

# **FROM BETJEMAN TO LINDISFARNE REVISITED**



Wendy Webb

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## **Wendy Webb**

*This collection is dedicated to Norfolk Poets & Writers*

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## FOREWORD

The wealth of detail Sir John Betjeman took from the beautiful English landscape and an extensive hinterland, is exquisitely echoed in these later writings of Norfolk poet/editor extraordinaire, Wendy Webb. A fair number of inclusions in this compact collection have been inspired, I might even say – engendered, by specific poems of Betjeman’s that have had particular appeal for this prolific versifier. It has often been said that in order to compose consistently good poetry one must necessarily develop an insatiable taste for the reading and constant absorption of abiding works of the masters. Wendy has previously drawn upon the still-cherished works of the more celebrated Romantic poets of nearly two centuries ago. More recently, she has found empathy with the writings of Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas – And now, with renewed vigour, she pays fitting tribute to that entertaining former Poet Laureate, John Betjeman. - Though admittedly poetry content here retains that essential glowing hallmark of her own inimitable style and approach.

Northumberland is a fascinating county, enshrined in majesty and mystery, and blessed with some of the finest coastal scenery in the whole of the British Isles, and Wendy has accordingly included poems from Bamburgh, Seahouses and those wild, scenic Farne Islands. Lindisfarne, however, is possibly the county’s finest gem, and has long been a major centre for pilgrimage; and yet, the intrinsic peace of this idyllic, somnolent island remains, despite the massive influx of would-be vocational pilgrims and chancing visitors. How well, then, Wendy has thoughtfully interwoven reflective strands of impressionable description together with a readily spiritual sense of awareness. Reading through these poems, one can almost imbibe the salty tang of northern sea air, visualise the homely clutter of local country cottages and marvel at the veiling tranquillity of a small island community very much at peace with the glory of its former days.

## From Betjeman to Lindisfarne Revisited

From Holy Island (the modern name for Lindisfarne) we are transported, through the medium of enchanting verse, to Scotland; and here again we have poetry simply brimming with atmosphere and the prosody of crafted, masterly description. As to the lyrical tone and quality of these fine poems, I earnestly recommend that they be read aloud, for here, of a certainty, is mature, incisive verse that is more than able to speak for itself. – A selective cornucopia of sheer literary delight!

*Bernard M Jackson – International Poet/Review Writer  
(Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2006)*

## SLOUGH

Slough of despond I cannot see  
why Betjeman would spread muck free  
to leave Slough cow pats of defence  
and never try to make amends.  
For when a belch of stars shine bright  
it's best to watch them late at night,  
to stagger when no Tudor frills  
lean like fake-flowered windowsills.  
Slough's fate, as birdsong in my head  
where Maidens puke but do not dread  
my double chin and tum-rich skin  
while modern works of art live, since  
synthetic hair and paint dry fresh  
as bombed-out Slough in late-night flesh.  
And though I cannot write a lot  
about what Slough has surely got,  
fine poets will soon, doubtless, muse  
why Slough spreads muck, a centrifuge.

*Inspired by Betjeman's poem of the same title.*



## **RUSTY ANGEL**

**Greeting traffic horizontally,  
a heron priest lumbering a grey tide,  
reaching rectangular heaven,  
immaculate as lorries.  
Boxed future to junction the north,  
weeping rust, industrial tears and tyres  
of furnace curving feminine form,  
flow and faultless grace.  
Conceived and quickly gone.**

## **BERWICK**

**When streets depress like a Lowry painting,  
Berwick-Upon-Tweed spreads wide legs of indecision,  
a viaduct precision-placed on stick legs  
of a Roman tide.  
Architecture walled in art.**

## **LINDISFARNE CASTLE**

**Priory rock to fortify a hill,  
while Henry sacked a holy site  
basking in pilgrimage and country life.  
So tourist trails can silhouette a dream,  
rich jewel of England's past.**

## **CHANCE**

**Half-way refuge,  
less than reassuring  
when car cruises across causeway,  
driver calculating tidal probabilities.**

## **PLACE**

**Surreal to see Gertrude Jeckyll  
shivering in walled garden  
surrounded by seashore.**

## **ST MARY'S, LINDISFARNE**

**It is as holy as any place in Christendom,  
in shadow of the Priory,  
attracting tourists like salt spray.  
Peace pauses in the southern aisle,  
monks traipse silent as duty,  
or a late-grown tree,  
carrying cask of bones  
preserved like mead,  
to plant in Durham.  
Faith grows and spreads,  
an oak of England's past.**

## **AIDAN**

**Aidan carries Olympic flame,  
gains the prize  
in silent, upraised head and arm,  
to stride from far Iona's shores,  
dip a crozier out in sheepish pledge,  
to save the ninety-nine and spread  
from Lindisfarne to wash in southern shores  
of England dipping like a heron's flight,  
to pray like priests and raise a crook where feet  
slip to Pan's tunes of pagan past,  
a sanctuary raised in stone,  
a rock of ages worn upon the tide.**

## **CUTHBERT**

**Cuthbert. Where is he laid low?  
To lie at low tide on the sea,  
nothing but a cross, a shore,  
an island off an island seat,  
where peace rests with no bones, just feet,  
and all of shore a sea.**

## **GROUNDED**

**‘Still heaving with may and the sky ready to fall,’\*  
though rain is a novelty and sunshine too cool;  
though it’s August and holiday season for all.  
Where terminals pack full security flights,  
grounded and crowded, unprocessed, interminable;  
awaiting the sky-falling, flight-palling stark  
arrivals, departures of poppy-bright skies  
in the meadows of heaven and plough-hell of lies.**

***\*Quote from ‘Before Invasion, 1940’ John Betjeman***

## UNHOLY ISLAND

I'm on the level crossing of the mainline route to  
Edinburgh  
and what a lot of trains to shake foundations of my  
cottage.  
I'm on the Beal causeway to the Holy Isle of Lindisfarne  
and what a tidal surge of fears are forced to stop and  
stare.  
I'm in the Railway Cottage in a golden endless field of  
corn  
and what a lot of miles to go to buy a loaf of bread.  
What a proofing and a kneading to find some upturned  
ovens:  
where herring boats may roof the sky, tide-stormed on  
drifting land.  
I'm tide-bound where the local shops are baked by sand  
and sea,  
across a white-marked causeway where St Aidan clouds  
for prayer.  
I'm an island on the mainland where the supermarket's  
at Berwick  
and no viaduct nor walls will aid me to the present-day.

## **BORDER CROSSING**

**A pewter sea flecked by sheep's wool  
as far as eyes can rise from England to Scotland.  
Cruising along the A1,  
sheep dotted to shoreward,  
swifts dancing light on air  
and gentle undulating clouds  
breaking a gleaming crystal vase  
and there, proportioned perfectly to art,  
a solitary dinghy in full sail.**

## **SHADES OF SCOTLAND**

**Every shade of sky heralded approaching Edinburgh,  
with mountain rolls of cloud and meadow pink  
to frame the Firth of Forth in postcard blue  
and sea the shade of skyline hills  
from fields of gold and rosebay willow herb,  
to sky as broad as Norfolk wrapped in light.**

## FRINGE FESTIVAL

**Fringing Edinburgh Festival packed for the Tattoo,  
the Royal Mile welcomed a French Flea Circus,  
tattoo and caricature artists and statues breathing life  
like Venetian masquerade.**

**Only Scott stood proud, unreachable, unlike the  
Writers' Museum,  
free as Robbie Burns and words to walk over, like a  
grave.**

**Paved with gold, the city burned,  
and in the sweat of stalwart walls  
the Castle Arms are raised to pull a pint,  
to paste the bar with foreign notes  
and, in the last-ditch spirit of a Scot,  
serve Haggis like a castle's keep,  
piled high with turnips, mash and condiment,  
drizzled with a whiskey tattoo sauce.  
Macabre to find, then, tucked away downstairs,  
a throne room polished fine with stainless steel,  
to mirror endless cheek of kilt laid bare.  
The daring of the Scots.**

## **EDINBURGH CASTLE**

**The Honours of the Kingdom  
lie in no walk-in vault of crown and sceptre,  
scabbard, sword,  
nor in a Stone of Destiny, a seat.  
They lie beneath the vault of heaven  
set in a Firth of Forth of perfect blue.  
The many treasures, mounted, claim the eye  
and frame a perfect scene.  
Yet there's a seat as fine as any,  
straddled across a cannon for a shot,  
framed to snap the finest souvenir.**

## **MEAD FOR TOURISTS**

**Oh the mead is made and the mead is there  
and it's on every shelf and I'm starting to stare,  
for it all looks delicious and all is for sale.  
When I drink it I'm sure I'll grow hearty and hale.**

**Oh the mead is inviting, the mead is for sale,  
when I drink it I'm sure I'll grow hearty and hale.  
It's there in the shop where sweet tasters begin  
and then such sweet choices are stacked up within.**

**Oh the mead is for tasting, sweet tastings begin  
and then such sweet choices are stacked up within.  
There's a queue at the counter and I'm starting to stare  
at the mead made and aisles stacked with mead  
everywhere.**



## INDOOR GAMES

John, you're dreaming, how unseemly,  
seeing me in slumber-wear.  
Keep love-thirty eyes on tennis,  
for there's no more furry cupboards  
in your dreams of hide and seek.  
Fairies will not lark and spangle  
in my hair, unless you dare  
to play another game of tennis  
in the night-nets of my hair.

Such a foxy tea o'clockly  
pressed against my party frock.  
John, you must be seemly dreaming,  
but you know my gold hair streaming  
in the hall-light back at home.  
John, you must be more than dreaming;  
absurd recalling Christmas,  
though bells and party frocks are so appealing.  
Please don't tell, it's most unseemly,  
how I love tart lemon curd.

*Inspired by 'Indoor Games near Newbury' by  
John Betjeman*

## **PILGRIM'S RETREAT**

**In the inglenook of a teashop  
where a sign catches my eye,  
the queue wraps round the counter like a habit of prayer  
and Juliet smiles shyly where pilgrims kiss  
a fleeting table and two chairs  
and there sits a friar fat with soup and crusty bread  
and not a word is said for a brief moment of pilgrimage.  
Nothing but the clatter of crockery  
and a door opening for business.**

***Inspired by 'In a Bath Teashop' by John Betjeman***

## **OUTCROP AT LOW TIDE**

**Seawater whorls of pink and yellow,  
no tennis balls, no girls,  
just deep impacting whorls.  
No girls in slacks, no boys in jeans,  
just grapefruit cannon whorls.  
It seems to scrape sand-time  
in whorls of pink and yellow,  
like sandpaper, like DIY  
and not a fish or crab in rock pools rich with coal  
and what a slough of indecision  
there at the end of the world.  
Footprints etched in sand, in rock, in shoals  
and only batwings hanging out to dry,  
neatly on the land of sand, of stone.  
Pegs as beaks and clothes like gleaming Harry Potter  
schools  
shagging the coast.**

## **CELTIC SAINTS**

**Strange how monks seek silence among seals'  
wide-eyed astonishment of movement  
staccato as prayer.  
Cup hands slowly to a nest,  
to lay a blessing on a sheave of eggs  
and breathe warm mead to nurture into flight  
the flapping batwings of a shag  
or time interminable as a clutch of tern  
or cuddy ducks who sleep on peaceful pillows.  
Stretch a Celtic cross to lift the sky  
in sundisk of a Chi without the Rho,  
then watch as fishes teem and breed to roe,  
spread wild goose signs of fishing nets  
from Northumberland to the world.**

## **SEAHOUSES**

**Seahouses knows how to treat tourists,  
tucked in coastal crags like shags and guillemots.  
Trains brought tourists to early fishing homes  
for £2 rent per week.  
Don't ask the price today of a seaside holiday;  
just pay for boat trip to the Farne Isles,  
it's worth guano to shag in the breeding season,  
to lounge on rocks like lichen-seals  
and watch the wheel of gulls.  
But buy a car park ticket from Tourist Info first,  
it's cheaper collecting guano by the week  
in a perfect dropping heap.**

## **BOAT TRIP**

**It is calm at low tide in the harbour,  
boat wheeling sluggishly through mud, past lighthouse  
to the open sea, far as Seahouses from Inner Farne,  
then like a roller coaster ride, children scream,  
look doubtful whether this is fun  
for ninety minutes on a calm sea grey as habit.  
To Cuthbert's solitude where low tide cannot  
stretch canon arms in pilgrimage.  
Blessed beyond measure, guano like lava flow,  
like icing covering a cake  
every inch of eggshell birdstep,  
gone until breeding season next year.  
Shags like Gothic candles beaking breakers,  
swirling grey with seal-eyes.  
Leaving to engine's hummed vibration,  
a peace, of sorts, settles on retreating skyline.  
The Farne Islands sinking into mystery;  
Bamburgh cannons rising purposeful as Orion.  
Holy Isle a full stop on the Pleiades.**

## **BESIDE THE SEASIDE**

**Packed to gunnels, wrapped in extra woollies  
and sitting on sleeping bags in the narrow sidecar,  
engine hammers life, vibrating bones.  
Excitement dowsed little by bumpy roads  
to first sight of the water tower,  
so bracing, so refreshing, Mablethorpe.  
Rumbling down to the camping site,  
brother riding pillion, dad braking at the office,  
paying for a pitch.  
The little shop: buckets, spades, balls and kites.  
Unfamiliar muscles regaining control;  
unloading ground sheet, guy ropes, frame.  
The same every year except Cromer, except Dorset,  
except Whitby, Harlech, Chapel St Leonards,  
Sutton-on-Sea.  
Coasting heaven, shorts and T-shirts,  
spending money – enough to feel rich  
at the funfair on day one,  
poor after the bucket and fishing net on day two.  
Endless tides and sand and sea,  
fish and chips and drooling for ice cream.  
Rich as postcards, stick of rock.  
Taste rising to the scent of sausage, beans;  
billie can of strong sweet tea;  
a flap of canvas in the morning sun.**

*Inspired by Betjeman's poem of the same title*

## **NORTH EAST COAST RECOLLECTIONS**

**No people on the causeway to the Isle,  
nor pilgrims pole-to-pole, to Easter-trek  
a dawning tide to wade where habits walked  
upon the ever-changing grey of wide,  
wide sea and sand and land and sky.  
Nothing but rising, darkening foam  
and all alone on tarmac's gleam  
of white, white markings lengthening to sea  
and there, a life of sorts on stilts  
and in the brine a tilt of pilgrim tide,  
to wait adrift at sea or shore,  
where Cuthbert trod sand-steps of time  
and sinking puddles dipped his soul  
to seek seclusion further from the storm.  
Break on the shifting sand-bars,  
rippling, break,  
to intersect the gold of waving time  
where rose lines on the setting sun are strewn  
with silence like the Priory bell  
and then the next, a lesser-breaking sound  
of bells, of birds, of interchanging layers  
of silence stormed in shells.**

***Inspired by 'North Coast Recollections' John Betjeman***

## ALNWICK GARDENS

Pay for a year or bring many children  
before queues wrap round the ticket office,  
or cloaks and wizard hats brim around the castle,  
then turn aside to the treehouse early  
where morning tea effuses, vanishes before lunchtime.

Rest awhile at the Visitor Centre full of facts  
and poison plants explained  
and there, good ladies, take Ablutions  
or you will queue too long.

Refreshments at the terraced pavilion,  
watching ever-flowing cascades of water  
soaking up sun's sparkling diamond eyes.  
Climb above cascades, wet with water spouts,  
then wander round the Ornamental Garden,  
good enough to sit in peaceful corners  
watching the world flow by in tricks of light and water.  
Pay for sunshine, not for rain, and take the Serpent  
Garden's sting;  
bring dry towels and bathing gear, hear the childish  
giggles, screams,  
to every press of spray; wringing dripping clothing, bake  
and shake the drops of fun on picnic lawn.  
Take ice cream, steaming chocolate's finest scene,  
cascading waters sparkling in the sun,  
then drift with wizard children to another lawn,  
where picnic tables room a view  
bewitching as Hogwart's, or Harry.

Then wander into Alnwick, time to spare,  
and there The Old Cross charms with dirty bottles  
and Grannies Tearoom upstages The Hairy Lemon  
of Robert Burns.

Outstationed Barter Books – so rare – to die for,  
a wizard, wizard day.



## **CHURCHED**

**There in a teashop on Lindisfarne:  
in the corner, supping tea,  
a woman in slacks with a teacake,  
not daring to light up or seem  
distracted by bloody old sunlight,  
by windows, by water, by sea,  
by grass paths to silently wander  
when tourists, so tide-bound, leave.**

**There stones remain in silence,  
old men leave habits of prayer  
to stare on slate ocean, longing  
as candle-flames dip, disappear.**

**There with a soul in the churchyard,  
a hand on the latch, in the porch,  
a wine glass, a sop, newly-entered  
to skylark for heavens, adored.**

## NORFOLK

The Devil came and left again,  
he could not take the pace  
of lap lap lapping in the reeds  
and water's wondrous feast  
of silence like a birthday cake  
sliced fat or thin with waste,  
the lampen darkness settling rich,  
warm cabin's polished rinse.  
Oh whispering watery Norfolk sounds  
lap-rock lap-roll around  
where daylight dreads no unbatoned hatch  
and promises unbroken, matchless,  
weed like paint pots in the reeds  
where artists bless new light in perfect peace.

*Inspired by Betjeman's poem of the same title.*

## **A CHILD**

**O little body, you are dead  
before your soul-wide eyes  
could see my question, 'Blue or green?'  
Of shades where likeness lies.**

**O little body, you are dead  
without a speech-full soul  
and though your silence, poignant, speaks,  
sky-wordlessness is dread.**

**You looked a father and a son,  
where death was simply birth  
and meeting flesh was word enough  
where Norwich buried earth.**

**And now the same blue eyes I see,  
that you hid, son, from me;  
where nightmare absences your face  
and agefulness soon leads**

**to parting shored where eyes are blind  
and silence loudly speaks.  
Light of the World of dark-born eyes  
please leave and keep my mind.**

***Inspired by Betjeman's poem of the same title.***

## DIARY OF A CHURCH RAT

Although rats leave a sinking ship  
and do not hide from crew or whips,  
I think it's time to munch a tune  
why this foul Ratty leaves no room,  
except on Christmas Eve when drunks  
share chairs – not pews – with monks and punks.  
Where carpets make the finest bedding,  
but aisle-soaked puke's not what I'm dreading.  
We live rough, live well most the year  
where only Regulars are sincere  
and many a chair is stacked away,  
except for church on Easter Day,  
when children can be truly annoying  
and acolytes waxen and most cloying.  
But bats in belfries are protected,  
while children run wild and neglected.  
Though damp and leaking roof funds triple,  
congregations' frost-pierced nipples  
are no tempting bites for me  
when dozing toes, near as can be,  
are stationed with half-empty crisps  
and fail to notice nibbling frisks.  
The Church Rat is a socialite  
and munches parson's nose chick-bites,  
except at Harvest when tin cans  
are much more giving than church hands.  
But worship down on hands and knees  
is reserved for Christmas Eve,  
when drunken beady pairs of eyes  
face rats with whiskers in the aisles.  
Then the nibbled parson brings  
a ratting cat that changes things,  
until Epiphany's fat cat  
snore-dreams of morsels nibbling back.

*Inspired by 'Diary of a Church Mouse' by John Betjeman.*

## **FORD AND ETAL**

**St Michael and All Angels guards the site,  
2B pencil tip to scene a church.  
Pretty inaccessible is Ford,  
a time-warped frozen dial, 1914.  
Pretty inaccessible the castle  
and pretty jubilant, Victoria.**

## **HEATHERSLAW LIGHT RAILWAY**

**Etal bleet-rhymes 'beetle'  
or so the rhymester goes.  
From Heatherslaw through countryside,  
moot pressures pass; steam slows.**

## **BELFORD**

**The Jolly Chipper of Belford  
serves Haggis and Chips with a smile.  
If you're bored, under ten,  
then again and again  
he will banter, pull faces awhile.**

## **CHEVIOT HILLS**

**Past Flodden Field, through Milfield,  
the Cheviots rise like mist;  
beneath are bales of harvest corn,  
no sun-soaked poppy drift.**

**To Wooler for Good Life or Cuddy Duck,  
where Trotters are bakers, not pork.  
To Stormin' Norman, the chippy;  
or nick-nacks, or art, or a walk.**

## HIGH AND LOW VERSE

Oh verse, with so much open ocean,  
how to sail fast in slow Motion?  
Or like a Lizard's reality,  
chameleon a Goodyer's lea.  
If I learnt unrhyme's uniform,  
would Stevens' verse keep up my storm?  
To chisel Chisholm to perfection,  
diction would be pure reflection.  
With Hannah I could lose my mind,  
then, heartless, Plath what gas I find.  
No Hughes would shock my birthdays sweet  
if Coleridge drugged my defeat.  
So I will Cowper Hopkins' favour,  
never will my Wordsworth waver.  
Keats and Shelley may consume,  
like Thomas' voice or Dylan's tune.  
Herbert, Blake and Milton's fire  
will paradise my purest ire.  
Jackson will spur Jazz to wing  
and Bissett make sane angels sing.  
Williams will bath prose with flavour,  
Hodge will sweeten all I savour.  
Gill and Garwood, Davies, Simpson,  
will enhance Knight, Payne and Gibson.  
Betjeman and Tennyson  
will Constantine where legends fly,  
then I'll spin myself a Webb  
and swot to live like spiders die.

*Inspired by 'Preface to High and Low' by John Betjeman*

## **SHAGGED OUT**

**I stand, a shag upon the shore,  
watch grey tide wash my sand-steps dry.  
My arms, a crucifix before  
shade's darkest shadows learn to fly.**

**Watch grey tide wash my sand-steps dry  
to slate sky arrows from the hills.  
Shade's darkest shadows learn to fly  
bow-weary miles where bats ledge sills.**

**To slate sky arrows from the hills,  
drip-caves are leaden like shot wave.  
Bow-weary miles where bats ledge sills  
to ebb strength flapping crazy-pave.**

**Drip-caves are leaden like shot wave,  
surf-stranded on a land of sea  
to ebb strength-flapping crazy-pave;  
stretched darkness, blank eternity.**

**Surf-stranded on a land of sea,  
my arms a crucifix before  
stretched darkness, blank eternity.  
I stand, a shag upon the shore.**

***Inspired by 'Tregardock' John Betjeman.***



## **CELTS**

**Can Columba light a spark, can Aidan live  
in angel light where Cuthbert dreams afresh?  
Can Patrick coracle such early Celt?  
Can saint on saint flow like the tide of light?  
Can moonlit pools flow like the drifting tide,  
to see unseen parts' weed-weep sea?  
Can pearl-grey David psalm the west, oppression lift?  
Sink Holy Aisle, rise Arthur's seedless heirs.**

*Inspired by 'Old Friends' John Betjeman.*

## **HARVEST HYMN**

**We plough in global warming  
till all the fields parch bare  
and foul emissions feed it  
to rain storms everywhere.  
We like late desert sunshine  
to fuel home package tours  
and floods abroad and terrorists  
we seed to foreign wars.**

**We hope that only concrete  
and mobile phones are found,  
not susurrating beauty  
nor wildlife-nurtured ground...**

*Inspired by Betjeman's poem of the same title.*

## LENTEN THOUGHTS OF A JEWISH ANGLICAN

The Cloud of Witnesses is littered,  
skulled in holy prayer,  
like wailing scrolls and holy faces  
hidden everywhere.  
All ages parchment to the Rock  
of Ages rolled away  
where absent friends and long-lost graces  
trace a bow of shawled prayer.

*Inspired by Betjeman's 'Lenten Thoughts'.*

## THE LAST LAUGH

I made hay in a Golden Year  
while the sun shone brightly,  
but whether laughter cried in fear  
or harvest; I threshed tightly.

*Inspired by Betjeman's poem of the same title.*

## BAMBURGH TO LINDISFARNE

Storming to Bamburgh Castle, brooding in thick mist,  
as leaded windows welcome, warm as Evensong;  
to form a trail of knights, full-armed with lethal  
weapons,

‘Do Not Touch’

and dungeon lighter, with no scent of pain-  
racked damp like ghosts of Chillingham.  
Here restrained with no dour warnings, thefts,  
returned in fear, bad luck and mischief.  
Only the face of Oswald, early king,  
looking out to sea to slash dull sails,  
only the royal line of wives, restrained  
with glance askance in brimming tears,  
of some long-vanished grief.

Only a wealth of ornaments, of past,  
and names in art that flame like Turner wealth.  
Here at Bamburgh, where the teashop’s warm with  
light  
-not blazing hearth- where coffee, soup or sumptuous  
feasts

storm beneath the keep as cannons line  
in rumbling thunder, while headlights shine, elusive  
wrecks,

and then descend the track with care  
to find a new-dammed moat  
and every car afloat in slow procession  
down the middle of a flooded road.

To drive at low tide on to Lindisfarne,  
where all the sand's a moat,  
espy two pilgrims cruel upon the tide  
of markers starved of land,  
where sand steps back to ancient times,  
far from a Christened holy walk  
to font, to fount, to see  
a ruined Priory, graveyard wall  
and there beneath, in mist, a cross  
of Cuthbert's island blessed by Full Immersion.

### CANDLELIGHT

In waxen head and yellow toes  
no sincere poet ever goes,  
but without wax and most sincere,  
his words drip false where none can hear.  
The bells of Christendom may ring  
as flat as bricks and tiles and sticks,  
but stained glass poets learn to sing  
in candlelight with neat-trimmed wicks.

*Inspired by 'Before the Anaesthetic' by John Betjeman*

## LINDISFARNE

White reef, like Vikings surfing the tide,  
flagged by poles starved as monks.  
Carrying precious load ashore,  
of pickled bones  
ripe as plucking-time,  
to ebb, to flow,  
to lay to rest  
as bladderwrack of prayer.  
And here no herons priest a howling gale,  
where dark settles for a season  
leaving night wrapped around a land  
blanketed in peaceful dark.  
To leave an island to its mystery,  
secure as a rippling tide.

## MORNING APPARITION

A brilliant diamond rose through opal cloud,  
bathed in Chillingham's radiant blue,  
and dazzled with a childish laugh, skeletoned on the  
tide  
and, wide as skyline lost in mist,  
pale Lindisfarne dipped, vanishing  
in cloud beneath the road.

THE END

**This collection was first published to mark a special anniversary of the poet. The title is now out of print.**

**Other titles are available:**

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