibun for the Bobbin Boys

PRERANA KUMAR

'The mill was a male preserve, although one female worker is recorded in the 1890s.'

'Emily Curwen, aged 13, listed as a 'bobbin borer', was the daughter of a bobbin turner who lived at Plum Green: census of 1891.'

the bobbin boys crowding emily thirst around the water wheel, each turn drilling
their alder, ash, willowed spines. each boy wishes their body bobbin-shaped.
raw wood urged long and straight. then little fingers framing them precious
through spun hours. their bodies spooling value long after the rays set.
their lungs kissing the lake's waters
without asking.

*

my body so close to my boys	
	we ricochet : metal
mice cackling our lungs sharp	
	each second spit comes coal
shaving the air	
	swallowed by his or his mouth
	we forget
the sound of lake-wind	
the tongue of a hymn	our own unlined voices
	behind the belt
charles asks how a kiss	body-screams ? in answer
i drum his crescent stomach	crater music-box

& somewhere in london or matadi or melbourne
or the small bobbin world of some woman's slender hands,
her fingers begin to treble.
we do not tell them our joy
still comes from laughing.

*

a small, warm kitchen:
the lake water humming in a pot,
each bubble a surging echo of ringing lake-ripples.
she does not think of her son's fingers grinding to the bone.
his lungs basting in the sawdust that churns the air. this wood-bodied son among
other sons being 'blazed': growing less into his bark each hour, slendering
for the mill-owner's hands. the threads of him sliding into the lake,
how easily a body billows over the wet.
she only thinks of gently peeling the carrots for soup, ridding the root
of its outer dust. her son happy and soaked, and full of the right skin.
her eyes, cloudy from years of hopeful soup-making,
the steam milking her irises without mercy.
through a corner, still untouched,

she remembers to
feed the absences; son-shaped,
difficult to drown



Goodshaw

KATIE-ANN MILES

When we think of where
it is said that faith resides,
should we think of grand cathedrals?
Of towers, and bells, and steeples?
Or think of You.
The congregation. A sculpture of
a new life carved from repudiant stone.
Of the tenderness of morning
light through unstained glass.
Scuffs from children's feet
on wooden pews.

What did it take,
to build faith, here?
That deep, refusing faith.
A necessary sacrifice,
so that You may know
your God, all at once.
That deep breath, long held,
at last released.

What did it mean to marry here?
To love and to live and to die here?

To greet Him, an old friend
in both waking and sleep.

To be buried in the soil
of the garden You tended.

To return, at the end of it all,
here, and only here.

Lives of the Sten Men

LAWRENCE NICHOLAS

I

You can't survive as one man
down here, must become song.

We break earth in-time to our chorus,
rhythm molding heartbeats into line,

teaching muscles to forget their own minds
as they break the heart of the land.

Whip-strikes are the cliff face clock.
Spent bodies are left behind.

Each claw of earth thrown into mouth or eyes
a reminder: still alive.

2

River's voice must be trapped into screaming,
forced through our snare of earth, until
the secrets of its depths are cut clean.

Treasure weighs more than sustenance.
It clings to our footprints after Water's
bled itself back into the hillside.

We are colder than the dead now,
the absence of bones all we have left
to feel. Nothing but rocks to hungry eyes

we watch. Ocean tongues wrap cliffs
the way Whipman's fingers cling to the
dirt-wrapped, shimmering fruits of our labor.

Each step home brings its own ache.
The only rewards: seeing castle gates swallow our work
and greeting pillows with the truth: still alive.

Otherworlders weave their way across waves
in contraptions that speak to wind.

We march their cold-clay and delicate-crate offerings
to the footprint of the fortress, in double quick time.
Their worth is measured by teeth of cliffs and current.

To quieten our feet screams, we look
to where horizon meets the sea,
lock our minds there, until we've cleared the final steps
into our master's house. Inside, Ocean's voice
dies to the chaos-song of commerce.
Different tongues gesture their way towards common ground,
Horse dung clashes against spice and wine.

We drop their offerings off our backs
in double quick time:
glass finer than a heartbeat,
silvery grippers for meat we'll never see,
pottery homes for favourite things,
all safely passed on to others' hands.

Our fingerprints do not survive
on the beautiful things they take in exchange,
but we remember making them.

Masters and traders forget our faces,
but after watching something of us
leave this place
we sleep easy, still alive.

Artognou

EMILY PRITCHARD

We write our small names everywhere –
each piece of paper that I used in school,

marked yours at the ends of letters,
auto-filled in online forms, inside book jackets,

under every childhood drawing, and left
on the flat slate slabs of Welsh beaches.

Like you, Artognou, your name not carved
but scratched into the surface, just enough

to last these fifteen hundred years
scrawled underside a drain cover at Tintagel:

Artognou, descendant of Paternus Colus made [this] –
then, again – *Colus made [this]*. Your name,

Artognou, something like Known-As-A-Bear
or Known-As-The-Bear, but you're not known

at all, Artognou, your first three letters seized
upon and twisted, your stone becoming Arthur's

Stone, broken on all sides, its meaning cracked,
your name become a sign, something to hang

our hopes upon, to make the leap from myth to fact
and back again. Reading your name this way

is laying claim, saying here is where it happened
and I do the same, use my name's root to root

myself, tell how Pritchard means *ap Rhisiart*, son
of Richard, how my grandfather spoke only Welsh

till he was eight years old and I speak none at all,
hold on to my name like it's a tool, and with it I can

scratch myself into those rocky cliffs – ask, hand
on stone, to be remembered, to be a part of [this].

Wu'du

AMANI SAEED

I would dig up Halifax
to build you a home. I would carry
every single stone, jagged
and fresh-plucked
from the maw of the earth,
down the hills to town
just to pass my ragged hands over its face
and find yours in it.
Would chisel
until your features emerged, sudden
and smiling.
Would stumble
through vales of green for you, arms
out, eyes closed, hands expectant. Know
you would guide me, plain as I am
as grey, as small. As a good mother would.

I promise to raise you the plainest house.
The smoothest, blandest pews
the barest roof
slot the seats to
converge around you like a colosseum
beloved, I'll extinguish hell
with a bucket
set the heavens ablaze
like Rabia, run
like she ran wild
through the desert
as do the winds of the moor
tousling the heather heads
with divine abandon. O
I pine for you. I burn.
I burn so that your voice
rips through me, that when I tip
my head back
and unfurl
my mouth
the sound
comes bounding out
bouncing and unbidden and joyful,
beloved, so joyful.

29th November 1849

H L TRUSLOVE

I've been walking for a while now.

My two feet have turned to blocks of thick heavy ice
And I can't feel my toes except for as tiny knives that
stab on every step

And I've been walking for a while now.

It's nice out in the Fells on other days.
You can stand on a hill
And look out over the fields and rocks
And feel like you're at the highest point in the world.

Out there the fresh air can clear the sawdust from
your lungs
And the wood sores on your hands don't matter

When you're not walking.

Me and the other lads left for a wander one day
When the waterwheel broke down in the mill
And all the machines were left in dead silence
Not to drown out our chatter any more.

We laid in the grass
And we looked at the clouds trotting through the sky
And we skimmed stones across the pond
And when they stopped skipping
Our heavy laughter sank with them into the depths.

I was exhausted after that day but it was in a good
way.
The kind of exhausted where your bones are aching
but your soul is light.
I think my legs are too cold to feel pain now.

I can't see anything more than two feet in front of my face now.
The rain is whipping in my eyes
My shirt was eaten through with water long ago
And the wind seems intent on throwing me far away.

I wonder if they had known it was this bad, if they'd have sent me out today?

I don't know how long I've been walking now.

It must be a while.

I can't see the mill behind me any more.
The torrent is like a drawn curtain
And I can't see the forge ahead

And so I forge ahead
Even though I'm blinded to the wide open fields
And my breathing is laboured
And my toes are icicles
And every time I close my eyes they want to stay closed
And I've been walking.

There's a tree over there.

I think I'll sit down to catch my breath

And try to warm up my hands.

Just for a moment

And then I'll keep walking.

Flying ointment

SIMRAN UPPAL

We clamber round the rocks behind the castle
 Theo leads us through the cliff
 Harriet trips over the English Heritage fence
the farmer next door doesn't mind
 the sea in front of you
green moving safe

There are traces in the archaeology for three thousand years
 Theo says psychedelics were always consumed here
 witches made ointments for tiny doses of plants
we did the same in the 80s wandering festivals
 herbal first aiders, new queer witches
 picking plants from the hedgerows as we walked
olive oil jars in the back of the tent full of
 mugwort fly agaric lion's head salvia

They had olive oil here I say my friend Lydia told me
 shipped from Algeria, Lebanon, but only for the rich man
 the chef who dressed King Arthur's salad didn't eat it
where did they live how did they spend their evenings who sailed
 the ship round the sea who carried the oil up the steps
 what did you do in the evening after clambering over the steps

Anyway Theo is still talking about the witch-practice
 no institutions she says lived religion folk religion
 before the church everyone took psychedelics here
white tourists haggle over ayahuasca now but this land has
 mugwort fly agaric lion's head salvia
 they gathered we know the people who worked this land
poured the oil for kings and nobles then left and sat together
 the workers led by women sat together practiced healed took
 mugwort fly agaric lion's head salvia

Theo is good at giving care she know now I need
 silence of words richness of sounds
 she begins to sing to herself no words
sea moving as she sings I remember the seals
 in the sea did my ancestor see their ancestor
 remembering
healers sitting far from the church by water
 I ask the rocks if they are my ancestors
 they say yes of course

grey noontime sunset
flames refracting off sea

the heart of Harriet's stomach has fire blossoming
rippling inside a wide line in front of spine throat
crown of head lamb's tongue flame licking sky forehead

smiling swaying still Theo is gently singing
sea moving in time with her singing
Theo is silent but the waves but the waves

Rough Music

with *The Spacious Firmament*

PHOEBE WAGNER

a girl mouths along to
The spacious firmament on high
in a chapel that smells like dying oak
the light grave blue
on pink and brown pews
she's sat below the clock with its whistling hands
her mum paid for this pew box
the village are herded
pigs bulging in their stys
the radiators are rattling and pointless

With all the blue ethereal sky
preacher abraham nichols is waving
the same figures at the front of the congregation
hollow crab shell back
droning notes
cracking his ribs

under the bench
she begins to shuffle
her growing feet
And spangled heavens, a shining frame
of women's voices
flooding the men's bass
now her little brother's
tattered leathered feet
launch at the wooden slats
Their great Original proclaim

the clock continues to spin its hands into
The unwearied sun from day to day
bringing townspeople in and out of the chapel
pounding off-beats into the wood

no matter how loudly preacher nichols continues to sing
Does his creator's power display?
her mum side-eyes her
holds in a grin
michael's children to the left
join with their cry to be fed

And

this
publishes to every land
pews in a widening town
The work of an almighty hand.

her eyes lock with nichols
she walks right up to the metal wire
behind his eyeballs
cuts it with her pliers

the congregation begin to rumble
a hive of angry bees
nichol's voice
now leaning into the storm
the townspeople lustily breathing

Soon as the evening shades prevail
brother, Mum and Jean are at it
devouring the hymn

The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
of many leathered feet
tides of stock from their broth
crusting at the edge of their lips
turning wet

And nightly to the listening earth
the people paint
his shell of a face
with spitty broth

she
Repeats the story of her birth
the girl
is the eye of a new storm
the bennetts
their pots and pans
their stolen banjos passed out to the back pews

Are you done digging your grave yet?
the congregation sing at the preacher

she pushes her way out the box
runs to the blocked opening
banging her ticking fists against a hollow wall
we want to know what's behind here

*Whilst all the stars that round her burn,
And all the planets in their turn,
begin to dress themselves in rotten eggs
the stench pulling the screws from the hinges of the pews*

*Confirm
townspeople will begin to devour
the tidings as they roll,
And*

*some
spread the truth
like the last of the butter
will probe
from pole to pole.*

*What though in solemn
pots and pans
silence all*

*god doesn't
Move round the dark terrestrial ball;
covering our ears
abraham blocks his*

*townspeople
What though nor real voice nor sound
spitting out the doors
two symmetrical eyes
leaking into the hill's pores
Amid their radiant orbs be found;
In reason's ear they all rejoice,
their wooden spoon raised
And utter forth a glorious voice,
a noise, a rough music
turning abraham's breath
to wet on windows
Forever singing as they shine,
their ruckus melting with the chimes
'The
many mouths
that made us is divine.'*

Let there be light

EVE WRIGHT

In a teething heaven
Is the holy bones of a God.
Watery gum lines incised with shards of wine
Glass, dissected light
As though an organ, vulnerable, stripped of sin
From the inside out: the skin a page torn from the bible.

/

The bible
Drips bloodied into his dreams. Heaven
Is a slow fix, but he, like Father, is enamoured with sin
And seeks something quick, steals alcohol from the wash up. God
Has an eye on him, burns holes, sparks; he drinks light
Neat, soul on fire for another man is best cured with wine.

/

He's sick outside the church on a Sunday, coughing up wine
And pages of the bible.
He refracts in windows fragile with Mary's sacrifice. Light
Headed and slanted, his eyes froth with a heaven
In flames and out of reach. God
Nails his love language to a cross; the devil's tongue weeping sin.

/

Scarred knuckles and bruised knees, he kneels before his sin
Grinds the wine
Into teeth into Adam's dust, into rosary beads like a noose, and
to God
He prays to be hung. The priest chews the bible
Pages and prayers, which spittle and glue to become false
promise of heaven,
Where blemished flesh invites into it pure light.

/

He must be a light
Weight, the hangover ferments in sin.
Days and nights blur drunk, as though mocking, as the
lighthouse stretches to heaven
To watch over the dead souls, lost in the mouth of the sea and
blood stained wine
For those wounds, he must repent. And with the skeleton of the
ark, and ripped pages of the bible
He erupts, like a spleen, the spinal cord of God.

/

And, God
Oh, God, he feels the light
Swimming through his bones. A warmth, like sunlight spilling
through pages of the bible.
A soul, steeped heavy in sin
Comes to Him, seeking salvation from wine
And shame thick in his veins, a forbidden lover away from heaven

/

Or maybe, he is already in heaven, with all her teeth, and he is
already dead. Perhaps God
Knows mild hands like warm wine, and lets him transcend under
the lighthouse light
Doesn't let flame nor sin lick him, instead gives him angel wings
straight from pages of the bible.



Untold Stories Poetry Competition

Over the autumn of 2020 English Heritage invited the public to explore their heritage through poetry, in the ‘Untold Stories’ poetry competition.

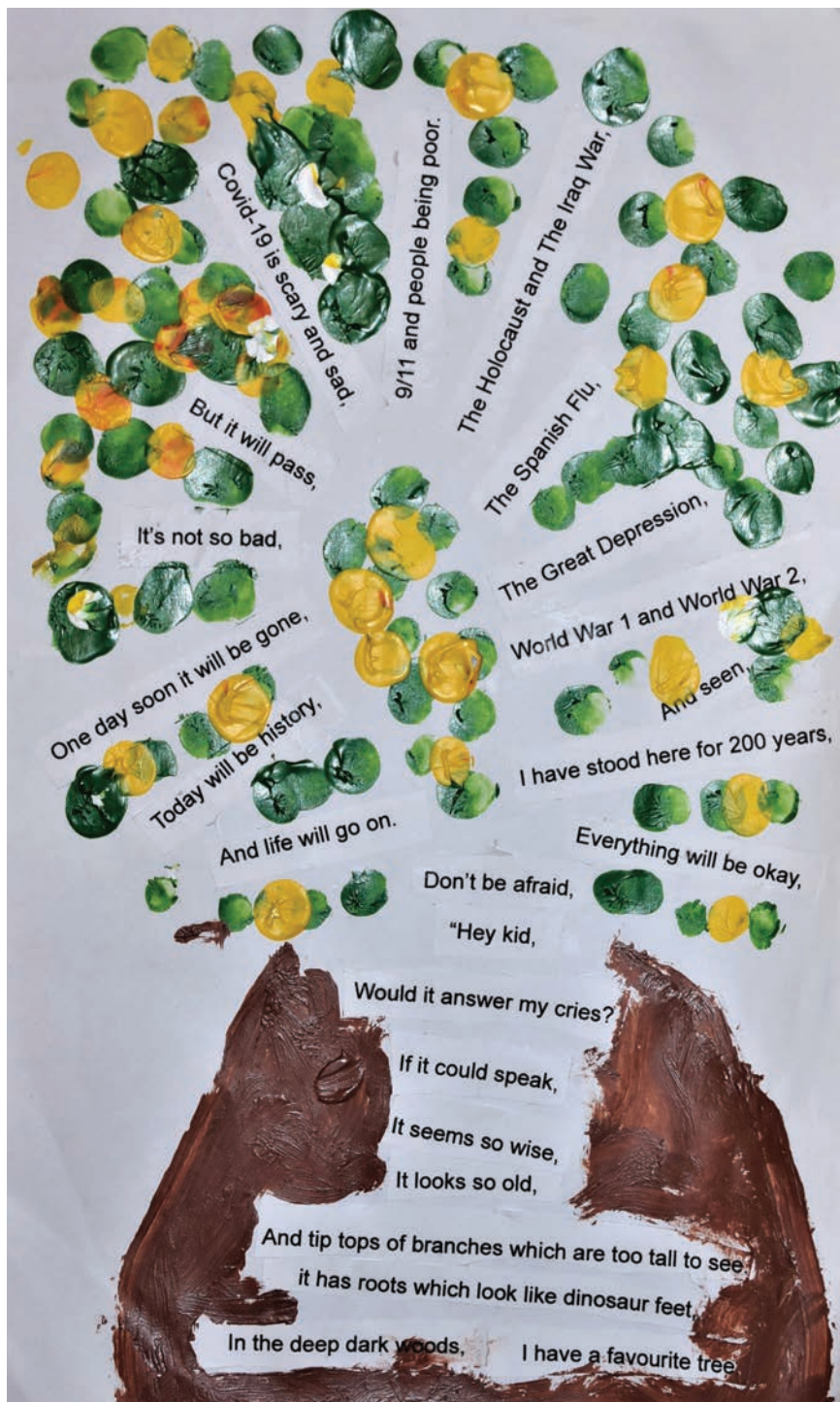
Over 250 poems were submitted from across England, with entries from Cornwall to Cumbria and everywhere in between. The competition was a chance for people of all ages to explore their heritage by sharing the people, places, and communities that have shaped them, and by doing so contribute to the heritage that will be handed down to future generations.



The Wise Tree

EDEN (5–8 AGE GROUP)

In the deep dark woods I have a favourite tree,
It has roots which look like dinosaur feet,
and tip tops of branches which are too tall to see,
It looks so old,
It seems so wise,
If it could speak
Would it answer my cries?
“Hey kid
Don’t be afraid,
Everything will be okay,
I have stood here for 200 years,
And seen,
World War 1 and World War 2,
The Great Depression,
The Spanish Flu,
The Holocaust and the Iraq War,
9/11 and people being poor,
Covid-19 is scary and sad,
But it will pass,
It’s not so bad,
One day soon it will be gone,
Today will be history,
And life will go on.”



Evelyn Dove

EMILY (9-12 AGE GROUP)

You are persistent, courageous and
powerful.
With a dream inside your grasp,
A chance to bring change.
You charge through the boundaries
And destroy the prejudice.
They cannot stop you.
They never have.

A placid ear is woken
By your empowering songs.
Promoting your long for freedom,
Sharing your quest for respect.
They do not hear an outcast.
They do not hear in black or white.
They only hear the promise
Of equality. Of justice.
And it is enough.

You are a warrior, elegant and compelling.
With truth as your weapon,
And pride as your shield.
They fail to defeat you,
For you fulfil your dreams.
They cannot stop you,
They never have.

Your voice displays your passion,
Your message is received.
For all throughout the struggle,
You did not give in.
They do not have the power.
They do not have control.
And you changed their belief.
With truth. With strength.
And it is enough.

You are Evelyn, prominent and inspiring.
With a voice sent from heaven,
That you used to change the world.

Now others will follow
And triumph in your footsteps.
They cannot stop you,
They never will.

For they saw the world
In Black and White
But you saw it
In colour





A boring village

NATASHA (13–16 AGE GROUP)

I was taught that nothing happened in Lymm,
It was just a boring place full of fields and cows,
Full of old buildings and crumbling walls.
I think they forgot to mention how the first major
Change to the American pay policy happened on a bowling green here.

I was taught Lymm was boring,
Full of tractors and farms,
A few boats floating on the canal.
Nothing interesting to see.
They never told me that Henry Ford
Built the high school here as a house for Belgian
Refugees of war.

They told me Lymm had nothing special,
We did the same thing as everyone else,
Nothing that could possibly make us stand out,
They never realised there was more than just the May Queen.
Soul-caking, Morris dancing and rush-bearing lying ever forgotten.

I thought Lymm was a peaceful place,
Full of the simpler things in life,
Ever blind to the turmoils of the outside world.
Forgetting the radicals' protests of 1817,
And the calls for military intervention in our
Small, quiet village.

And those same radicals and farmers,
Who left Lymm the following week
For protest in Manchester
Fighting for their rights.
Were slaughtered in the Peterloo Massacre.

And yet, this colourful village,
With such a vibrant history,
Has been reduced to
A dull, quiet village, full of nothing.
A village that once meant everything.
And to some, it still does.

Handmade

KESS TAMBLYN (17+ AGE GROUP)

September and I'm standing ankle-deep
in Devoran churchyard; my father lifts a torch
to bring to light the rows of graves and cheap
gas station flowers. "Here," he says, as though
the blocks of stone mean something. In the church
someone is singing, faint, and this I know:
the rows of bones stay silent. Just
a name, a date, a stone collecting dust.

I'm seventeen. We walk the coastal path
200 miles that summer in the heat.
I trace my father's footsteps in the grass
faithfully, tramping over new-born nettles,
through the gorse, sea thrift, the Cornish heath.
The sea wind brings the taste of metal
blood and wind and sea salt to my mouth.
No man is an island, and to the south

west slope of my young shoulders there's relief:
the rocks and crags of ribcage handed down
from other women; my bones remember grief
and lilting words my tongue has never guessed.
The Tolver Stone, Tintagel, Castle Downs,
the coast path of my spine. I am a guest
in my own body, a bloody heritage
I trace below my skin; the slow sedative

lull of voices carried on the breeze.
Older, I stand before the mirror and I face
the faces of the past: whose eyes are these,
whose oval face? What women tilled these lands
before me? An aunt whose hollow bones I trace
along my ridge, a grandmother whose hands
I write with. The cartography of skin
and reborn bones remembers where I've been.

How long do we survive beyond our years?
Those graves were silent, nothing left to show.
They're gone. And yet they've handed down their fears,
their traumas and their dreams; I know
their drifts and tides. The past is dark and yet –
within the tangled corpse road of my veins
thrums a living current, their echoes in the caves
behind my ribs and in my ears. We never met
but here in shifting rows an anchor chain
of women stretch beyond me: sunlight on my waves.
In the mirror, muddied waters blue and brown.
I'm looking, and it's light all the way down.





Commissioned Poems

**Selected by Poet-in-Residence Jacob
Sam-La Rose, English Heritage
commissioned poets Esme Allman, Jay
Bernard, Malika Booker, Safiya Kamaria
Kinshasa and Nii Ayikwei Parkes, to write
new poems inspired by English Heritage
sites.**

The poets were invited to explore narratives that centred or examined the absence of Black people at their chosen site, whether historical or contemporary, real or imagined.

Their poems map a literary journey across space and time, from the Cold War Bunker in York to Appuldurcome House on the Isle of Wight, and from 800 AD to the present day.

Each poet has written an introduction to their poem which offers the reader an insight into their own poetic process and the histories, stories and experiences that have led their writing during this commission.



Esme Allman

‘**W**here things shouldn’t be’ responds to the notion that Deal Castle was established to guard and protect the English border. The poem plays with the prospect of breaching the territorial, national and ultimately imaginary boundaries Deal Castle guards.

The audience for the poem is immersed in a moment shared between two mysterious figures, washed up on shore at Deal, who resist the hostile circumstances imposed by the landscape around them. ‘where things shouldn’t be’ is a speculative narrative that explores where the place(s) of existence in England and English history are for Black people, more specifically for Black women.

where things shouldn't be

seen from deal castle's south-facing outer bastions

two figures float like an oil spill
sink-resistant and surging against waves
they move inland

arrive flirting with the lonely moon
softening the sullen rock

their burning Black demanding all its light

two women
shore-broken mid-embrace;
holding.

both chests swollen; pressing
against the other taking breath.

their exhale grazing
a melody at the beach's sharp
unhomely air.

they eye each other
wholly; searching beyond.
an easy freedom drifts between their bodies interlocked;
they part mouths
sculpted in perfect yearning.

and while the sea bleeds onto barren land
they slip atop the pebbles to lie idly thrumming
their fingers at their sides

the sea dares itself closer towards
the castle threatening
to restore its simple quiet
clap and slap to best the women's mounting tune

a wind catches the castle hisses spits feverish with warning
the women and their song clashing
a sharp-edged crescendo

last breath the seafront shivers;
a blinking.

the beach, once again, fragrant
with peril.

Nii Ayikwei Parkes

As someone who has a somatic and psychic relationship with space, not being able to visit Appuldurcombe House to respond to it was a difficult starting point.

Instead, I spoke to one of the experts on the house and its history and they told me that the questions I was asking had never been asked before. They did however give me a thorough overview of the history that had been recorded, one of the most famous stories being of a Lady Worsley, whose affairs caused a scandal in her day.

Looking at photographs later, all I saw was stone, the house half in ruins. I imagined myself standing before the edifice, looking down at my feet, and the first line of the poem came to me: Said the stone to the foot: you stand on me yet/ you say you don't see me? From that line, parallels between the way stones exist in the world and the way enslaved people are treated as disposable property, invisible entities (and thus perfect silent witnesses) became evident... and from that foundation I built a poem. I played with notions of gossip and asides (through footnotes), but also the way that history is always, inevitably, linked to the present.

of which I have not left one stone standing...

OPENING ARGUMENTS

Said the stone to the foot: *you stand on me yet
you say you don't see me?*

Said the stone in the hearth: *if it weren't for me
this house would burn to the ground. Real talk!*

Said the sculpture to the baronet: *who told you my home was
not civilised enough to keep me? who said I wanted to leave?*

Said the stone in the arch: *don't underestimate me – I see
everything. I'm like a hole in the wall. Geddit?*

DEFINITIONS

¹ Stone is object

² Stone is complete

³ Stone is action

⁴ Stoned is inaction

⁵ Stoned is action

⁶ Stone is component

⁷ Stone is complement

⁸ Stone is commentary

Stones⁹ are henge, stones are hench, stones are a huddle,
a team, a gathering of workers in Wight shipyards, dykes
holding sheep back. Stones are also ballast, burden, the poor
of Cowes cowed under the grip of workhouses, the counter-
weight to balance the heft of slaves whose labour sugars
the crunch of desserts served under stone-wrought arches.

[⁹at this point the meaning fragments like a struck quarry stone]

FOOTSTONE I

They wheedled in by marriage, their family wooing
a path to the lee side through Anne's floating heart,
and, soon, above me were Henry VIII's¹⁰ gilded feet, then
one snub-nosed scion reduces my kin to an engraving,
marking the destruction of stone by stone, forgetting
that stone can not be erased because it is also earth.

[¹⁰you will have noticed from the modern example of Prince
Andrew, that royals pilgrim through many storied houses]

HEARTHSTONE I

Not as grand as a façade, but I am symmetrical
too. I carry a beam, like condemned Roman slaves
stumbling to the site of their demise, but around me
gather all that seek comfort. Trapped as I am by John
James's design, I have still overheard confessions that would
unsettle the seas that bore the Isle of Wight from Portsmouth.¹¹
Before soldiers huddled here, sheltering during Europe's wars,
before Benedictine monks floated chants in the air
around me, there were seven sisters, all named Worsley,
who ran up and down this house's hallways, kept it
running, imbued it with cheer, but were never once
considered heirs simply because they were women. That is
how feckless cousins come to fill spaces with scandals.

[¹¹ Google "Isle of Wight" "slave ship" "Portsmouth" if you desire]

SCULPTURESTONE I

Do you know what it's like to be ripped from the belly
of all you know? I knew immediately that the boy knew:
I may have been Greek and he may have been called Ethiop,¹²
but we were both taken by the same hand, stolen away from home.
There is a difference between a callused hand and the callous:
one treats all 'with barbarous cruelty,' the other labours to produce
beauty. Still, my fate became that of art in the vain collection
of the callous. Who knows what became of the boy? Who knows
how wind carries these ships of the stolen through black nights?

[¹² some people said Abyssinian, but I say if you can't learn to
tell one black boy from another, why fuss about names, Jack?]

FOOTSTONE II

I could speak of echoes, the shriek of bed posts
protesting under the weight of human desires, but who
listens to the utterances of one that is held under foot,
one who labours for breath under the preying¹³ knees
of those who believe themselves exalted? But this
is the lot of the stone that holds everything else up.

[¹³ this spelling is deliberate because kneeling Christians, like
Derek Chauvin, prove that praying can be a form of preying]

ARCHSTONE I

From up here, all is visible, from scalp to secret caress
smuggled along a spine while all sip wine from the glass.
I can't tell you how a grandfather became friends with Jonathan
Swift, who died insane at 80 (a number one-thousandth
of the sum the 7th Baronet of this house married to gain),
but I can of folk of both Brobdingnagian and Lilliputian tempers
that flocked here. Labouring under the weight of sculptures,
muscled men shuffled beneath me to follow the impatient
hand of a Sir Richard, placing his stolen Greek treasures
wherever he pleased; curios he was barely here to enjoy,
having made an exile of himself through salacious desires
and scandal, more inclined to make failed bids for female slaves
in Constantinople than settle for basic decency. Had he
perhaps heard of the exploits of his great uncle, Henry, removed
from office as Governor of Barbados on account of 'adverse
complaints'?¹⁴

[¹⁴ exactly how vagabond must your 'vagabond spirit' (Jonathan Swift, 1731)
be to elicit adverse complaints in an era of unscrupulous plantation owners?]

HEARTHSTONE II

We have our own joke song: it's a hearth rock life for us,
it's a hearth rock life for us... No amount of licks can blacken
us any more than the soot we already carry. We are stacked
against each other tighter than [] in the grip of a [],¹⁵
shackled together by hardened bonds that darken with time.
Of course, we are not human, are we? Otherwise we might have
gone the way of Thomas Cyrus, but we don't hold our breaths
hoping for that; we just eavesdrop and wait like 19th century
orphans, resigned to life in the workhouse, then servitude or
the army.

[¹⁵ some people will fill these [] with the words "sardines" and "tin"; we are
not opticians, but we know of wilful blindness to history]

FOOTSTONE III

Orphan stones, disdained by heirs, will be the head
cornerstone.¹⁶ What do you think this house is built on?

[¹⁶ Lee Scratch Perry's original production on Corner Stone is full
of grit, an earthy vibe for Bob Marley & the Wailers]

SCULPTURESTONE II

Isn't it ironic how many of us are crying for repatriation when the houses we were originally stolen to have crumbled? But are we heard? We are told we are protesting about things that happened before the descendants of thieves butterflied into the world from their cushy cocoons. Their comfort has nothing to do with the fact that we were ornaments they played with as they stumbled into walking; we are the ones who have lost our marbles.¹⁷ Our pleas are Greek to them; they fall on the same ears that will hear nothing of the lost boy's demand for reparations. So let me be still again.

[¹⁷ this is an Elgin joke; apologies if you don't get it!]

ARCHSTONE II

Perhaps the stones have spoken enough. Maybe it is not the place of this isle's needles to prick the conscience of history. If the monks of Solesmes left nothing here but footprints, we can leave things as simple as this: people were born here; they lived, they loved and they died. Let us leave the calling card of Boyle's Law: $P_1V_1 = P_2V_2$.¹⁸ Pressure (P) here, can be the suppression of the exploited, and (V), volume can represent their Voices. According to the law P & V are inversely proportional, so as P decreases V increases. The future is likely to get very loud.

[¹⁸ Robert Boyle was a fantastically wealthy great, great uncle of the 7th Baronet, able to dedicate his life to science]

FOOTSTONE IV

The last word comes from the first slab, for nothing begins with nothing. All injustices¹⁹ have their root in stolen things; this is something that they share with extravagant wealth. Odd companions, but true. Not being a standing stone, I could not be demolished or banished. I am now the foundation of what happens next. What will you remember of these stones?

[¹⁹ if you ask me I could write a list (this is a corruption of a jazz standard. next time we can talk about rock music.)]



Jay Bernard

I chose the York Bunker because I was intrigued by the ideas of heritage and modernity, and how they interact, as well as its Cold War history. The fact that there was a serious chance of a nuclear war is something we have almost forgotten.

I spoke with Curator Kevin Booth and we talked about how people trained at the bunker as a kind of open secret, that they would try to work out where the radiation was moving, that there was no help or reward for them once they'd done their jobs. The image that stayed with me from our conversation was that the bomb would be detected using photo sensitive paper in a box with four holes poked into it. I got the impression that chances of survival were slim.

The poems move through time and end in Beirut in 2020 – maybe because it was such a sad tragedy, and the videos of the explosion reminded me that the world ends every day.

A note: the titles for the poems come from the warning colours used in the bunker, and tocsin means 'alarm bell'.

Said the Bunker to the Bomb

BLACK

I want to have fun,
I want to know the truth of the land
the ha-has and swamps

of poor populations who want more
fun, distinction, more expensive leisure
and gold leaf cantaloupes

I want glory and a dishwasher
I want a hero's charred underpants
I want a hero's yellow snakeskin hair

I want to be the night, to be death,
to be the warning and the knell,
the heaving chime, the fly's mouth

I shoot planes in my nightmares.
I pre-emptively learn to hold a gun,
straight and firm like a future

I want to be the flawless slip
of blue sky to pink, I want to be peace itself
like a worm undermud

I want to be pure environment
the life patty in a docile hill,
the clay that makes both kite and wind

I want to have more fun than this
I want to give bodies back to the vaporised
not light candles at a march

WHITE

Home after training. E. was born last night.
Bus was late, dark walking to the house.
Inside everyone was there – plus K's soup!
Cat missing, T. broke her smallest toe – didn't notice.
(All else fine.)

E. is premature, the weight of two bibles.
I owe her something. Heavy sense, especially now.
A drink is still my passport and disguise. All evening
playing records with the men. I couldn't leave.
Whiskey got lower and lower.

S. has no more chances at the magistrates.
No fights tonight. But S. said E. looked like the napalm girl.
It caused a promise in my heart: E. will inherit a world.

There will be fish in the sea, stronger than S's hands.
Her tongue and eyes will not grow grapes or radiate.
Hidden things will keep their hidden places.

TOCSIN

What is that sound high in the air?

far away a hush
a choir takes a breath

and when the earth regains its axis
the hatch opens

badger-like a volunteer
scurries to retrieve

the pin-hole camera mounted
on the bunker's concrete lid.

a hole in each side
caught the flash

that caused the jolt
the almost snapping of the heart.

light threadbare over seas
like setting sewage.

in the gut, a three-man cell,
a dutch study

of shade and flame.
They turn the photo over to reveal

a lowering star.
The evening meal is quiet.

Overhead the plume
still shatters

a dust
so lethally new

that none could feel
what was happening

only
know it.

RED

Beirut was not a bomb, exactly,
but it's the second closest I've come

to the mushroom's razor frill,
it's flabby hat and skinny leg,

how like a killer bedsheet
plump with speeding air.

A man I have not met
described a place I have not been,

a city where the mayor
has declared

that this is too much
for a country.

The black spaces behind the missing
windows do not add up to a country.



Malika Booker

Addressing history from the 1700 as a Black creative involves writing into trauma, silences, gaps and an ongoing erasure, practised since colonialism to validate transatlantic slave trade practises that rendered Black bodies inhuman. These bodies were merchandise, subjected to horrendous living and working conditions and abject torture. The legacies of the imperial actions still permeate today's society, recently igniting a revolution that rocked the world after the death of George Floyd when reactions varied from: calls to various channels within the educational system to decolonise the curriculum, to nationwide marches, and the iconic and controversial toppling of historical statues in Bristol. These shaped my choice of Brodsworth Hall and Peter Thellusson's slave plantation in Grenada as the site for my poetic response. However, given the emotive climate and the fact that my mother's family are Grenadian I could not sit down during the isolated state of UK lockdowns and delve into poems that resurrected the trauma of my ancestors. I therefore decided to focus on architecture – the imitation of great English houses in the colonial territories.

Once I began to research however, I stumbled upon mahogany. The poem

begins with the first sentence that I wrote in my notebook "And then I realised the whole house was filled with mahogany, the doorknobs, the bannisters, the stairs themselves... My God it was worship and annihilation all in one." The colonial relationship with this luxury item ranged from praise for its opulence and majestic quality, to a ruthless extermination of thousand-year-old trees.

The research amplified the connections between colonial acquisitions and the development of an Englishness – reliant on imported tea, sugar, wood etc, and amplified the cruelties of empire. The empire's lifeblood pumped on the consistent annihilation of people, culture, land and resources, a wide scale, environmental deforestation, and exploitation that was quite biblical in an Old Testament sort of apocalyptic way.

This quintessential British wood and furniture provided the symbolic poetic potential for me to attempt to capture the epic and complicated scale of environmental, political, religious and social impact of our colonial legacy. This poem seeks to be testament, witness, interrogation and praise. Mahogany has to sing its own song in a bid to highlight the epic complicated interconnectedness between Britain and her colonies.

Songs of Mahogany

I

*And then I realised the whole house was filled with mahogany, the doorknobs,
the banisters, the stairs themselves...
it was worship and annihilation all in one.*

2

*I was compelled to assist in cutting a great deal of Mahogany
wood, writes Olaudah Equiano. Think of the mornings he toiled
and toiled to capture swirling grains of the tree crotch, under*

*the tyranny of mosquitos. Think of his back breaking, while
harvesting rows of trunks bigger than the big house, to harness,
then tumble into nearby river water. Logs lashed*

*together, lumbering, riding currents towards their first
destination, a main port, to be buried in the belly of ships. Think
genocide visited here and men laboured in the art of such a thing.
Speak of Mahogany. O speak of the people of the land!*

3

*Speak of Mahogany. Speak
of the original people of the land!
And think of bodies/ bodies/ blood/
 black/ blessed/ bones/ back/ back broad/
 borders/ broken branches/
broken bough/ brown/ bleed/ balsam/
 balm/ breathless/*

*Here is a space of interruption,
where hands slap wooden surfaces
for luck and palms lick wood for praise.
This is how Noah came to bend ancient
mahogany bones into a skeletal spine
for his ark, while Jamaican crows cra cra.
How they came to revere the mahogany,
whose demise summoned the jabbering crows.*

4

When Chippendale said *silky mahogany was a sensory delight*,
did he know that its music would be a relentless history, where blues
lick wood and the earth chants down Babylon, blam blam blam
they fall and fall and fall, till forty years later the rich red trunks
are legend, a mythical fancy wood, *Drop them one by one –*
Go lang boy! Then dip them dip them, but there is no healing
stream. Their majestic shadows opulent in these country houses.

5

Genocide visited here, as men laboured in the art of such a thing.
Speak of Mahogany. O speak of the people of the land,
who languished in dark desolate valleys. Look yonder
into a vault where their hallowed history is buried
by architects of deceit,

whose reckless temerity cannot subdue
sunlight leaking fragments,

tales of men touching trunks, murmuring prayers, heads bowed
asking forgiveness, yea asking permission, before
they began to saw the flanks.

See Noah – drawing and measuring
while nightingales perch in branches singing.

Take note, there are Jamaican Nightingales in the orange trees and think
of the men condemned to chop them down, branded
with the master's initials on their chests. Men
who sprinkled precious water to appease.

And think again of Noah drawing and measuring, like he making war
ship, naval

– while watching sky feeling in he bones, hurricane coming.

6

Dusk here reeks with the gestation of mosquitoes and slithering
snakes, lizards scuttle, and insects crawl out of the forest foliage,
littered with scorpions, centipedes and towering trees. Unruly
vegetation to be gutted, scaled back, then there are the bodies
bent backs, in sun, raised machetes cutting, while monkeys
gibber flinging their bodies from limb to limb on the brown boughs.
Prospectors came, found shady canopies populated by the ancients
they slashed and burnt to plant cane, shipping severed trunks
and limbs home to the motherland. And the forests became graveyards.
It was the dark of this place these adventurers feared, so genocide visited
here, as men laboured in the art of such a thing.
Speak of Mahogany. O speak of the people of the land.

7

In Jamaica in the big house, the house girl is on her knees
polishing the wood floor with coconut oil and orange halves.

In England servants kneel with linseed and brick dust,
worshiping this majestic red, genuflecting.

In the kitchen cook prepares the tea tray for Master. It too
is fancy wood. She walks through the house to deliver
to a man hunched over a desk shaping his will. Now think
of Brodsworth, of the old Mahogany water closet, and over
there the Spanish Mahogany dinner wagon. The balusters
added to the principal staircase and the exquisite tables
for tea drinking rituals with precise accoutrements. Peter inviting
guests to join him 'Round the Mahogany.' Thellusson hunched
over his red oak desk writing his will, casting lots for eggs
that may not hatch for generations, listening for cook's footsteps.
his tale ends and begins here. A man hunched over a desk,
inheritance, a male marking territory as the tall clock case holds
the round moon shaped face and time spreads herself out.

8

They buried us in the belly of these ships.
Mornings we toiled and toiled
bodies and brooding, timber and cut down.

In some ways the tragedy has a silent
crescendo, somewhat operatic, somewhat
reminiscent of a dark forest.

Safiya Kamaria

Kinshasa

I immediately came up with the idea of *MTV Cribs: Farleigh Hungerford*, as I walked among the ruins of the castle. I became enthusiastic about the idea of restoring and inhabiting it with an imagined owner from a completely different walk of life. I wanted to reflect on: home, safety and mortality.

Limbo, written after my visit to Down House, was perhaps one of the most difficult poems I have ever had to write. I walked into what seemed to be a quaint British country home, past a living room with a grand piano but then saw a West-Indian map. My experience of viewing an orderly exhibition rapidly evolved into a pursuit of heritage and vindication for a Guyanese ex-slave, John Edmonstone. I sought to articulate my honest feelings about my discoveries while grappling with the reality of present trauma. I felt it was my duty to illuminate unknown stories in the hope of provoking others to question the framing of British history and who and what our history education excludes.

MTV Cribs: Farleigh Hungerford

Cameraman with handheld camera ready. Harpists, trumpeters, lutists and a tambourine player on deck. Castle guards on standby.

i

shuffle my grime on fresh rushes before walking in
scum stays outside

[Queen Latifah ft Monie Love – Ladies First]

my great hall
with our funk, party like it's 1453¹
live well fight like hell
kin lost to the smoke
end up on this wall-painting
all dressed in white at a garden party
don't mind the bear rugs and silver chalices

paid

to

love, that's a heavy tax
filling every inch with my people
draped in silk
like they've never been muddy

[RUN DMC ft Aerosmith – Walk This Way]

stop

they said the north-west tower had ghosts
but if spirits were here i know they'd be like
holy hell!
we barricaded ourselves from colour
faces on swords were our mirrors
why did we not spice the halls with kente
swap the blood-stained glass with sugared almonds?
anything that reminds me of outside stays outside
renovations still happening
sun-roofs on all towers, tapestries on
creatures to brighten the dank
replacing a few doors for bead curtains
coffin-looking chests for walk-in wardrobes
a few lifts to stop me
slipping
watch your step

walls

from

¹ 1453 marked the end of The Hundred Years' War. Walter Hungerford, 1st Baron Hungerford fought in the war as a knight and admiral.

kings topple
they always

collapsing

[Kurtis Blow – The Breaks]

the fattest pigs in the land
can be smoked whole
nothing like two kitchens to feed family
only thing the last owners did right
family tree is growing somewhere
i always wanted stuff to hold onto
just had straw as a young'un
now i got cannons pointing outside and a

a

sky

[Queen Latifah – Wrath of My Madness]

i know you want me to tell you where the magic happens
but look at me and look at where i am

still

don't know what dried paint smells like, just smoke
i thought if i got a round table –
but no amount of crushed beetles² could plaster the taste
i need more
more sugar more sun more kente
more ostrich feathers on my bed
more 50 inch wide-screen puppet boxes
more strokes of brown on cement
anything to drench goodbye
everyone
back in the garden

fell

i want to show you the hydraulics in my new carriage
i paid to stop walls from collapsing
a sky still fell

[Eric. B & Rakim – I Ain't No Joke]

² Superstitions, and the fascination of witchcraft permeated English society throughout medieval England and in the Tudor and Elizabethan period where these cures/ superstitions were known.

Limbo

i.

with a delicate touch
smile lightly brushed
stomach forced in the ribcage of a whale

her portrait could be mounted anywhere in that house
and it would be considered natural

when life becomes an ornament
does it still dream of moving?

ii.

she plays piano for the man
with a waterfall flourishing from his chin
he drops earthworms against her music
fixates on their reactions to C-sharp
pushes their bonelessness
his touch full of salt
they gasp for air

iii.

a light filters through their skin
dizzied by a pulsing beam
rocking on the edge of a rhapsody
between life and what comes next
they beg for darkness
soil drenched in decay

the man hovers a candle over them
dips a quill in ink and records their behaviour
contemplates their final position
so small
they will need to be fiddled with for hours

iv.

this work
swapping the soul with cotton
the semblance of life captured in limbo
all preserved in this mausoleum

and his name

v.

John
so small
did he not sow the seeds of the new world
to an aspiring young naturalist?
show him how to rearrange skin
and bring the rapture to a halt?

vi.

a butterfly is mounted
suspended mid flap
ghost bargaining with glass
refusing to shed the foliage from its back
it is screaming
or i am
i want to end its suffering
but i don't know whose lock of hair i need
or what drum pattern to play

vii.

i can't sleep
every spirit is moving
yet the bodies are sculptures
eternal defilements of gravity
we got a version called The Limbo
a trick dance
your feet shuffle forwards
chest carries the weight of the sky
back bent to tease the horizon
inches from the floor
beneath a wooden pole
the illusion of progress

viii.

Mibiri Creek, Demerara
slaves are chopping wood
John walks into a house to meet a gentleman
the man twists towards John
crouches to the ground
trots on all fours
gnashes his teeth
snarls
John takes notes of his semblance
to other species

ix.
hot milk
hugging my mother
bargaining with my heritage
but the haunting continues
and i am too stubborn to leave John
here

x.
i see the butterfly fighting still
trying to escape from

Jacob Sam-La Rose

To save you a little Googling, St Hadrian (also “Adrian”) was a 6th-century abbot and scholar who came to be based at St Augustine’s Priory in Canterbury, identified as “African by birth”, specifically North African.

I was first introduced to him through the lens of a refugee experience, considering that he’d been a refugee at one point in his past, and that the journey he made to England took a route most likely taken by many contemporary refugees.

In reading more about him, however, I grew more interested in the fact that everything I learned came from other people’s accounts (as opposed to any of his own works), and the idea that the fact of his African heritage itself became a point of contention – not in terms of whether he was African or not, but rather whether, being North African, he could be appropriately defined as “Black” or not – and what such enquiry around the notion and value of Blackness in a historical context says about our present day perspectives.

St Hadrian the African

I. ARS INQUISITIONIS

By whose hands
and how many eyes seen?
What soft-edged silhouette?
What shade or tone of man?
What learning!
How ineffably refined!
What remains in the negative space?
What architecture of faith?
And what is prayer but poetry?
Enquiry abstract of response—
what shapes do ours mark out?
And what do they tell us
of us?

II. HOMING

At what price, devotion?
A far shore peeling away into personal history—
an exhalation, the dying toll of a struck bell.

Picture the man suspended between two constants.
Name them: there and here; to and from;
sun and moon; given to a man and equal and beloved;

beginning and final account. Was he ever sick
for the song of a swampphen? A particular angle
of North African light? Did he measure the distance

in octaves of Sundays strung between purpose
and whatever was left behind? Did he once wake
from an Apollonian dream to find himself

unmoored in thin English air? To suffer the pagans,
wrestle them from their sticks and stones, hold them
true to the proper observances, gift them with tongues.

To be a humble saint, incorrupt, in whose name
the selfless be praised. To be set in stained glass, bleached
and brightened by good light.



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