

VERSES OF 'THE LAST COWBOY IN SUSSEX'
BY BILL LINDFIELD

MT Editorial notes:

Bill's numbering has been followed in this edition. This means that there are gaps where no poem with that number was found amongst the copy set he passed to me. These may have been taken out by him for a poetry reading so may at a future date be found and included. Where a poem relates particularly to a chapter in The Last Cowboy, that chapter number is given.

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THE DAWN

I woke up this morning from a beautiful sleep,
Not fitful and dreaming, but restful and deep.
The morning had broken so clean and so bright,
I'm sure to create it, our Lord stayed up most of the night.

Everywhere was unspoilt, not a cloud in the sky,
No wind to disturb, I think it too shy.
There is no other place, there is no other day,
That compares with England in the middle of May.

The grass can't be greener as the growth has begun,
Dancing and weaving in the rays of the sun.
The yellow buttercups group making a wonderful sight,
While streams of daisies wander with trails of white.

High above cascades of flowers all try to please,
As they hang just like garlands from the bounteous trees.
Little birds sing from morn right through to night,
For they to appreciate the beautiful sight.

The wind begins to appear at the progress of day,
The leaves start to stir, the boughs start to sway.
Us humans beneath the wind starts to please,
With the coolness that follows this mid-morning breeze.

The sun starts to sink at the beginning of night,
And we are once more forbidden the beautiful sight.
So we go off to bed with a stretch and a yawn,
And thank our dear Master for that wonderful dawn.

THE FIVE SENSES

The world is a place where you soon understand,
That pleasures in life and danger can walk hand in hand.
We were gratefully given the gift of five senses,
Their aim to appreciate joy, and repel as defences.

Our first is our sight for there is so much to see,
And some horrible things from which we can flee.
The second of hearing so we can of danger beware,
But find the joy of a bird song filling the air.

Our third is our touch to feel the thorns of the wild,
But marvel forever in the touch of a child.
Our fourth is our smell to avoid the horrors we pass,
But allows us the scents of the flowers and grass.

The fifth is our taste detecting sour instantly,
But allowing us to eat the sweet fruits of the tree.
So we are able to see, hear, smell, touch and taste,
We should use them all wisely, they're gifts too precious to waste.

A SORRY PLIGHT

Holidays are a blessing to you humans I can see,
But it's a very different picture to little flowers like me.
I feel ashamed now when you look upon me for I am a pathetic sight,
But now you are back I pray you will understand my sorry plight.

Yet I know deep down in my heart you'll carry out a sin,
And pluck me from within this vase and throw me in the bin.
I know I was meant to brighten that's the reason I was grown,
But very soon you lose your zest for life when left dejected on your own.

While you were laying in the sun, or walking a shady lane,
I remained here in the dark dreaming of the rain.
With the curtains drawn, the light subdued, I feel I want to cry,
For when you left you cleared all around, but you never said goodbye.

The days have grown into a week and I've tried desperately in vain,
To look my best for your return, but could not without the sun and rain.
I felt life draining from my stem, I felt my petals start to fade,
I grimly tried to stand up straight, but it was a sorry escapade.

But now you are back, I'm glad to see the rest has done you good,
And although perhaps I should show you anger, you thought I understood.
But please remember when next you go, on your desk is a pretty little flower,
And where you humans gauge life by the year, ours can be counted by the hour.

CREATIONS

When around us all we look, it's a job to understand,
That God created all of it with water and with sand.
He created Moors and Dales, with hills as far as we could see,
Then surrounded it with water, that we now call the sea.

He then allowed the sun to shine, to lift water to the sky,
And form it into great white clouds that we see floating by.
He put on the earth the plants and trees and to ensure they would remain,
Broke up those great big sailing clouds and sent it down as rain.

Then he thought he'd better give the sun a rest and so took away the light,
And of course by doing so created for us night.
He thought things shouldn't last forever, he couldn't see the need,
He'd let things grow and reproduce by the shedding of their seed.

He then created animals, the grass and boughs to graze,
To drink the cool clean morning rain, then in the shadows laze.
He gave petals to the flowers and created their sweet smell,
Powdering them with pollen, the insects to dispel.

He made the birds of feathers, to nest high in the trees,
And gave them wings to fly in the skies and high upon the breeze.
He made insects on which the birds would eat and put fish into the sea,
Made all the plains and deserts and mountains as high as they could be.

The soil he made was cold and dark, so the sun for heat and light,
And lovingly the silvery moon to brighten up the night.
But of all the things he made upon the land and in the sea,
The greatest was when he sat down and created people, just like you and me.

THE OLD CARTER'S THOUGHTS

When I left school I went on the farm
Looking after the cows with my brother
We'd spend half the day feeding one end
And the other half cleaning up at the other.

I sat on my stool there milking one day
And the teat in my hand I could throttle
To think that I was spending my life
Just to fill up a ruddy milk bottle.

Then I thought of the others I'd watched at work
As they hoed in those mangolds and swedes
And realised I wasn't as bad off as them
For I earnt more to look after my needs.

But I'd always loved horses and wanted to be
A carter, just like my old dad
So I applied for a job at the farm up the road
With the two Suffolk Punches he had.

I got the job and to the stables did go
My heart so full of glee
The cap, the kerchief round my neck
And the string below my knee.

I brushed and I curried those horses
'Til their coats had a marvellous sheen
Then I watered, fed and harnessed them
Leaving the stable spotlessly clean.

We went to the field and hooked on the plough
As the clock on the church had struck seven
And we changed stubble to furrow again and again
Us three were in our fifth heaven.

At eleven o'clock I sat down to snap
Horses' nosebags hung from their heads
I took from my pocket my Grandad's old knife
And set about my cheese and bread.

When the half hour had passed and we started again
The gulls sang with delight

We'd call it a day when our acre was done
And proceed back to the farm for the night.

The journey home was a pleasant one
Seated high on the old horse's back
Along the headland and through the wood
And back up the old rutted track.

The stable would greet us with a smell of its own
The hurricane lamp lit, it would flicker
The harness removed and hung on the peg
And for their evening meal the horses would nicker.

Having fed them you'd let them rest for a while
But the day wouldn't be finished not quite
You'd wander off home for the dinner you'd earned
Then come back, and rack up for the night.

So back you would come and give them a brush
A pat, and a word and a pet
As you whistled away to keep from your mouth
The grime and the dust and the sweat.

You'd then fill up their rack with the sweet smelly hay
And you'd shake up a good bed on the floor
Then you'd make sure you bid each one good-night
As with the light out you shut up the door.

Then back to the cottage with the fire in the grate
And the kids in the flickering light
The wife who had finished and sewing away
As you settled down there for the night.

Soon the kids would go up, and it wouldn't be long
Before the candle let us to bed
And it seemed in no time the birds and daylight came
With another eleven miles to tread.

Now here as I set alone on this seat
With a beard, grey hair and a stick
The land looks the same with less hedge and fields
And everything moving so quick.

I wonder if progress is really the word
That makes man want to change all that he sees
Or is it because he is greedy and vain

That makes strong men ignore the weaker ones pleas.

What is it today that is missing
That seemed to be there long ago
As I toiled together with the horses
In the sun, the wind and the snow.

Today it is true that I have all the material things
For the benefit of me and my wife
The TV, the fridge, the washing machine
To make us an easier life.

For then it was long hours and hard work
And on a good job done we were bent
Our bellies were filled with good basic foods
And most of all we were content.

THE MORNING RITUAL

I heard the horses whinny long before I'd reached the door
I heard their impatient stamping on the cobbled stable floor
On opening up the big split door I found the interior so dark
You see the carter's day begins before that of the Lark

The horses became so restless rattling the halter chain and block
And I listened as the church bell chimed the hour of five o'clock
I struck a match and lit the lamp taking the sieve from off the wall
Then ladling in from the oat bin adding chaff 'til it was full

Each of them in restive mood received their first feed of the day
Which appeased their massive appetite after a night of munching hay
I curry combed and brushed them until their coats looked clean
Their manes and tails were also combed to match their bodies' sheen

They were given a second helping and they began to champ again
Then I dressed them in their harness of both the leather and the chain
Followed the journey through the door their hooves sounding a heavy tread
And all these things had happened while half the world was still abed

MY TRUE LOVE

Around the leafy lanes of Sussex
Where beauty abounds for one to see,
Or high above on the rolling Downs
That sweep down to the sea.

Wherever you look in this county of ours
At something old, or something new
It will probably be green of grass or trees
of Oak or Beech or Yew.

There's a song written of our county
Men gather, and with gusto they sing,
While the Morris Dancers welcome the summer,
By dancing at Chanctonbury Ring.

Findon is a tiny village of hills
It's tranquil and almost asleep
But once a year it's invaded
By the annual fair of the sheep.

Travel on a few more miles,
Where the Arun runs fast for the sea
And at Arundel just up from its mouth
Is a really lovely sight to see.

For there perched high with its regal face
Watching over its wood and its land
Is a castle, with its battlements
Standing, brave and proud and grand.

Away to the northeast is Steyning
A market town both charming and bold
With quaint streets sided by old houses
And a Grammar School a few hundred years old.

Just down the road stands the butterfly museum
Below where Bramber Castle used to be
Who'd ever think this little place was once a port
And the land around the sea.

So on down the road to Shoreham,
Where a busy port flourishes today,

Beside the River Adur flowing lazily by
Through brookland and meadows of hay.

There's plenty of other lovely places to see,
If the whole of our county you roam,
I've written about the places I know
Cause you see, to me, it's my home.

THE CUCKOO

This morning I stood at my door, looking at the mass of May flower on the hill
When I heard the cuckoo call its name, it gave me quite a thrill
Once again the old world had turned, showing its face to the sun
And that bird calling its name told me summer had begun
I loved the sound of that bird's name, and yet nevertheless
It came I thought to live a life full of wickedness
Because while it sat and called its name, others were doing their best
To collect grass and straw and bits of mud to make themselves a nest
Then when their hunger grew great, and they were off on their daily quest
That crafty old cuckoo would creep along and leave an egg there in the nest
Then the little bird would return and sit on the eggs for a spell
You'd think she would notice the intruder by the strange colour of its shell
But no notice of the eggs were taken, and her mate would relieve her for food
So that eventually the sitting was over and the nest held a nice little brood
Soon the chicks' mouths would be wide open as the parents flew to and fro
And the little cuckoo chick began to grow and grow and grow.
The speed of its growth was much faster than the others who were thrown from the nest
While the elder birds worked for its hunger and the supplies they brought were the best
Soon the cuckoo had grown to its full and into the air it did fly
While the foster parents saw it depart with neither thank you or even goodbye.
Then the foster parents so nearly exhausted sat in that tree for a rest
And thought of the spring, the fools they had been, although they had given their best
They knew that nature would continue and never change a thing
And the same story would unfold again at another arrival of spring.
It seems to me by this story, where every fact is true
That life can sometimes deceive and it can happen to me and you
And if and when it does, why the moral seems very plain,
Don't just sit there crying, discount all your losses and start all over again.

MORNING MILKING

Carried by the early morning air one hears the cowman's song
As he calls once more his charges, cup, cup, come along
They hear his song, dally no more and with a measured tread
Make their way to a manger of cake waiting in the old cowshed
Once through the gate they travel the muddy and rutted way
As they have so many times before at least two times a day
Arriving at the shed having answered their master's call
They obediently ascent the step to their individual stall
Retaining chains around their neck forbid them a retreat
They bend their heads readily the concentrates to eat
While the cowman starts to wash the udder and the teat
Then dressed in a white cottage and hat with a stool to make a seat
He presses his head into her flank and sits on the stool with ease
And taking up a bucket places it firmly 'tween his knees
Soon with a squeezing and a pulling and avoiding the swinging tail
The milk begins a ringing as it strikes the empty pail
The tone begins to ~~(begins to)~~ deepen as the pail begins to fill
And streams being to lessen she has given all she will
Through the muslin and o'er the cooler the milk now has to pass
While the cows released are once more driven out to grass
The dung is shovelled the floor is swept and once more washed so clean
You would have a job to realise that here that activity had been
Yet it was known by cow and man that another day would come along
That would start not only with the birds, but with the cowman's song.

THE CORNFIELD

The gold corn stood alert and proud,
Offering to the sky on high
The ears of corn that it had grown
For the sun above to dry.

The cycle had been a long one,
To produce that ear of corn,
But it had forever happened
From the day the earth was born.

The fallowed earth had received the plough
The harrow had prepared it for the seed,
The summer rains had quenched its thirst,
And appeased its every need.

The frosts of winter and the rains
Along with a coat of snow,
Had been its companion through cold days
Now came the spring to help it grow.

The warming summer winds had blown
The blades swayed like waves upon the sea,
They changed the colour of its coat
Through browns, until the gold was there to see.

The horses pulling the binder came,
Bobbing and heaving three abreast
While the fourth beneath a shady tree
Took over each hour to give each one a rest.

The golden straws would dance no more,
They'd made sheaves that now stood in a stook
Idly spending the days in the drying sun
Listening to the quarrels of the rook.

About two or three weeks later
The great groaning rumbling waggons came,
Those sheaves were pierced and thrown up high
To travel swaying up the lane.

Then into the great big rick were placed
Where with others they were matched,

To create a stack with pride and skill
And receive a coat of thatch.

The fields that remained of stubble
Were soon made into furrows by the plough,
And were left once more to fallow,
Or be seeded as pasture for the cow.

HAYMAKING DREAMS

Those far off days of my young life come flooding back to me
Each time I see them haymaking in fields beside the sea.
Those brookland meadows that I knew then, grew grass of many kinds
The blossoms of those flowers fill the eyes and the scents invade the minds.

Each meadow was confined within the boundaries of its brooks
Their contents of the tall stiff reeds appearing military by their looks
The great big shire horses with chattering mowers would soon arrive
Those isolated meadows with men, machines and animals would soon become alive.

The insects that survived upon the grass would sense the danger
The great big hooves and noisy machines would create in them an anger
They would fly around, their home destroyed, their environment gone forever
They would bite and irritate man and beast with aerobatics that were so clever.

Soon the flowers would wilt, as did the grasses blade by blade
And those buzzing little offenders would search for other shade
Then came other horses, whose machines' spinning tines would follow like a tide
Lifting and fluffing grasses seeking those that tried to hide.

These drying grasses filled the air with an aroma drifting far and wide
Creating in any farmer's boy the desire to be there by their side
The clattering rakes would follow, leaving rolls like waves upon the sea
The horses' heads would shake, their tails would flick, the flies attack relentlessly.

Two more horses, again with Hessian coats and at their rear a carter on his seat
And with the wooden tines of a sweep would clear the rows and continue to repeat
The creaking, groaning, squeaking elevator who all winter never made a sound
Lifted the hay to the top of the stack as the pony walked on round and round and round.

The stack grew high as the builder lay the pitch that two others would share
Until the day grew old, the sun sank low and the field became so bare
The men stopped, the sweat drying on their brow, as the horses' heads hung low
Then oft they plod their homeward way and leave the field once more to grow.

The old man on the seat saw each one depart and weakly said goodbye
As with his red spotted kerchief wiped the water from his eye
The summer sun had lulled him to sleep and caused his head to bow
And the scene that he'd been watching happened fifty years ago.

HAVE YOU EVER

Have you ever wet and pulled the straw for the thatching of a rick?

Have you gone a night without your sleep when a poor old milking cow was sick?

Have you ever stood lonely in a field, singling of the mangolds with a hoe?

Have you ever trod a field of rising wheat a chopping of the thistles as they grow?

Have you ever folded acres for the sheep, carrying hurdles yards and yards upon your back?

Have you ever loaded yards of manure on a cart and travelled with the horse along the track?

Have you ever walked between the handles of a plough, until eleven miles and one acre has been done?

Have you ever got up very early in the morning and only stopped when day has lost the sun?

Have you ever trod those great big clods when the fields are getting tilled?

Have you ever ridden on the back of the old farmhorse after its day's labour in the field?

Have you ever been a young boy with a clapper board, roaming noisily to scare away the rook?

Have you in a harvest field on a lovely summer's day collected sheaves to stand them in a stook?

Have you ever trod a muddy lane within the pouring rain and collected cows without a moan or cuss?

Have you ever on a cold and windy winter's day cut up a hay stack to make into a truss?

Have you ever amid the dust and noise of a busy threshing gang had to move the cavings as part of your employ?

Have you never had the chance to do any of these things, you've not had the chance to be a farmers boy.

STEEPDOWN HILL

Steepdown stands at seven hundred feet above the village and its land
Viewing almost every inch that within our village stand
It feels the tread of heavy feet almost every day
It's even seen the Romans as they passed along this way
It's heard so many different tongues as they stand and talk
While down below thousands have passed along the Southdown walk
Its sward has fed the cattle, sheep, rabbits and it's clear
That many moons ago from now it even fed the deer
It's carried weapons of flint and wood in the years that's gone before
Just below her peak the artillery of war
She has been a place for picnics, she is a place of charms
And many lovers have lain here within each other's arms
But to me she is close to heaven where the wind's song can be heard
And as I stand and look around I feel the freedom of the bird
But over the last few decade of years I feel so sad to say
That man has tried his darnedest to take her beauty all away
But try as he might as I stand and look out to the sea
The beauty of old Steepdown will always be with me.

THE OLD ELM TREES

Around my village some years ago, you were always bound to see
The majestic sight aloof and proud of the great Elm tree
Each lane and byway by their side made way for one or two
With branches high and wide they'd make shady tunnels to walk through.

They came at least a hundred and fifty years ago when common lands were to be no more
To create those fields and lanes that stretched from the hills down to the shore
They grew tall up to the sky, their roots stable in the chalk
To create for us a bounteous canvas wherever we should walk.

Their limbs, twisted, knarled and strong stood out by their side
And under those spreading branches many things would try to hide
Children's voices 'neath that mantle would across the meadows ring
While hanging on a rope secured to those branches they would swing.

The evening breeze would waft along, rustling leaves and boughs would sway
Whiles hidden from all watching eyes, those courting couples lay
Their shadow would welcome the cattle on a long hot summer day
Where they would stomp and swing their tails to keep the flies at bay.

Perhaps there on a winter's day, horses with nosebags on would munch
While carters sat beneath their lea and carved away their lunch.
Perhaps it was best suited for a corn rick or stack of hay
And would play host to the threshing machine on a cold and draughty winter's day.

They created for us a landscape where we thought change would be never
They were so tall, so strong, we thought they'd live forever
Our fathers and our mothers and their old parents too
Had seen, admired and loved them their whole lives through.

Now young eyes will see no more those billowing sails on high
Like great old fashioned sailing ships whose sea was the blue sky
The winter winds of many years battered them with their might
But apart from a breaking branch or two they hold on tight.

They'd seen the snow, they'd suffered floods, and to our great surprise
It took merely a little beetle to create their sad demise
But now the young saplings, left when the big old trees had died
Are starting to become the hedgerows in which the old stumps hide.

So it will probably be true to say one day, like in the days gone by
There's nothing quite as majestic as an old Elm tree to a country eye.

THE GREATEST ARTIST OF ALL

Our creator is an artist, that is so plain to see
He practiced skills that were so magnificent, just for you and me.
He took the sky as his canvas and painted it of blue
Then made with white great fluffy blobs that are clouds to me and you.

The land below he stretched and shaped as far as could be seen
Then covered it with grass and tress in so many shades of green
He then thought the land too flat and used another of his skills
And so with sculpture created vales and dales and always the distant hills.

Then gathering the rocks, made mountains topped on high with white
Each day clearing his canvas with black and so became the night.
He paraded all his colours their wonders us to show
By creating rainbows in the sky to give them all a glow.

The earth below he painted brown and scattered it with seed
His palette now he put to one side of it he had no further need
For he merely washed them with his summer rain and dried them with his sun
And for us now and forever a changing canvas had begun.

The colours on his palette he had held so very dear
And so that he could use each one designed the seasons of the year
The spring brought buds and leaves, Buttercups and their fellows
All using shades of luscious greens and acres of bright yellows.

Summer brought the flowers of blue in cottage gardens old
While Poppies grew in violent reds among the fields of gold
The autumn scene is wondrous, causing us to stand and stare
Because our Master brushed a blaze of colour almost everywhere.

The winter caused the long dark nights to squeeze in a little day
This gave him the chance to paint each one a deeper shade of grey
Sometime the daylight wasn't long and soon changed into night
Then at such times he sent the snow to change it all to white.

But whatever place, whatever time we give our thanks to thee
For allowing us this lovely land and the gift of eyes to see.

THE OLD ROCKING CHAIR

Those flowers across the desk from me at which you fondly gaze
I to look upon as in this old rocking chair I laze
I won't attempt to compete against their beauty, I'm of a different hue
And although I'm insignificant I see much more of you
I know you love those little flowers for when they wilt I see your sorrow
But they just make me say, "I dunno, here today and gone tomorrow"
I know that very soon when they've gone, there within their place
I have to start and compete again with another lovely face
You have some other flowers I know but they are created into plastic fauna
And I'm pleased to say with frauds like that you keep them in the corner
Last year when you took that vase away I thought, good that's the lot
Yet I think it was the very next day there stood a plant growing in a pot
Now I think I've got to know you and anything natural is bound to please
Whether it is flowers, pot plants or just the buds from off the trees
When I first came I wasn't sure if I'd get to like this place
But very soon I settled down to happiness, it must have been your face
We've shared a lot of time together here, merely you and I
It must be a couple of years, my God how time does fly
So go out and buy some more flowers and I assure you I won't glare
I'm safe, I'm everlasting, lazing in this rocking chair.

SUFFERING

I sat down and read your paper, depression stayed all day,
The words I read had told me, they're taking Lancing Clump away.
I couldn't shake that news from inside my head, I almost shed a tear,
For I was born in Bulpit Lane and had known her sixty year.
We had shared the scenery together because oft within her I would go,
There were the battles of the Thirties when we watched electric pylons grow.
A little later came the builders who swore they meant no harm,
And promptly built the bungalows on the nursery and farm.
We saw West Street try to deal with autos of every class,
And eventually succumbed to the need to build a new by-pass.
Then once again the Clump saw war declared and planes came from afar,
To drop their bombs within her wood, the trunks still bear the scar.
Within the lanes and hedges we could see the great Elms grow,
And were sickened with grief when the beetle came and they sadly had to go.
The Clump stood firm and people felt that here they were close to heaven,
But then nature in her vilest mood ravaged in October eighty seven.
But we didn't complain even then, or when they changed our lovely valley to a dump,
But now we plead haven't we suffered enough, don't dig up Lancing Clump.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE TURKEY FARM

Alas another page of time has loudly slammed her door
 The workers that abounded here you'll not see any more
 The turkey sheds are clean and bare the turkeys all have died
 The prosperous year we were told that lay ahead 'tis clear somebody lied

Is it because the hens don't lay didn't the stags come up to scratch
 Or is it because they used AI that there are no eggs to hatch
 I'm sure it's not because people didn't care and there was no one to fear
 So what really was the reason that we had no poults to rear

The workers seemed to strive quite hard to get the quotas through
 Was it the overheads with cars and lorries new
 Was it that they had to grow within green pastures they had seen
 And so they went and joined them by buying up Goose Green

Was it the farm with cows and corn new tractors as big as tanks
 Or was it the big business lunch after which a smile and a nod and thanks
 Perhaps it was the buying of French birds was just a big pig in a poke
 Why was it such (a) great big firm should suddenly go broke

The killing gang they played their part George pushed through thousands every day
 And Richard Clark with all his staff would freeze them all away
 The boys fishing in the brine tank would get lots of burns from there
 They told me but I don't believe them that's where Roy Carter lost his hair

The birds placed in the boxes Arthur and the boys would strap
 And when each week I'd show Mac the kill sheet he'd say it's just a load of crap
 The boys who worked in the cold stores would chase me for warmer suits
 And they'd often get quite smarmy and say "How about a pair of boots?"

Old Mick would move the heads and guts but he'd have one awful habit
 Just ask him a simple question and he'd rabbit, rabbit, rabbit
 All would come to the stores and I'm sure they'd think I'm queer
 For I'd look at them a bit old fashioned and say there's nothing like that here

Slowly the work force has disappeared, they've gone to other places
 One misses their chatter and their moans, the laughter and their faces
 Yet we will soon be leaving too but we mustn't be dejected
 We mustn't think we're overlooked, forgotten and rejected

So if those jobs don't come your way don't give up in a while
 But keep on looking and knocking and do it with a smile

Please tell them all where you have worked and tell it them with pride
Be like them old turkeys when you're plucked there's nothing left to hide

So keep on looking out my friend and I hope you find your hole
May luck go with you but if it don't I'll see you on the Dole

THOSE STRIPLING YEARS

Recalling my young stripling years, my mind soon fills with faces,
The memories roll out like a film recalling many favourite places.
There's "Hank-a-Pank" and "The Mountain", places I hold so dear,
And when I stand high on this bank, I feel our Master near.

The Mountain is a wood of Beech, planted near on two hundred year ago,
How could those old people see how marvellous they'd grow.
They stand there side by side reaching up to seek the light,
Giving us their beauty by the day, the animals hunting by the night.

Their mantles stand high commanding the view for miles and miles around,
While a thick leafy carpet of the sweetest shades lay beneath them on the ground.
The leafy boughs swaying high above forbid the sun to make grass grow,
Yet here and there a shaft of light pierces, to set the wood aglow.

When the wood is left on the western side, one feels the need to thank,
The one who allowed all the creation that can be seen from the top of Hank-a-Pank
Below upon this northern bank were created centuries ago, lynchets with a bone
Where ancient people strived to live and built themselves a home.

There were hedges, lanes and fields, green of grass and corn
And hills that were clothed in hollies and gorse on which dew sparkled every morn
The scene below held for me such beauty that it could bring me close to tears,
Especially when I think of those who shared my stripling years.

THE LEARNING FACTORY

The school of my learning all those long years ago
Was a daily journey for us children, about a hundred or so.
It was built to live forever back in Eighteen seventy-two
When Victoria ruled our country and the British Empire too.

It had a house with two classrooms and a playground to allow us to be free,
But within ten years of it opening another classroom made it three.
By the year of Nineteen twenty-eight it was two more classrooms to the good,
But this time instead of stone they were constructed out of wood.

When I arrived in Nineteen thirty-two I made sure I wasn't late
To present myself to the teachers and allow them to educate.
The first lesson I remember to enable me our language to understand,
Was to sit beside a shallow box and finger letters in the sand.

I was then taught all the numbers and to allow us to estimate,
We were given simple sums to do with chalk upon a slate.
Then we progressed to pencils and paper full of squares,
And the mystery of division, which was mine and which was theirs.

Then came the higher classes and of stories we had to think
And write them in our composition books, we had progressed to pen and ink.
We laboriously wrote whilst continually dipping nibs into the well,
And with blots and fingerprints, the teacher gave us hell.

We read Geography and stories from books belonging to generations long before,
And were taught some Country Dancing on the largest classroom floor.
We had nature study walks picking wild flowers which we pressed within a book
And watch the tadpole turn into a frog after we had caught them in a brook.

Sometimes we got into mischief, or played truant down the lane,
But at the end there was always punishment from teacher and the cane.
There was football, cricket, conkers, allies, mustn't forget the whip and top,
Played on the way to school, seldom a car would make us stop.

Now the road is far too busy, the school's been redundant for twenty year or more,
And of all the kids of my time, I daresay there's left less than a score.
Through all those weeks and all those years I'd strive, but it didn't help me find employ,
And over the last fifty years I haven't used a bit of it, 'cause I've been a farmer's boy.

FRIENDSHIPS

You make some strange friends in your life,
Whom you recall when you give your memory a jog.
And two that come back to me are Blossom and George
An old horse and a dog.

Blossom's young master had reached eighteen,
And had been called away to war.
So I found myself just leaving the age of fifteen years
At that old stable door.

That first morning I'd fed that brown mare, brushed her fetlocks
And was sweeping up the floor
When I was taken aback a bit as this big old mongrel dog
Came abounding through the door.

I was quite alarmed and didn't quite know what to do,
As he kept jumping up at me.
And whether I liked it or not it was clear that during the next year
'Twould always be us three.

When I'd fed and cleaned old Blossom, clothed her in her harness
Then chained her to the shafts of that old cart,
We'd leave the yard in North Street, Lancing
And on our day's work with the Council make a start.

I'd stand in the cart, the nosebag on the shaft,
The water bucket on the axle 'tween the wheels.
Old George having finished his morning barking
Would take his place beside the bucket, his head just missing the rising of old Blossom's heels.

We travelled all the lanes and byways with the old boys
Who repaired and cleaned the road.
Carrying the tarmac for the holes, and picking up the sweepings,
Until the cart showed us we had got a load.

We clopped and rattled our way around until
By the sea a great big hole could be seen.
Years and years this hole eventually filled with our help
And today it's known proudly as Beach Green.

We saw the war together, suffering bombs and noisy tanks,
Old Blossom bolted once, an act I didn't like

And old George, who was nothing if cantankerous
Chased and pulled an old man off his bike.

The butcher didn't like old George 'cause he crept into his shop
And had a string of sausages away
About a hundred railway workers waiting at the crossing gates
Got splattered with old Blossom's pee on another unforgettable day.

Old Blossom was a gentle girl and realised that I was just a boy
And George would always keep me safe from harm
As we travelled all those roads and lanes
And spent hours on our own down at that lonely Brookland Farm.

There are many strange meetings in one's life
From which a friendship surely will soon forge
And that's what happened to me at fifteen years of age
When I met Blossom and old George.

HOW

The little girl held her mother's hand, answers to her questions were required now,
And her mother had to be full of patience, because each one started, How.

How is it that a baby needs a nappie and not a pot like me?
How is it that the tide comes in then rushes out to sea?

How can some plants grow up so big from the tiniest of seed?
How is it some people have too much while others are desperately in need?

How is it we have too much food to feed our great big nation?
While no more than hours away by plane there are people dying of starvation?

How does a little beaver make a dam after hours of gnawing through a log?
How is it that we chase and kill a fox, and then come home and make a fuss of an old dog?

How is it that a silk worm will produce a skein of silk?
How is it that a farmyard cow will supply our daily milk?

How does an ugly hanging chrysalis turn into a beautiful, fragile butterfly?
How is it when you're really old and grey, the time has come when you have to go and die?

How is it when you're happy and you laugh and inside you feel so full of cheer?
How is it when you're sad and feeling low that you tend to shed a little tear?

How is it there are so many questions to ask and so many things to see?
And come to think of it, Mummy, how did you come by me???

THE SOUTH DOWNS

The hills of chalk that stand aloof commanding a great domain,
Are green from turf that is kissed by sun and watered by the rain.
I have known them over sixty years, walking them has been a joy,
Whether today with a walking stick or the young body of a boy.

Their banks today are just as steep, but show the gulleys of the rain,
Because now each year they are ploughed and sown to grow a crop of grain.
The wind is their constant companion, swaying the straws like waves upon the sea,
It is a lovely sight, but when I close my eyes I see it as it used to be.

Then there were no fences, they were free just like the sky,
The clouds above would billow, and sometimes touch as they passed by.
Their clothing was the bramble, the holly, the gorse with its glorious yellow flower,
The leaves, the branches, blades, would hold sparkling dew at morning's early hour.

Rabbits would burrow, hares would run and larks would sing on high,
And as a boy I lay back, saw and heard it all as I looked high into the sky.
I've stood just like my forefathers, breathing that sweet air and sharing that domain,
And hope and pray my descendents will do the same if progress allows them to remain.

THE SMELLS OF YEW TREE FARM

Yew Tree Farm was a collection of buildings that we passed every day,
When we made our way to school as we passed along that way.
The old farm had a cacophony of smells that would make the nostrils flare,
Different aromas seem to arrive from almost everywhere.

The poultry sheds would send their share as eggs were laid and cockerels reared,
While from the rubbish around the farm came the smell of the Billy goat with his beard,
From the pond another smell as mud was disturbed as the ducks came waddling by,
While others fished the water, their backsides high in the sky.

The smell of cowcake the nose would soon regale,
As along with the smell of spilt milk would be the sound of the milking pail.
The great old Shire Horses in the stable would turn at us and gaze,
As at the half door we could stand, that smell we never could erase.

The pigsty full of grunts and groans would smell when food got spilled,
The earth damped in the adjoining field soon after it was tilled.
He smell of a truss in the open stack, where stairways had been cut into the hay,
The early morning air, and grass, as the herd passed after the first milking of the day.

The smells coming from the hurdles that contained a flock of sheep,
All these smells would soon make themselves aware as you awaken from your sleep.
But now the animals have all departed, the yard is now called Malthouse Close,
And although my eyes see houses there is something missing from my nose.

Those smells have all gone as have the buildings too,
But don't you fret, Old Yew Tree Farm, for we will remember you.

HIS OWN MASTER

When I was a boy a regular sight passing by my home
Would be the bearded face of an old man who we thought was alone.
The open spaces were his home, his path the road and lane,
The billowing trees singing their song his shelter from the rain.

The hedgerows were his papered walls, his ceiling was the sky,
The grasses and the heather his mattress where his tired body lie.
His bedroom light would flood his room from the silvery moon above,
His companions through the long silent night the sparkling stars he'd love.

His bed covers of warm evening air would bring sleep that followed a tired yawn,
His alarm clock would awaken him, 'twould be the singing birds of dawn.
His home would be blessed with running water from the brook twinkling at his feet,
And each meal would be concluded with fruit from the trees that were his sweet.

The necessities of life would be carried in that knapsack on his back,
His address would be beneath the clouds along some country track.
The ambitions in his life would in some create a sorrow,
But his only prayer to his Father above was to keep him safe until tomorrow.

He would travel miles and miles each day and amongst his little load,
Was the blessing of contentment, this MASTER OF THE ROAD.

DANKTON LANE

I have trod the lane of Dankton on so many different days,
And have seen nature adorn its banks in so many different ways.
I have seen the greens of springtime in the grass and buds upon the trees,
The flowers opened by the summer sun, the scents wafted by the breeze.

I have seen the seeds of autumn in many shapes and pods,
I have seen the coloured leaves depart the trees by the winds of angry Gods.
The frosts of winter making rough the marks of hooves and wheels,
The covering of a thick white sheet when snow even hid the hills.

Through the hedges and the gaps I saw many different scenes,
From the horses with the ploughs and drills to today's great big machines.
I watched the cows and bullocks during sun and when 'twas cold,
As sheep were driven down from the hills to spend the night within the folds.

I've searched and found the bird's nest in the hedges and seen the rooks up in the tree,
Followed the pack of Beagles and watched the fox run free.
I've heard the rushing of the Pheasants' wings and rose the Partridge too,
Thrilled as I watched the Skylark and heard the first call of the year's Cuckoo.

I've known the barn and hovel standing at the lowest point of the lane,
Followed the steam of the threshing machine, its implements pulled like that of a train.
I've known the cottages that once here stood and various names could tell,
Of those who sat within their walls and drew from the well.

I've walked the highest reaches where the hills reach to the sky,
Where I've chased and caught the rabbit and seen the hare dash by.
Yes, I've seen it all a hundred times, but I'd like to see it all again,
Before they build their great big motorway and I've got to say goodbye Dankton Lane.

THE FARMING YEAR

The weather and the turning world dictate the farming year,
It tells us when it's time to sow, to nurse, to clear
January brings the long hard frosts when fields are white and soil hard,
Our days are taken up with gathering food for the cattle in the yard.

February sees the state continue and we welcome the threshing train,
Because money's getting hard to find and we have to sell a little grain.
March will with her winds mellow the air, bringing with it Spring,
When not only the corn beds, but meadows too, hear the rollers ring.

April with her showers and days of warming sun
Tell us there are other crops, whose life cycle has begun.
May will bring those luscious greens when all the rubbish starts to grow,
And we spend many long hours in the fields in the company of our hoe.

June will see the world alive and welcome mid-Summer day,
As mowers, sweeps and elevators spend the days at making hay,
July will see us traipsing fields of rising wheat chopping thistles as they grow,
We will pull armfuls of the wild oat which on the headland we will throw.

August will see the harvest, binders, sheaves and stooks lined in a row.
While around the yard and 'neath the Elm we see the corn ricks grow.
September with her darkening nights, will see stubble with furrows straight and clean,
But not before the women and the children have given it their annual glean.

October starts another year when drills and harrows occupy where the harvest has been grown,
And the seeds of yet another year have once again been sown.
November brings the mud and rain and the fogs but we have to make a start,
At the pulling, topping, loading at the task of mangel cart.

December comes, the air gets cold with its snow and drizzling rain,
There is poultry to pluck, hams to cure and prepare to start the year again.
No following day will be the same, no year ever like a twin,
But the calendar of a farm's year, is the same year out, year in.

BEFORE YOU CAN LOOK AROUND

Those early years in cot and pram safe from the world's harms
Forever exposed to inquisitive eyes to display your many charms.
But soon you're crawling, walking, growing out of that baby sound,
And it all seems to happen, before you can look around.

Then it's walking, talking, losing those baby looks,
And fluffy toys are thrown away, you're into reading books.
You're education started in a noisy school playground,
Those initial years have flown away, before you can look around.

The infant years have spend on too, you're a junior at last,
And parents with saddened eyes say you are growing up too fast.
Exam follows exam each year passing, showing promise has been found,
And you find that you are leaving school, before you can look around.

Your head soon fills with thoughts of love, and it's just a little while,
Before you are besotted by a pair of sparkling eyes and the beauty of a smile.
That happy day soon arrives, the wedding bells they sound,
And you find yourself a family man, before you can look around.

Life now seems full of work, there's so many mouths to feed,
It is what nature is all about the spreading of your seed.
Wedding bells you hear again, and children once more hound,
For you find yourself a Grandfather, before you can look around.

As they grow up so you grow old, and become unsteady on your feet,
That's why you see me here today resting on this seat.
I sit here now thinking back and one thing I have found,
Enjoy your life when you are young, because you get old before you can look around.

A NICE SEPTEMBER DAY

The September sun shone brightly upon the stubbled field,
Creating upon each straw a twinkling jewel from her yield.
The dew had descended heavily on this late September morn,
And we had proudly witnessed another day be born.

The morning sun rising above the trees cast long shadows on the floor,
And birds began to gather, their numbers counted by the score.
The horses lay in their collars, chains rattled, leather creaked,
And the golden stubble was soon with dark furrows streaked.

So we progressed as morning grew, my song added to the sound,
The horses and the plough journeyed round, and round and round.
Another land we would set out some distance from the first,
And I'd stop and take a swig of tea to quench my growing thirst.

Mid-morning came and it was time to give my team a rest,
And sitting in the sun beneath those trees was the time that I liked best.
We'd start again and once more the gulls would squabble at my feet,
And very soon ploughing the other way those two ploughed lands would meet.

As I walked between those handles listening to the mould board sing,
I saw and heard the Partridge taking to the wing.
I heard the Pheasant call its mate and saw a rabbit chewing at its feed,
While the Sparrow and the Chaffinch searched the ground for dropping seed.

This process had been for years my family's employ,
And it hadn't changed the slightest bit since Grandad was a boy.
I thought I too would continue to follow those horses to earn my meagre pay,
For I was not to know that progress was to sweep it all away.

The day ended in the afternoon, the horses' coats darkened with their sweat,
The nosebags dangled from the hames, my day not finished yet.
We clumped from the field and up the lane, of this journey they were fond,
Because they knew they'd soon quench their thirst while paddling in the pond.

The harness removed from tired bodies and hung upon the rail,
I'd take off my outdoor jacket and hang it on the nail.
Then settling them in the stable, I too would settle down and stay,
To rest a while and watch them eat seated on a truss of hay.

Long in the future, before I've lived my last,
If I was given the chance to relive a little bit of past,

If I had the chance to choose a day I'd let my memories stray,
But I am sure I'd choose ploughing with the horses on a nice September day.

THE LONG HOT SUMMER DAYS

Those summer days were long and hot when I was just a boy,
And days were filled from morn to night every minute was a joy.
Although one tries not to remember there must have been many days of rain,
When the time was spent confined indoors noses pressed against the window pane.

There were so many adventures travelling with bodies, oh so fleet,
Clothed in a shirt and khaki shorts with plimsolls on our feet.
There was scrumping, climbing apple trees, for the fruit we couldn't reach,
Days playing in the Brooklands and outings to the beach.

We'd go traipsing over bush covered hills covering miles galore,
And chasing rabbits with hazel sticks when they were binding up the Nore.
We went tree climbing in the mountain and tracking down the lane,
And sometimes if we were lucky a day out upon a train.

But when we reached twelve years of age we left our happy band,
Because now a lot had summer jobs working on the land.
I'd lead that great big Shire horse looking tiny in my pants,
Ensuring when we went hoeing those hooves missed treading on those plants.

Then came the war when I was young which took the men away,
And us younger ones were called to do our bit in the making of the hay.
I remember nineteen forty when planes fought above us in the sky,
And we would have to set the horses free and neath the waggons lie.

We were confined to the village now, barbed wire kept us from the sea,
While the hills were used for training tanks and firing artillery.
We received the evacuees from London so many new and different faces,
And had to share our school and use halls and other places.

Then we left school at fourteen years and worked for little pay,
And gradually as they grew up the young men were called away,
Some to the RAF, some Army some the sea and each for home would yearn,
And several names come to mind of those who sadly failed to return.

At last the war was over, we could once more use the sea,
But we had all grown up now and not the kids we used to be.
The childhood memories that we knew had changed from blue to grey,
So I expect that's why we remember that the sun shone each and every summer day.

LEFT BEHIND BY TIME

The old couple bent with time shuffled along hand in hand,
The traffic passing by came from a world they didn't understand.
They bravely tried to live their lives as in the days gone by,
And were frightened to be left alone should the other die.

They were born before the car, or at least before it became the rage,
And had lived a quiet contented life that's how they had reached their age.
Their fare had been a simple one, their beverage tea and beer,
And the best meal they ever ate was "Harvest Home just once a year.

She had borne him seven children, but had lost one as a child,
They'd lived in several cottages, most of them in the wild.
He'd spent his life upon the farm and became the master of the plough,
And she had put her hand to most things and even milked the cow.

They had chicken in the garden and kept the pigsty clean,
Grew vegetables in the allotment and the harvest field they'd glean.
Each day they would receive a quart of milk and had a row of taters in the field,
And they'd be sure to pick some turnip greens when the poor old pig was killed.

Times were hard when the family was growing up, then they all went away,
But each one returned to be with them on their Diamond Wedding Day.
There were children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren and he turned proudly to his wife,
This my dear is our harvest of a long and happy life.

Now as they walked hand in hand as they did seventy years before,
They knew the Lord had been generous but they didn't have many more.
Yet they were extremely grateful to have lived as a young child,
When the countryside was open and all the flowers were wild.

Now they were happiest by the fire in their little cottage home,
Talking about people and times when in their youth they'd roam.
They didn't watch television or allow the radio to invade their mind,
Because you see they were two old people that time had left behind.

THE PLOUGHING MATCH

'Twas nearly fifty years ago when I spent the day out with my dad,
And I reckon looking back it was the last day out together that we had.
We travelled deep into our county to a place they call Scaynes Hill,
And there he'd introduce me to his old mates as my eldest son young Bill.

When once again the harvest was gathered from another year,
We would gather in an empty field where the stubble was quite clear.
We had come to see the horses and the carters try the judges eye to catch,
For Autumn had once again brought the annual ploughing match.

The horses' coats were shining in the sunny Autumn weather,
While the brasses gleamed like twinkling stars against the burnished leather.
The ribbons flickered in the wind, showing off the plaited tail and mane,
As the links of trace were hooked to the whippel trees again.

The carters marked their half acre stints with sticks in their usual manner,
Then set about adjusting the plough with their favourite spanner.
At last all was ready, plough lines and handles in their hand,
They set off to open up the first furrow of their land.

For the next few hours they travelled creating dark furrows in the gold,
While others paused to inspect their work, some young some very old.
Furrow followed furrow, each one straight and true and clean,
Until a row of perfect ridges stood where stubble once had been.

There must have been thirty pairs of horses, the sight one of pure joy,
As was our dinner of a pint and a ploughman's lunch in the local "Farmers Boy".
Then came the award of prizes, rosettes the harness to adorn,
And another day had passed that made me grateful I was born.

No horses tread the stubble today, no carters walk behind,
But I am so very pleased that that scene is locked in my mind.
I try as I travel the country other scenes to catch,
But I am sure that no other will compare to that long off ploughing match.

No poem

JUST A GAME OF CONKERS

I watched a young boy the other day throwing sticks high into a tree,
And if time was just a mirror I'd see a reflection there of me.
For I too threw those sticks, the Horse Chestnut was my aim,
Its fruits were called the conker, I sought to play a game.

We'd score a hole through the centre and hang them on a string,
"Who's for a game of conkers?" you'd hear our voices ring.
A challenger with outstretched arm would present his treasured nut,
"Mine's a niner" he would say, as confidently to you he would strut.

Battle would commence, each conker swung the other one to thrash,
And cheers would rise from onlookers, as one could stand no more and smash.
The broken bits would skid away, to lie with others in the yard,
And complaints were laid that vinegar and the oven had made the champion too hard.

Sometimes the loser grew quite violent as the "Tenner" grew in fame,
And would sulk and not agree that it was really just a game.
Most children grew up to understand that others often presented a winning feat,
But others sadly had to win, even if it meant they had to cheat.

The lesson is if you want to be the king, the champion, the best,
You've got to work and dedicate and not be one of the rest.
So find yourself a bigger stick and throw it hard and high to see,
If you can get a bigger conker out of life's Horse Chestnut tree.

THE CAVINGS BOY

The cold windy January morning was loathe to break away from night,
Yet the farmyard was so busy before the day saw light.
There down within the rickyard where normally only hens would scratch,
Could through the gloom be seen the men tearing off the thatch.

Yesterday we had seen the Steam Engine, The Drum and the rest of the threshing train,
Smoke and rumble, sway and rattle as it came drunkenly up the lane.
I was to be one of the gang at last, it filled me full of joy,
But alas, I never knew what was in store for the poor old cavings boy.

The old Steam Engine sent the power along the belt to the pulley of the drum,
And other belts and pulleys turned and that big old machine began to hum.
Those three men upon the rick threw the sheaf along with measured speed,
The bondcutter cut the string passing the rest to the man who had to feed.

The straw was passed along the walkers, then up the elevator to the stack,
The winnows blew, the shakers shook and the corn shot out into the sack.
The bits of straw, the husks, the dust would aim at me and many times my thirst I'd slake,
As it seemed to me a hopeless task, to keep the back clear with a rake.

Twice that day I was so relieved when we stopped to take a snack,
And I had the great joy to remove my shirt and wipe my sweating back.
The rick of sheaves sunk lower as the stack of straw grew high,
The sacks became abundant and the terriers helped a score of rats to die.

The early evening sky had darkened as the hours had passed away,
And that neat rickyard looked a mess after another threshing day.
But that activity was many years ago, and since when I've sought employ,
I've made sure it didn't include a day as that poor old cavings boy.

THE ANNUAL TADPOLE DAY

I was once a member of a happy little band,
Who set out one afternoon with jam jars in our hand.
We were heading for the Brooklands to test their annual yield,
And had climbed the rails of a broken fence and where now in Blacksmith Field.

We had walked on past the great Elm trees that stood so proud and high,
And beside the pollard Willows who appeared to be whistling at the sky.
We had reached the lower levels where cows stood aside to let us pass,
Then treated us with sheer contempt and went on eating grass.

Along a high bank now the bramble grew, with a reed-filled brook below,
'twas here we'd search for Moorhens' eggs and find where the mushroom grow.
Then we arrived at a culvert where the stream ran fast and clear,
And where thousands of newts and tadpoles swam this time of the year.

We'd fill our jars and play other games sailing objects under the culvert's floor,
Then we realised time had flown away and we headed home once more.
On our way there were other games and our laughter across the brooks would lilt,
And it's sad to confess that before we got home most of the jars were spilt.

But we always managed to save a tadpole or two which we would fondly log,
As we watched nature at her work as each one turned into a frog.
Then we realised that time was getting on and for home we'd have to scam,
We were late for tea but it didn't matter, it was only bread and jam.

And so to bed, but before I'd sleep I'd store that activity away,
Filing it as another memory of childhood, that annual Tadpole Day.

GRANDPARENTS

I've sat and watched the sun sinking when the heavens are all gold,
And I found it beautiful and soothing like life when you are growing old.
I've stood early at my window as the sky silvers with the morn,
And it fills me with the joy of life as when a Grandchild has been born.

My wife and I have had the struggles of that long off parenthood,
And have savoured the pleasures and the joy of our own little brood.
Then it seemed in no time at all that through all the stages they had grown,
And had become tall, strong, independent as from our coop they'd flown.

Now Mother and I sit in our easy chair, all is quiet and serene,
And think back to those days of children and the happiness we've seen.
Then there are footsteps running up the patch, the door is open wide,
And the sweet fruits of yet another generation are once again inside.

The innocence of those little faces, the trusting grip of their tiny hand,
Will answer all those hidden questions of life, they'll make you understand.
Then as they grow they chatter, you read them books and play,
And you have to take a little break, or they'll have you at it all the day.

Then it's school parties and picnics and trips beside the sea,
The age of showing off, with the command, "Grannie look at me".
Nobody wants to grow old, no one wants their hair to grey,
But our Zoe, Jamie, Scott and Katie help us enjoy each and every day.

You know when they have left again, those little souls you'll miss,
But you will still feel all warm from their cuddle and their kiss.
For all the people who will never know this joy, I feel so very sad,
Because there is no greater blessing than to be a Grandma or Grandad.

LAMBLEYS

To roam from the village acres was an act from which we would refrain,
And our western boundary is marked by the rise of Lambleys Lane.
This old lane climbed steeply from the village street below,
Creating a really brisk hard walk that would cause the cheeks to glow.

But climb it many times I have, both as a man and boy,
And when I reach the top and look around it still fills me full of joy.
Not only is there beauty to be seen where'er you look,
But there are marks of people long ago in this living history book.

There on a northern bank are the lynchets in straight lines,
While opposite on less steeper banks signs where once were grown the vines.
On Steepdown's bank there could be seen a gulley that carried many a load,
Because centuries ago it had been a Roman road.

No doubt when they lived the land around was full of bush and tree,
And the things of life we know today were still a mystery.
A drift road ran north here avoiding hills so steep,
Where many moons ago people drove their cattle and their sheep.

Later came the farmers who cleared the valleys and induced the growth of grain,
And flints collected were built into barns, to store and keep it from the rain.
Men with vision came and so that home could be seen from the blue seas,
Planted nearly all the hilltops with a bounteous crop of trees.

I was born of a humble working home, but when here I stand and see,
I don't give a damn who owns it, because it all belongs to me.
Who would ever want to go away when places like this last,
Where one can see such beauty, as well as so much of the past.

MY LADY FRIENDS AND I

In my early teenage life when I had learnt to hoe and plough,
I also had twenty lady friends and each one was a cow.
We would travel that old lane each day those demure ladies and me,
To spend the days roaming the fields within the sight of sea.

We had created a good friendship and many hours we'd pass,
As we walked free and contented amongst the greenest of the grass.
We'd be together 'neath leaf and bough and each would try to keep the flies at bay,
As gentle winds played us their song on that long hot summer day.

But any day and every day, even when dark winter tried to steal the light,
And even when all the trees were bare and silent and all the grass was white.
We'd be together every day as soon as the sun rose to show us day again,
Sometimes we would look sad and dejected when eyes saw us walking in the rain.

All our days would start early as 'neath that canopy of trees we'd walk,
My friends would plod on gently and not answer when I'd talk.
They couldn't talk but just like me they'd see the trains go rattling by,
And when they were all resting peacefully I'd lay down with them and watch the patterns of the sky.

Now those gentle ladies have long since departed to pastures new,
And factories and houses stand where once green grasses grew.
The rough old lane is now tarmac, the great old trees have gone with sad decay,
And the railway gates we opened, progress has swept away.

But the colours, names and temperaments of those ladies return to me again,
Whenever with my walking stick, my bowing head I walk again down Cokeham Lane.

THE WEEKEND

The weekend comes along and most receive it with sheer joy,
But it don't make a happoth of difference if you are a farmer's boy.
For the cows they graze then chew the cud, lying to relieve their cloven feet,
Looking for your head within their flank and your hand upon their teat.

The sheep would stand a starving within hurdles on ground so bare and cold,
Awaiting their daily trip to the hill or to move to another fold.
The hens would cackle, scratch and rue the day they had been born,
If the rising of the sun didn't mean another feed of corn.

The pigs would quarrel, becoming mischievous they'd need their daily fill,
And they'd grunt and squeal as they would hear the bucket with their swill.
The great big old working horses in the stable would enjoy a lazy day,
But they too need a drink and cleaning out and another rack of hay.

So the only difference really is for the fields to miss our heavy tread,
And maybe if we are lucky another half hour in bed.
There would be no time for church, 'cause there would be little time to spare,
But we too would give our thanks to God whose works are everywhere.

Within frost and snow, sun and rain and words in the wind he'd send,
And a Farmer's Boy would thank him every day and not just at weekend.

LYCHPOOL FARM

Lychpool has a valley that is its very own,
The steep banks are grazing for the sheep, in the valleys corn was grown.
It held two farmyards built out of flint, containing barn and yard,
While the roads were packed with chalk and stone to make the surface hard.

The winter mornings saw smoke from chimneys rise high into the sky,
For here was a little hamlet, where some were born and some would die.
Here children would traipse to school and return before the dark,
And where the meadows 'neath the summer sun quivered 'neath the shadow of the Lark.

The winter frost would with its cold, grip the empty ground,
When birds would scratch amongst the straw to eat what could be found.
The swirling snows came, hiding the sky and cover the whole terrain,
Blotting out the hedge and footpath and lose from sight the lane.

When spring arrived to compensate and all seemed washed so clean,
The valley was then a picture dressed in a coat of emerald green.
Lambs gambolled in every field, the land was born again,
While flowers adorned almost every inch of the hedges down the lane.

The summer sun arrived bringing the insects, buzzing in the daytime haze,
And cows laying in deep seas of green would merely chew and laze.
Birds fluttered to and fro, they'd never seem to rest,
When trees and hedgerows became the haven for their nests.

The lane was now so busy as the horses clumped it time and time again,
Mowers chattered, rakes and turners clattered and waggons rattled up the lane.
Hay time now and all was busy, then the mangold fields were sown,
Followed by hot days singling and a hoeing where the little plants had shown.

Then fields of golden corn were ripened by the sun,
And once again it was time that another harvest has begun.
The binders with revolving sails threw sheaves upon the ground,
Which were collected and stood in shocks as the cuts continued on around.

It never ever seemed that a day could last so late,
As waggon after waggon load wobbled through the gate.
When the activity was all over and every field was bare,
There seemed to be ricks of hay and straw almost everywhere.

The September sun threw shadows as the team ploughed every day,
While others pressed, harrowed and drilled to tuck the seed away.
The fogs and rains of autumn came when there was the need to gather the mangolds' yield,
When the horses in shafts and trace bobbed over rutted field.

The short grey days of winter in winds savoured with flakes of snow,
Saw the threshing machine hum and whirl to free the corn to flow.
Then once again it was dead winter with ice and snow and rain,
And Lychpool valley was isolated and locked away again.

THE WORKER'S MARK

The ancient history of our home is a very interesting thing,
Because our ancestors tell us about life then with sites like Cissbury Ring.
We find in our hills many other clues as to where villages once stood,
Created from the stone they left as well as no doubt out of wood.
The tools of their labours with which they had hewn a home,
Some were made from the sharpest flint yet others out of bone.
There are other laces where mounds stand on hills so high,
Where the great ones of years ago would be buried when they die,
Then later excavations show us where the conquering Romans came,
The roads are gulleys in the hills and another converted to a lane.
Some diggings reveal palaces as well as the homes created for the poor,
And it makes on stop and wonder what else lies beneath earth's crumbled floor.
Agriculturists came, the passage in the earth so plainly can be seen,
By the banks and gulleys of our land beneath its coat of green,
There are many places in our land where it is so plain to me,
That the labours of the working man won it from the sea.
Then came the time when progress arrived to change the scene,
And hedges, ditches, woods and lanes fill where freedom once had been.
The countryside was changing, people flocked to create the city and the town,
And a lot of what had stood before, unwanted crumbled to the ground.
Motor cars replaced the horse, roads were created through the grass,
While houses, factories and offices grew along the side of each by-pass.
So once again clever man had planned the future as he had the past,
But how long in historic terms would these innovations last.
There is no doubt that man will on paper create another age,
While computers turn out evaluations by the page.
History books are full of great men and of the adventures on which they embark,
But, don't forget it's the land, the living history book, where the worker leaves his mark.

THINK OF TOMORROW

The beauty of this wondrous earth,
This green isle perched above the glistening sea,
Where I have the gift to rest awhile
Will ne'er belong to me.

This land with all its creation
Made those infinite years ago,
Where grass and trees abound the earth
And where the streams and rivers flow.

'Twas all meant to last forever
'Twas where man was sent to spend his life
To live in harmony with each other
To aid, to love but not to strife.

God had created this beautiful place
And gave man the reasoning to care
To love each and every acre
Its fruits and pleasures to eat and share.

But he had inadvertently given man emotion
And one of them was greed,
Which caused him to cut and dig and kill
For more than he would ever need.

He had tried to create in him compassion
To help the aged lame and sick,
To help those who found life difficult,
Those whose minds were far from quick.

Yet that lovely world he had created
Which he kissed with sun and rain
Was torn asunder by its people
Not for need but merely gain.

Great gaping holes in grass covered hills,
Black mountains high upon the valley floor,
While the quick minded hoarded fortunes
From the labours of the poor.

The skies were filled with poison clouds,
That future rains would be,

And the rivers and stream that gave it life
Polluted all the sea.

How very grateful we should be for the years
That follow the wonder of our birth,
When we arrive to share the glories
Of the sun, the sea, the earth.

So if we were created with any sense,
We would fight with might and main,
To forbid our fellow man to continue to destroy
And create a clean earth once again.

In my life I have seen so many changes,
And it surely fills my heart with sorrow,
Because the way we are treating this world today,
Is a blight against those who come to live their life tomorrow.

TRANSITION

The brooklands of the pleasure park
Were once open for the freedom of the sea,
Where its fingers would stretch and grip
Like flattened tendrils of the pea.

The chalk hills towering above,
Held the waters of the rain
Releasing them very gradual
Creating streams in the terrain.

The land below became a swamp,
Where tide and rain could play with ease
And where twice a day the sun glistened
On the water of the seas.

Then the causeway grew
And forbade the sea its game
The fields were drained, the brooks were dug
And so Brooklands gained its name.

Yet it was many years in draining,
As nature adorned it in so many different ways,
Until cattle grazed its autumn sward
Summer saw the making of its hays.

Then progress came, her rubbish too,
As rejects of modern life accrue,
This spot chosen by cart and lorry,
To tip, their contents out would spew.

Then later the Teeville Stream became a lake,
The grazing a course to hit a ball,
A little train travels around all the day
While the in the corner children laugh and fall.

This transition took two hundred years,
The seas were beaten, causing tides to finally abate,
Now I have to sit and wonder,
What will it look like in twenty eighty-eight.

WHATEVER HAPPENED

I walked early the other morning,
Car engines roared along with the blasting of a horn,
And I thought whatever happened to the quiet,
Broken only by a train whistle an the cock crowing in the morn.

I walked beside the by-pass,
That dissected our terrain,
And tried to look beneath the vegetation,
To find what had happened to Bulpit Lane.

I trod on within the sight of crumbling walls,
Until on reaching Dankton Lane I'd stay and think a while,
And wonder whatever happened,
To the footpath and the quaint old wooden stile.

I cast my eyes both north and south,
And saw both ways were clear,
And I wondered whatever happened to the horse and carts,
That had trod it umpteen times a year.

I looked across the meadows,
The morning mist creating a filmy haze,
And I wondered whatever happened
To the cows I'd seen her graze.

I carried on across what was the people's park,
The footpath was still clear,
And I wondered whatever happened
To the fair that was held here once a year.

I crossed the surface of old Church Lane,
That had felt the tread of a million feet,
And wondered whatever happened
To the alcove and the missing seat.

Then I wondered on through orchard
Where once apples and figs I'd spie
And I wondered whatever happened
For the man to allow this area to die.

Then at last I arrived at Lambleys Lane,
That is our western boundary today

And I wondered whatever happened
To take the old life style away.

The I realised that it was history,
As would be the proposed motorway with its fears
And I know that whatever else happens
Happens only with the passage of the years.

I realise that progress won't stand still
The hills will remain of chalk, the valley of rich loam
And that whatever else may happen,
I have those loving memories of home.

THE PASSAGE OF HISTORY

Sompting is a village,
Nestled twixt the hill and sea.
Which has for over sixty years
Been home sweet home to me.

Its jewel is its unique church,
Its steeple of which no other can be seen,
Reaches up high to the sky
'Tween fields and woods of green.

'Twas built a thousand years ago,
Water crept almost to its feet.
The coast road all those years ago,
It today our own West Street.

In those early days the Christians prayed,
Very soon to William they would yield.
Still the Serfs and Peasants carried on,
To farm the open field.

The waters of the shining sea
Were trapped, the salt carried to their store
While at a little later time
Smugglers rowed up to this shore.

Then the land was wrestled from the sea,
Brooks and meadows were all new,
The cattle grazed the new found sward
In brooks the newts and tadpoles grew.

The Act of Enclosures came along,
The open field system swept away.
Ditches, woods and hedges grew,
That wee the scene of yesterday.

The oxen and Medieval plough,
Replaced by horse, with ploughs of a thick steel beam.
Progress then moved another step
It became the age of steam.

Railways crisscrossed the land
Over every hill, river and stream.

Everywhere the sound of rail and wheel
And shrill whistle of the steam.

Eighteenth cornfields,
Where almost every acre saw the plough,
Was in the Twentieth turned to grass
Farming became the province of the cow.

Then at last modern day arrived,
Houses and roads appeared where once had been all green,
The motor car with its motorway,
Became part of the modern scene.

I am proud to have lived a part of this,
Sompting is still home sweet home to me,
'Twas the loveliest place God ever made
In the county of Sussex by the sea.

WHO KNOWS

The autumn leaves are falling
Trees stand so stark and bare
As winter reveals her annual face
Almost everywhere.

The rains and mist enclose the land,
All golden colours have turned to brown,
Long ago those last autumn leaves
Tumbled to the ground.

The year's hard frosts arrive,
Empty boughs stand out in silhouette
The grasses white down at their feet,
No longer pirouette.

The winds that had played that summer tune,
Now blown from their arctic source,
Yet the only thing that's moving,
Is the river on its course.

The Robin and the Sparrows
Midst the straw scratch all the day
To find sufficient sustenance,
That will keep the cold at bay.

Soon the snowflakes will come falling
Spiralling round and round,
Hiding the hedge and lane
Without making a sound.

This covering will cleanse the earth
Of disease and parasite
Now white hill and valley look innocent
As well as lighten up the night.

The soil beneath its blanket
Can rest and recuperate
And build anew the energies
That will new life create.

When warmer winds with tepid rays
Of the late winter sun

Would thaw the earth's white coat
Already life had once again begun.

The bulbs were once more seeking light,
Buds on trees would soon appear
The primrose on the woods' warm floor
Would be the first colour of the year.

Why do all these things happen,
Who tells then when to grow.
'Tis he, who was there at the beginning,
He who only God would know.

A SYMBOL OF LOVE

The clouds were suspended above the hills like great wads of cotton wool,
As I looked high to the grass green hills high above the school.
The blackened grove of trees where one would expect the birds to sing,
Sheltered the south west side of ancient Cissbury Ring.

The great ramparts were the skyline which caught and held my eye,
Where perhaps great battles had raged in the days gone by.
The early autumn sun shone, it was a still and quiet day,
When local roofs showed off red tiles as well as slates of grey.

The day grew old and the sun created a sad loss,
The cotton wool had disappeared and made way for candy floss.
The hills and valleys merged, green and blacks were grey,
October had again seen the passing of another lovely day.

Now the skyline above the Ring held dark clouds, changing through to pink,
As though they were sitting on those hills to watch the old sun sink.
The hills, the woods and that old Ring would soon be hidden from my sight,
That cotton wool and candy floss had given way to night.

I look now through the leafless boughs of the big trees' symmetry,
At the last dying embers of the sun as it sinks below the sea.
Now noisy cars with red and yellow lights frantically pass me by,
Their occupants not once that day, had looked to drink the beauty of the sky.

There was a time when every man read the sky like pages in a book,
Now they find life so full, that they haven't time to look.
But please when next the sun shines and the clouds are floating high above,
Cast an eye up to your Master, the sky is a symbol of his love.

THE OBVIOUS PATH

"Morning Jack" says the old cowman,
As they meet there in the yard,
"Heavy frost this morning,
The old ground seems quite hard.

"There'll be no ploughing for ee this morning,
Reckon the old dungcart's for a trip.
To clear away outside my byre,
And on forty acres tip."

Old Shep came by right then a'crying,
"Ain't you old boys nothing else to do,
Come with me and pitch some hurdles,
That'll make a man of you."

They laughed, each one so proud,
Each thinking their job was best.
They thought it was more important,
A cut above the rest.

They all looked up when the chicken cackled,
It told them Old Phil was round a bout.
"Morning Phil", they call in chorus
"Morning Mates", he'd shout.

Then along came Old Harry, hay knife 'neath his arm,
And as usual from his lips a cuss,
To complain it wasn't the best day
To cut and change the stack into a truss.

Well this won't do each one agreed,
Day'll be over for we start.
We'd better move for the Old Man comes,
He'd very soon have us part.

They all set off in different ways,
Heavy hobnails rattled in the air,
With their belted trousers, kerchief necks,
And flat caps holding down their hair.

Later the kids going to school,
Would follow the cowman and his dairy herd again.

Then have to stand hard in the hedge,
As Jack with trace horse rattled down the lane.

They saw old Phil collecting eggs,
Hens scratching and cackling round his feet,
And high above Old Shep and dog,
Though the hills were whiter than a sheet.

Then they heard as well as saw Old Harry,
As always his cussing filled the air.
And the trusses missing from the stack
Left a pattern like a stair.

Those kids were going to learn to write,
To read and the world to understand,
That there were other ways to make a living,
Than to work upon the land.

Those teachers would strive each day,
Their pupils would try hard
But all knew that this young generation
Would in future years greet each other in the yard.

PROGRESS

Progress is a growing monster,
Taking great steps every day
And along with each new arrival,
Old things are cast away.

The countryside in which we live,
Was once full of hedge and tree,
Will soon become a desert
As far as eye can see.

Those hedgerows created long ago,
That were full of sight and smell,
Have disappeared these many years
Along with the bucket and the well.

Those cows who were lady friends of mine,
With simple names like Sandy, Rose and Pip
Are recognised only today
By large numbers on their hip.

The tractors now go roaring by,
Leaving heavy vapours down the lane.
Oh: How I miss those clumping hooves,
Those jingling chains, those flying tails and mane.

That great big shed housing a thousand hens
Who find their living hard.
Cackling stories of Grandparents,
Who had the freedom of the yard.

Man once knew and felt his soil,
Clods beneath his hobnails could be found,
Now with modern ways and great big machines,
He has no need to walk upon the ground.

Now that hedges have been torn away,
And buildings rise where in the brooks we'd play,
The children have no nests to find,
Nor yet no Tadpole Day.

Now with Discos and towns of lights,
No open fire with leaping flames.

No family to sit and talk
And play old fashioned games.

Progress is like the weather,
We must accept the sun and rain,
We must travel on together
Because there is no way back again.

I know I have to journey along,
But I hope that progress will be kind
And leave a little bit of yesteryear,
Where I can recall those pictures in my mind.

THE PATH OF LIFE

Those early days along the path of life,
Are filled with memories of play.
Of gambolling among the lush green grass,
Or hiding 'mongst the hay.

Then growth begins, so does the path,
You learn of the hedges and the trees.
Of the animals that share this earth
Of the flowers and the bees.

Soon the path of life gets rocky,
And climbing we fall amongst its stones.
We enjoy the ecstasy of achievement,
And failure with its groans.

Then the woods of puberty arrive
In its midst a choice of path to take.
It's so important to think hard,
There's no room here for mistake.

The choice we make must be the right one
Footway clear a surface of dry stone.
And it's time to choose a partner,
The journey is no good all alone.

You can now share the sunshine,
But must stick together through the rain.
When every forward step you take,
Makes you slide right back again.

The path ahead can appear quite steep,
But those forward offer a helping hand.
And the two of you have created others,
Who at the start begin to understand.

Now the path ahead is clear to see,
Underfoot gets clearer as we go.
We find that there is no need to rush
And offer a hand to those below.

Each step now so easy,
Surface clear and clean.

And we rest upon an offered seat
Recalling all the beauty we have seen.

We are now upon the highest ground,
With all the past down there below.
The future is clouded to our fore,
But onward we must go.

The reason of life lies within those clouds,
Days of silver and of gold.
The reason why the path's so long,
From the young to very old.

THE BEAUTY OF SPRING

The early morning sunshine bid hello to another day of spring,
And gradually the birds arrived their lovely songs to sing.
The Daffodils in silent chorus happily rock and sway,
Little animals get excited as 'neath bare trees they play.

The Hawthorn hedges around the field don their lovely cloak of green,
While all around the woods' soft floor, the Primrose can be seen.
The grasses that were still and silent now begin to grow,
Seeds trickle from the gardener's hand the time has come to sow.

The crocus push their little heads up to try and kiss the sun,
While Arabis and Daisies dress up to join in the fun.
The Lupins leaves begin to show holding moisture like a pearl
And the future beauty of the Tulip sends its leaves to gradually unfurl.

The great rolling hills above that have stood white upon a winter's day,
Will soon be white again, in a bridal gown made of the flowers of May.
The fields of corn now growing fast dance without a care,
Sway and spring back into place just like a maiden's hair.

The trees who had heard the gale howl and be soaked in pouring rain
Now await the leaves and breeze to sing their song again.
The meadows hold the ewes and lambs and their Buttercups of yellows
Will soon greet the butterflies and bees and umpteen of their fellows.

Oh, if only us humans who live here too and not in the land of never never,
Could realise the beauty of the spring and ensure it lasts forever.

THE MORNING CHORUS

I looked up my darkened garden before day had arrived,
To discover from what throat that song had came.
For there within the shrouds of darkness
A bird waited the sun to rise in glorious flame.

Was it singing of joy to be alive
Or to ensure its companions would not be late.
Or was nature playing her tricks again
And inducing it to find a mate.

Daylight struggled in this early light
Soon the hedgerow could be seen,
And up there upon the highest bough
The songster would another feather preen.

Then back to that song so sweet
Bidding those that slept to fill the morning air
And to ask if there was a maiden near
Who would like to make a pair.

Then it seemed as lightness came
That each bough gave forth a tune
As every bird that God ever made
Planned a family in June.

That song he sang soon brought a mate
And their hearts with love were filled
While every minute of each day
They laboured on a nest to build.

At last their labours were completed
A home where his mate her eggs could lay
High up within the branches
Within twigs and bits of hay.

Soon within, a clutch of eggs were laid
And each took turns within those sticks
Until the time was over
And they had a brood of chicks.

Now food was the quest each day
And each they fetched was quickly ate

Perhaps that's why our Father
Made every day stay late.

The chicks soon grew as they ate and ate
Feathers adorned the skin and bone
They learnt to fly and disappeared
And the elders were once more all alone.

Then they too parted
And went the separate ways
To eventually fly far over seas
And find some warmer days.

But when the great big world had turned once more
Winter gone, as we bid hello to spring
They would find again that garden bough
And to the early morning sing.

THE OLD FARM HORSE

Those tender years of my young life
That now feel so full of charm,
Was the time that I was introduced
To those big horses on the farm.

There were greys and sorrels
And browns of many different hue
The chestnuts of the Suffolks
And great black Shires too.

They were housed within stalls in the stable
Where I would try to visit every day
When they were groomed beside the manger
And below the racks of hay.

There behind them on the harness rail
Was the leather and chains too
The collar, Breeching, Crupper, Hames
And pad the ridge chain passes through.

Beside this would be the oatbin
And a poke of chaff gathered every day
While on the other side the old boy's favourite seat
A sweet smelling truss of hay.

The mornings were my special time
When the lamp brightened up the place
And Grandad with curry comb and brush
Hissed to keep the dust from off his face.

Early June was my most loved time
As we passed the rick and stack
With me as proud as a Peacock
High up on that broad back.

This was the time of their freedom
Evenings and weekends they'd pass
Trotting, galloping and gambolling
Amongst the cool green summer grass.

It has become so plain to me
As I follow life along its course

That nothing creates a friendship and pride
That compares to the old farm horse.

THE SEA

I stand upon the sea shore, the water laps between my toes,
And I chase those little rising waves as the tide gently ebbs and flows.
I look out to the horizon and feel puny on the land,
That great expanse of water makes me feel I'm just a grain of sand.

I live beside her shoreline watching her react in different ways,
From the heavy storms of winter to those lovely summer days.
I have marvelled at her frocks coloured with grey and blue and green,
The little waves, her children and wonder where they've been.

I've seen her in a troubled morn, after a night being thrashed by pouring rain,
And each drop of water on the shore hurries to her bosom once again.
She has frightened me in stormy days when the wind above her moans,
And great big angry waves come in crashing on her stones.

There were other days when she was a mirror, all quiet and full of dreams,
When the waters of her oceans remember when they were happy twinkling streams.
She has held the fish that graced our table and taken the waste from off our land,
Gave sailing to the daring and children castles in the sand.

She has been a cloud flying high above, she has been a drop of rain,
She has been a puddle in the field, a stream in the terrain.
She has felt the cold of artic ice, the heat of a jungle sun,
God gave life to that drop of water the day the earth begun.

Many adventurers have ridden her oceans to discover foreign shore,
While ships made of both wood and steel have used her for their war.
Yet today she is the same as ever, her waters worldwide where'r you go
And people of many different colours enjoy her waters around their toe.

THE COUNTRY LANE

Those lovely lanes of dear old England wandering at will,
Meandering through the valley and twisting up the hill.
Beside it ran in banks of green, places where the wild flower grows,
The parsley, campion and the fragrant smelling rose.

The winter winds would try to seek us as we followed along its way,
And the summer sun our skin to burn on a lovely summer day.
But its hedges were a barrier, its trees created a leafy glade
Offering shelter on the coldest day and in the summer shade.

Those trees and banks are a haven where the wild life abound
And early in the morning light the birds create nature's favourite sound.
Its surface had carried man and horse, the coaches and the cart,
The children on the way to school, and where lovers opened up their heart.

Each day the cows trod its floor from the cowshed to the field,
And waggons rattled out of every gate with the harvest yield.
The sheep headed down to the fold, or to have their fleeces shorn
And would return again in the spring when their lambs had all been born.

Today they are too narrow, their surface cannot bear the load,
And so beside each one is a massive concrete road.
Now people tread the floor again as those of centuries long ago
And once more appreciate the pleasantness as they miss the modern flow.

So before those old places disappear let's stop and think again,
Could there ever be an England without a country lane.

THE LOVER OF THE HILLS

I love those hills that roll so gently,
Those hills that make me feel at home.
It's the place where I find freedom,
When amongst them all I roam.

I love every gentle contour,
Every valley with its rolling banks.
The sky so high above them,
Is where I offer up my thanks.

I love the turf the sheep created,
The banks of growing grain,
The wind that kiss and tease them,
And start the green waves once again.

I love the red poppies in her cornfields,
The mass of yellow from her kale,
The strong wind upon my face,
When I walk her in a gale.

I love all her lovely little flowers,
Her grass and plants as well,
The pleasant blooms of shrub and tree,
That fill the air with smell.

I love the animals that share her with me,
The rabbits and the hare,
The bees and all the butterflies,
That flutter everywhere.

I love the sunshine above her,
That sparkles on every blade of grass.
Those great fluffy clouds above,
That kiss her as they pass.

I love the rustle of her ripened corn,
The mushrooms in her dale,
The refinement of her **toddy?** grass
Her barns with the memory of the flail.

I lover to be at her very heights,
Where in the clouds a halo I behold.

The scene below is made of silver,
The air I breathe is gold.

I love her in the morning light,
I love the sparkle of her dew.
I love her when the sun sinks fast,
And the green grass turns to blue.

I love her in the winter time,
When snow has turned her hair to white,
And all her trees are chandeliers,
With the icicles of night.

I love the mystic of her past,
Clues of ridge and hollow never lack,
When both peasant and invader trod,
Her footpath and her track.

I love everything about her,
I love her in so many different ways,
And I know that love will last forever
For I will love her all my days.

THE THUNDERSTORM

Dark clouds are gathering, the blue skies slip silently away,
The air is still and silent, the birds have ceased to play
The boughs now start to tremble, the wind begins to blow,
The sky has darkened as 'twas night, corn and grasses kneel and bow.

The first drops of rain appear, disturbing dust from off the field,
Creating with its arrival the promise of another bounteous yield.
Then a flash of lightning fills the sky illuminating all the land,
As though a million candles blazed within old nature's hand.

A great crashing peal of thunder followed, never far behind,
Causing many ears to rise and fear to flood the mind.
Those great black clouds now burst their seams, the rain begins to teem,
The water creates puddles, fills brooks and tumbles down the stream.

The earth so parched and thirsty, plants wilted gulp their fill,
The streams and all the rivers start to overspill.
Raindrops crash upon the earth, trees bend as the wild winds blow,
While more thunder claps and lightning sets all the clouds aglow.

Gradually the clouds slip away, the rain peters to a stop,
The breeze shakes water from the trees, tears glisten as they drop.
The streams gallop madly to the sea, the water drains from land,
No longer are there candles within old nature's hand.

The sun appears to shine again, the sky is once more blue,
The water sings its little song as it bids the land adieu
Steam rises from the vibrant earth, the plants refreshed and clean
The air is pure and filtered, the countryside serene.

We have felt, seen and heard a power that forever mystifies,
As another secret is revealed from within our Master's skies.

YESTERDAY'S HARVEST

The harvest scene of yesteryear will not be seen again,
Although each year the earth will produce a bounteous crop of grain.

In days gone by before the horses have left their night's abode,
The old man with a scythe, had cut around the field a road.

The young carter's boy had followed, bundling and tying with a bond.
Until the sun had lost its heat, and sometimes far beyond.

When the morning light had dried the straw, and the horses had appeared,
The binder stood by ready, to cut wheat or barley with its beard.

The triple team began their journey that they would travel time and time again,
And the farmer prayed the sun would shine, and the sky would keep its rain.

The sails revolved, the straws bending to their will,
Until the chattering blade severed, and they fell silently and still.

Between the canvas rollers now they rose, the ears, the straw, the leaf,
Where the packers pressed and tied them, tightly in a sheaf.

Gone were days of dancing with the wind, and whispering to poppies at their side,
There would be no more waving to the birds, no rabbits there to hide.

Arms encircled around their waist, they were stoked ears pointing to the sky,
Until the moisture had departed, and three Sundays has passed by.

The creaking waggons came, proud horses filled the eye,
Sheafs were pierced with pitchforks, and thrown up hard and high.

Loaded waggons swayed and rattled across the fields and up the lane,
The throes of yet another harvest were with us once again.

Day after day the shirt sleeved men laboured 'neath the sun,
Until the task was over and another harvest done.

The fields of stubble ploughed with furrows neat and true,
While drills and harrows sowed the seed anew.

Meanwhile the neat thatched stacks watched fields that looked forlorn,
Until the noisy threshing machine came and relieved them of their corn.

Now the scene is, oh so different with the combine harvester to stay.
The field is entered in the morning and the harvest is over in a day.

OLD DAISY

The old man leaned upon the gate, gazing across the field of green,
And realised it was all of eighty years since he'd first seen this scene.
He had worked with many upon these acres, but there was one who would stay within his mind,
One with whom he's shared his sweat, one to whom he had been kind.

As the picture gathered, his eyes filled with tears, that slipped sadly down his face,
It was twenty years before they'd parted, this gate, the very place.
He'd come to be a carter, he was young his hair was fair,
And Old Daisy then a young brown horse, Rodney made the pair.

Rodney was impatient, always trotting, when he was shackled to a cart,
While Old Daisy mild and gentle, but possessed a great big heart.
Each morning as he opened the stable door she would nicker a fond hello,
And those great big sad eyes would follow him where'er he'd go.

I'm sure she loved to hear his whistle as he brushed and combed her mane,
Or sang to her those old fashioned songs as they rumbled down the lane.
He told her all his secrets, words no other had received,
She wouldn't tell a soul, he solemnly believed.

They were on the way to the meadow that day, when suddenly she swayed,
Then she missed her footing, fell, and silently at her master's feet she laid.
He knelt and cradled her head in his arms and nearly broke his heart,
To think his old friend had gone at last, the time had come to part.

The old man had mowed and ploughed and many harvest carted,
But he swore he'd never carry another now that Old Daisy had departed.
I know this story is true and it makes me feel quite sad,
For I too loved old Daisy, and the old man, my Grandad.

THE LABOURER'S DREAM

When I was young I had ambition, a head full of delights,
That filled my mind on lonely days and made me dream at nights.
I pictured a farm that was my own, a proud master in his field,
A man who knew the soil and could always grow a heavy yield.

My cowshed would be full of pedigrees, types of breed galore,
And the pails would sing with streams of milk, from twenty head or more.
The hills that my farm would contact, white with flocks of Southdown sheep,
And sties full of contented pigs that spent the day at sleep.

Stables where great Shires stood, content when racks with hay were filled,
And where happy carters groomed and sang, after all the fields were tilled.
The farmyard would be a haven, ricks of straw and stacks of hay,
Where men would mix with smoke and steam on a winter thrashing day.

The harvest would always be a good one, a barn full of golden grain,
And all the hay would smell like perfume, because the sun shone without rain.
The hens would rear each spring, a brood of chicks so sweet,
And little lambs in sheltered folds would wobble on their feet.

The Rooks would in high Elm trees quarrel every morn,
But never once upon my farm swallow up the corn.
Those rabbits in hill burrows, and among the hedgerows hop,
Always seem so sweet to me and would not devour a crop.

All the hedgerows around my farm that looked and filled the air with joy,
Would remain forever as I knew them through the young eye of a boy.
There would be no pest or fever, no weevil in the grain,
The sun would shine so bright each day, and night would bring the rain.

But there I must stop dreaming, standing in this mangold field so vast,
And I tell you I won't be sorry, when the row I hoe 'twill be the last.
I've toiled here near on forty years, that farm I know never will be mine,
But it makes me happy to dream of it, and it helps to pass the time.

NO HARVEST HOME
(Combine Harvester)

Once again the hills have lost the sight of ripening grain,
And the hills that remained of stubble have been ploughed up once again.
The combine harvester had cut tracks through the gold and through the rust,
While the engines roared and travelled in a constant cloud of dust.

Combine followed combine like athletes in a race,
While the driver in a cab of glass appeared to come from outer space.
Tractors with open trailers are filled with the combines' load,
And from early morn through till night throttle up the road.

The grain had disappeared but crumpled straw lay on the ground,
The rows recalling all those journeys as those beasts roared round and round.
Now no longer wanted, fired, the smoke billows in the sky,
The hills remain in mourning as they watch the vegetation die.

Now the ploughs could till the hill with furrows up and down,
The blackened stubble disappeared replaced with earth of brown.
The tractors now rush back and forth spreading granules that will feed,
The harvest of another year that starts its life as seed.

Birds that in late summer time have lost the will to sing,
And frightened into flight as the rollers pass and ring.
Now when the harvest is all over, there is no celebration, no gang of harvesters to feed,
No gleaning in the empty fields to fill the winter's hungry need.

The harvest was once a family task, the high point of the year,
And every one enjoyed the "Harvest Home", the dinner and the beer.
Now every year farming life appears to be changing very fast,
And us older ones are sad to see the passing, that was the slow pace of the past.

MY PHOTOGRAPHIC ALBUM

There is a photographic album in my mind spanning many years,
That keep alive the faces of those for whom we'd shed our tears.
It travels back through boyhood days, when of Diphtheria we were beware,
When that innocent child departed the one with flowing saxon hair.

Then that old grey haired person died when I was very small,
They had thought that she would live forever until she had her fall.
When we began to understand and adulthood had come our way,
The old man with a reaper took my grandparents away.

And if I ever live to be a hundred, no other can fill their place,
The bowing back, the silver hair, the wrinkled hand and face.
Then there was those young friends, whose mental photos belong to me,
And remind me of a far off day and their disaster out at sea.

Then there was young Earnie, happy and proud in a Sailor's uniform of blue,
The war with its Russian Convoys took him and all his crew.
And young Reg who chose the khaki and across the seas did go,
The battle of Casino, was the place he received his fatal blow.

Then came that fateful day, the memory of which I try to smother,
The heartache when they told me that I had lost my dear old Mother.
But I was lucky, dad struggled on, eating years and clamouring for more,
Then suddenly it ended, he had reached the age of eighty four.

Now I too am getting older, I accept and show no rage,
As other photos come much quicker now to fill another page.
Each one comes their photo developed through the tears,
And it is not quite so hard to take if they had their share of years.

Each one has brought me joy their love and friendship glad to find,
And I have shared all my emotions with those pictures in my mind.
Now as my memory recalls each one, I feel happy just to say,
How very grateful I humbly feel, that they had passed my way.

SOON BE DINNERTIME

Beside the railway line I work, among the taters, corn and grass,
And running past me on those metal rails I see my old friends pass.
There is one that remains within my mind and will forever more,
It's the twelve fifteen from Plymouth, that place on Devon's shore.

I'm sure she knew I waited as she departed from that Hoe,
And would whisper as she passed me by, "Just forty five minutes more to go".
I longed to hear her footsteps, her clatter and her click,
As great iron wheels kept rolling eating miles upon the track.

The steam and smoke lay o'er her back flowing as a maiden's hair,
While behind her coaches rattled and swayed without the slightest care.
She was a real lady with deportment, style and grace,
Yet I'm sure that when she passed me there was a smile upon her face.

She had lines I never will forget, showing power and ease,
And every bit was shining for all the world to please.
The signal man would ensure that all her lights were green
For she wasn't just another train, she really was a queen.

Lancing was a mile away, a mere skip and a hop
But she was too important to even think to stop.
Yet she was a good old friend to me, her time never fast or ever slow.
That sleek smoking engine of Southern Rail, the twelve fifteen from Plymouth Hoe.

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

The daisies covering the meadows floor,
Buttercups in fields beside the brook,
Flag Iris bordering the stream
Create the desire to rest and look.

We sit beside the tumbling water,
As the piano of nature tinkles through the mind.
As we sit we wonder what far off tune
Those bubbling waters try to find.

Honeysuckle by bloom and scent create scenery so fair,
While Dogrose climbs and dots its blossoms everywhere.
The Hawthorn with its robes so white amid its leaves of green,
Help fill the eye, the scent makes everything serene.

All around tall grasses grow swaying with delight,
While up above the Skylark sings from early morn 'til night.
The butterfly with fragile wings painted with patterns bright and gay,
Create an aerial ballet as they flutter on their way.

Hearing the buzzing of the bee,
We cast our eyes aside
And watch the swaying Foxglove
On which it tries to ride.

We then hear the Moorhen,
With a body, oh so fleet.
As it walks upon the water,
With a splashing of its feet.

Looking down through the clear water,
At the brook's clean gravel floor
We are astounded by the tadpoles
That pass us by the score.

The heavy summer air is punctured,
As the Cuckoo calls its name
And for all the pleasure that I feel
I thank God once again.

One can lay back in all this glory
And cast eyes high in the sky,

Imagine clouds are sailing ships
Upon the blue as they pass by.

With closed eyes one can hear a thousand things,
Of insects, wind and trees
And although we desire the bigger things
Its these little ones that please.

At last one has to rise and in only a few yards,
Houses and roads are all that one can see.
Those joys that I have shared today
A memory of how it used to be.

THE MIGRATION

It 'twas the second of November, the PM of another lovely day,
The cold was slowly closing in, the sun prepared to end the day.
Something caught my eye, I looked high above within blue skies to see,
A sight that happens every year, but is still a mystery.

For up there I saw big grey birds, working with ease and unity,
Wave after wave perfect in formation, heading o'er the hills and out to sea.
They had arrived sometime in the spring, when all the snow had disappeared,
To court and mate, to nest and to carry on their breed.

When the chicks that hatched had demanded food every minute of the day,
The adults without question supplied them until they grew and flew away.
The adults fed and rested and recouped the energies they'd spent,
And prepared to act upon the instinct which every bird is sent.

I wondered as I saw them how long would their journey be,
And however could they find their way o'er the land and o'er the sea.
It puzzled me to know if the future weather would be kind,
And who it was that planted that knowledge in their mind.

As they flew, their wings forever moved with a constant beat,
They maintained that same formation and a thousand miles they'd eat.
Each day of their journey, there was the sun high in the sky,
And people who spoke another tongue watched as the procession passed them by.

It is still a mystery, the answer not known to the human race,
Why such an organised migration should once again take place.
It had certainly been happening since the miracle of birth,
And is just another secret of our good old Mother Earth.

DAMSEL'S NEW SHOES

I had travelled daily with old Damsel, and may miles we'd trod.
Today her shoes were wearing thin and we were off to have her shod.
The building out of which a chimney ushered was just around the bend,
Old Harry's voice called out, "Tie her in the travis, it's up the other end."

"Now come in here, Young Will, and give these bellows a good stroke".
As with a rod or iron he pulled and pushed as he gave the coals a poke.
Soon the fire was rosy pink like the cheeks of a young child,
And the iron that lay within became pliable and mild.

He took it to the anvil and hammered heavily and long.
The tune he made floated around, like notes from an old beloved song.
He then went to old Damsel and lifted her foot between his thigh,
And the old girl turned her head to watch him with her eye.

Taking up a pair of pincers, he wrenched that old shoe free,
Paring with a hooked sharp knife the loose hoof he could see.
He got me now to stroke that bellow 'til the shoe was white with heat,
"That'll do now boy", he said, "I can now fit that to her feet."

With the hoof between his legs again, he pushed the shoe on hard,
Disappearing in a cloud of smoke, as that strange smell drifted o'er the yard.
He then immersed it in cold water, that appeared to cry in pain,
As steam rose in great big folds to charge the air again.

Nails now driven home, protruding bits were snipped apart,
The action made one aware that you were watching a master at his art.
The rasp he held within his hands until the hoof was neat,
Then with a brush and linseed oil the job was near complete.

The other hooves of old Damsel done, Old Harry said "Good day",
And with Damsel harnessed to her cart, we went our merry way.
Old Damsel trundles no more carts, but Old Harry's face is clear,
Although the scene that I've described happened in my fifteenth year.

A WET NOVEMBER HARVEST

November is a dreary month, each day full of fog and rain,
But it didn't hinder us one bit, for it was mangel time again.
That field was green with leaves, beneath which were fruits of yellow and of gold.
And we prepared for wet days ahead, when both hands and feet were cold.

We'd have heavy boots upon our feet and leggings to the thigh,
A faded scarf around our neck and flat cap pulled down until the eye.
We knew our day would see us with a stooping back,
So around our shoulders we had slung an old potato sack.

The hand now grasped green leaves and wrenched them from the floor,
Severed leaves discarded they reached again for more.
And so the job continued, six rows melded into one,
This pattern would continue until the job was done.

Horse and carts that now arrived travelled 'tween the double row,
And carters bent and straightened as coloured roots they'd throw.
When the cart was full, willing beast took up the strain,
Leather creaked, chains tinkled until they were safely up the lane.

Those loaded carts now rattled as they trundled to the yard,
They were backed up to the pile, tipped, their contents to discard.
Back and forth those horses plodded, journeys counted by the score
Yet that wet and muddy field still held many more.

Those horses' heads hung lower as their labours began to tell,
And with discarded leaves and deep dark ruts that field looked just like hell.
Mid morning break was a welcome time, fire for many and rug for mare,
As low clouds scurried above, leaving moisture everywhere.

Day followed day, light and dark would blend,
The job seemed everlasting, it seemed 'twould never end.
Many days in fog and rain, we toiled until that field was clear,
And mangel cart, thank goodness was finished for another year.

A BARN IN SOMPTING

Those old flint barns that we know so well, are a symbol of the past,
When things were built with skill and care, to use and many years to last.
They were built when open fields were gone, when ditches and hedges grew,
To hold cattle and corn and farm with methods new.

Women and children scoured the field to collect the flint by hand,
While horse and cart and perhaps the oxen visited the sea to collect the sand.
With lime to make the mortar and trees felled to make the beam,
Thatch made the roof at first, then slates hauled miles and miles by team.

Those old barns began to grow, slowly no more than two course every day,
For to try to build them faster it would crumble them away.
At last they were erected with great doors front and rear,
A stable and a hovel were soon built very near.

Each side of that great barn we learned to call the goaf,
Where wheat was stored, before 'twas flour that would one day make a loaf.
Around and round within this goaf the horse trod to firm the stack,
And a young boy was his master as he sat upon its back.

The old horse had done this many times calmly plodding on around,
Until at last he reached the top and was lowered to the ground.
The winter time would find the men flailing on the threshing floor,
Singing songs together as dust and chaff blew out the door.

The pile upon the floor now thrown up the wind to separate the grain,
Sunlight caught it falling just like golden rain.
Flails were now discarded, progress, with steam and drum created other ways,
And thrashing that once took all winter was over within days.

Later the barn would house the sheep when they were to be shorn,
And the interior would be full of bleating until the early morn.
It would hold the harvest home a feast of meat and beer,
When doors were laid flat as a table and the place was full of cheer.

For some it was a hunting ground, others just a house,
From the ever eager old Barn Owl to the furtive little mouse.
'Twas a place where children played, laughter long and shrill,
And every Tuesday night the Lad's Brigade were set their drill.

Modern farming came along, desperately it tried to cope,
But modern buildings began to grow, at last it gave up hope.

Some became shops and museums, but most crumbled away,
We're lucky because ours up at old Church Farm has decided now to stay.

The scenery will still be pleasant, the memories remain,
Now that builders are busy again up the top of old Church Lane.
The old barn stands firm, ready to tell another tale,
Because now it is a detached house and the board reads, "UP FOR SALE".

PERHAPS

Perhaps one day I'll walk again that footpath of long ago,
Where villagers would be seen each day, as they walked to and fro.
Perhaps I'd reach it down that stony lane, guarded by high and bounteous trees,
That seemed so pleased to see you as they whispered in the breeze.

Perhaps it would run between high hedges, smells drifting everywhere,
For today 'twould be the springtime, scents of the apple and the pear.
Perhaps at its end where it opened out, I'd sit and rest awhile,
For here I'd find myself a seat, although it was really just a stile.

Perhaps once more I'd tread that grass, that was once called Blacksmith Field,
Where the dairy cows would come each day after being relieved of their yield.
Perhaps my feet would again disappear among those Buttercups of gold,
Or among the white that blossomed here, those daisy blooms of old.

Perhaps when I crossed, I'd find another stile, this one painted white,
That showed up against its greener friends and even glowed at night.
Perhaps I'd again cross that garden, of celery, leeks and greens,
And see a boarded fence with pears and a bounteous crop of beans.

Perhaps again I could climb a five bar gate, for here that's what I'd meet,
And find myself in Dankton Lane where it meets with old West Street.
Perhaps here at the lane's beginning, our northern journey had begun,
A lodge house stood back to my right, on my left a chicken run.

Perhaps I'd still find old Harry's threshing tackle at the top end where the standing was quite hard,
And opposite a pair of mirrors that showed into Rectory yard.
Perhaps up from the yard, sweethearts wouldn't care even if they were late,
But would dawdle close together passing through the kissing gate.

Perhaps now that I was in the meadow, to which the Malthouse gave its name,
Instead of rubble I could see the old building just the same.
Perhaps now the Park that our footpath passes through,
Had never seen the by-pass which came to cut it into two.

Perhaps I'd again pass to old Church Lane, the gate shut without a care,
Thanks to a lengthy piece of wire, and a rusty old plough share.
Perhaps as you have read these words, your memories have travelled free,
And you have walked from Cokeham Manor to the old Church along with me.

A CHOICE OF READING

The Vicar said, "Now tell me George, is it true what I have heard,
That you have never owned a Bible, that you cannot read a word?"
"Tis true enough", replied old George, "Words don't mean a thing to me,
But the Lord has taught me to understand, by all the things I see.

"When all glows red in the morning, burning up the sky,
I know I'll be lucky that day if I finish warn and dry.
But if the sky reddens before the ending of the day,
It tells me the morrow will be a fine one and fit for making hay.

"When I see and hear that old Magpie, calling over and over again,
It's as clear as clear to me that later we shall have a drop of rain.
And when my face feels chill, I know along with others,
That those angry clouds will bring us rain as they hang over Old Will's Mother's.

"If it's in the early light and it's raining long before the hour of seven,
My old bones tell me it'll all be over before the clock has struck eleven.
Then comes the day I see that lonely hare cavorting in groups without a care
And along with the buds upon the tree tell us that spring will soon be everywhere.

"The day arrives, I gather soil and it crumbles in my hand,
And now I know it's safe again to tread upon the land.
And when those weeds that've seeded, now begin to grow,
That is the surest sign to me that the time has come to sow.

"A sign arrives that reads, the hayfield should be clear,
It's the tadpoles who arrive again to mark another year.
The May blossom comes declaring, that it has one more year survived,
And signals to one all that summer has arrived.

"Some days those grazing cows won't settle, they frolic as though at play,
While little flies swarm around their heads, tell us that thunder's on its way.
Those old grey geese depart they are far wiser than you and me,
For they know there are some days of fine weather as they fly across the sea.

"Another message now is seen, for the ground is white and hard,
Cattle are brought in from the field to the comfort of the yard.
The trees when full of berries whisper, that winter will be severe across the land,
And we had better make sure that there are plenty of hay and mangolds close to hand.

"Oh, I can read Vicar, looking at the skies, the fields, the birds,
I don't need no pen and paper to put it down in words.

For my book you see are pages and words found out of doors,
But you know, there ain't a lot of difference Vicar, 'cause the author's same as yours."

THE KISS OF THE SUN

The morning sunshine was so bright,
Yet the air was raw and cold.
Reminding me of my young days,
And the farming ways of old.

It was on such days as these
That farm saw the old horse and me depart.
I'd have the bridle rein in my hand
And she'd be in the shafts of that old cart.

I'd hear the creaking of the leather
Accompanied by the jingle of a chain.
The axle jolting between the ruts,
Or the rims crushing flints along the lane.

The old dung lump needed moving
Each forkful steaming as we loaded it by hand.
'Twas a commodity that was so important
If we were to get the best from off the land.

Perhaps it would be a load of mangel-wurzel
Which we would spread within the field
To create a bite for the dairy herd
And help maintain their yield.

Or would it be a load of clean straw
To make up a soft bed in the yard
Where the cows could lay in comfort
As frost made meadows bare and hard.

Would it be the sweet smelling hay,
Fodder for sheep within the fold
Where bales of straw would protect them
From the north winds and the cold.

Would that sunshine see us
Digging chalk from out the fill,
That would be spread upon the land
To make it easier to till.

Would it be potatoes, contained in a Hessian sack,
Or swedes for which the market was crying out,

Maybe 'twould be from the labourers fingers suffering the cold
From a day of picking that dreaded Brussel sprout.

There had been many loads we'd carry,
Within dark days, and in the rain and snow
When farming took a rest from fields
Where not a thing would grow.

There were days treading over frosted ground,
That twisted hoof and boat alike
And those days when thunder clamoured around
While lightning tried to strike.

Days and days of pouring rain,
When mud was ankle deep,
Trundling lanes and through the wood
With all the trees asleep.

So through all those long days of winter,
As we trundled o'er the place,
'Twas a treat to both man and beast,
When sun planted a kiss upon your face.

HIS SPECIAL WISH

The boy said, "Grandad, having reached the age of eighty four,
And travelled through life's range,
Would you say that throughout that time
There would be some things you'd like to change?"

The old man thought while he stroked his chin,
His mind travelled back the years.
His answer to that question,
Full of memories and fears.

Would I wish to change the fact,
Of feeling rain from out the sky
And know that it would slake the earth,
And not cause the trees to die.

Would I think to change the river,
That showed an aquatic life to me,
But now flushes poison from the land
And then pollutes the sea.

Would I wish for motor cars,
In times when only horses passed me by
To kill hundreds on the roads each day,
And blow foul fumes up in the sky.

Would I wish to change a fruit harvest,
Where you could pluck and eat that day,
To one where you have to wait until they are washed
To get rid of poison spray.

Would I change that childhood breakfast,
A boiled egg with soldiers true,
To one with thoughts of Salmonella
And the harm that it could do.

Would I change the glade where Bluebells grew
And where Primrose scents drifted to the nose
To the houses that stand there now
In a place called Foxglove Close.

Would I change that garden where father grew
Those vegetables, cabbage, beans and peas,

To today's artificial colourings,
And everything's deep freeze.

Would I have wished for central heating,
A room with no focal point to laze.
Or share the evening of a family talking
In front of the fire's flickering blaze.

Would I change the taste of a glass of milk
Straight from a cow that I could name
To a bottle that is three days old,
And will never taste the same.

I've seen so many changes boy,
I've watched them all go pass.
The hedges around the field,
The daisies from the grass.

The greatest wish of all the old man said,
That's if the truth be told.
Is that I'd like to have spent eight years as a boy.
And to never have grown old.

KINGS OF THE DOWNLAND TURF

The shepherds of the hills,
Men of days gone by
Who trod that soft downland turf
And who could read the sky.

Their life was hard and lonely,
Tending flocks from morn until day's end.
Their sheep were not just Ewes and lambs
Because each one was a friend.

They were the companions of the earth,
Who could name every blade of grass
And remember where special flowers grew
In the little glades they'd pass.

They were one of God's musicians,
And found glory in the symphony of bells
That hung around the necks of sheep
And rung among the highlands and the fells.

Gifted with the hands of healing,
Their minds alive and quick,
To enable them to nurse to life
When either Ewe or lamb was sick.

Midday found them on the highest hill,
Early morning pitching fold.
It was a way of life to them
Handed down from men of old.

Autumn saw the rams appear
With breast harness they'd be free
And a flock of Ewes with painted backs
Told of future lambs we'd see.

Early year, lambing pen erected,
Ewes would be sheltered for the night,
While Shep patrolled at frequent times
His friend, the "Old storm light".

No comforting home at such times for he,
A wheeled tin hut there in the lea.

A window overlooked the flock,
For a caring eye to see.

The thrill of watching lambs at play,
With the old dog by his side.
The joy that sight bequeathed to him,
Those old eyes couldn't hide.

Then followed days of docking,
Little tails stuffed in a sack.
While rams were turned to "Wethers"
As they lay upon their back.

There came the time of dipping,
Sheep's eyes full of fear,
But it kept them free from parasites
And scab for another year.

The day arrived when the shearers came,
A dozen men or more.
One was called the "Winder"
Who rolled fleeces on the floor.

The young tar boy stood awaiting,
Pot and brush there in his hand
To repair any cuts the shearer made
And his trade to understand.

The sheep ran off half naked,
The men began to sing,
And the lambs whose first coat disappeared
Now called a young shearling.

Then the fruits of all that labour,
Old friends everywhere.
Then thousand sheep contained in folds,
'Twas another Findon Fair.

A few tales in the local,
Full of laughs and cheer.
An unsteady walk back home,
With a belly full of beer.

Now few of those old men remain,
Sheep tracts now grow the corn.
That old generation were destined to be shepherds

From the day that they were born.

THE FARM SALE

Cars gathered in rows in Stable Meadow,
Machines lined beside them in a row,
Because Shepherds Cross Farm was sold for building
There would be no more crops for it to grow.

It had been a farm near on three hundred year,
Generations had the same soil tilled.
Soon we would see those houses grow
Until every piece was filled.

The farmer who had trod his grandfather's steps,
Was loathe to see anything depart,
Mingled with the crowds that gathered
With ashen face and heavy heart.

"Who will bid me a price?" cried the auctioneer,
"This tool showing Ransome as its maker,
That has ploughed this farm a hundred times
And is fit to plough another thousand acre."

"This harrow gentlemen that we stand before,
Is lot number, 102
That has given good service to this man,
And I am sure will do the same for you.

"Now we come to a sound hay rake
Good shaft, seat, hoops and stays
That will last out your life sir,
Over many summer days."

He watched as each machine was sold,
Then the small tools that fitted nicely in his hand,
Each one he had used upon his farm,
Over every inch of land.

The cows now frightened in the ring,
Memories of head in flank and hand upon the teat,
Followed by a flock of Southdown sheep
Each one he'd pared their feed.

The cockerel with his flock of hens,
He remembered their very first cheap.

Followed by Betsy the pig and her litter
Who he had watched many times asleep.

As day wore on, animals sold,
But the horses were saved until the end.
And the old man struggled to fight the tears
Because each one was a friend.

"That's the last", the auctioneer said,
"Thank you gentleman and Goodday".
Lorries, tractors, trailers and carts
Loaded and took everything away.

The old man wandered around the empty yard,
His mind rolling back the years,
He even saw his Mum and Dad,
But his only company was his tears.

He never worked another day,
They eventually sent him to a home,
And they would smile as they let him out each day,
Those same acres he would roam.

So if an old man wanders past your house,
Seemingly looking at your gardens front and rear,
He doesn't see the flowers growing,
But the crops and friends of yesteryear.

CARRIED AWAY

The young boy sat upon that train as it carried him from home,
The years ahead would cause him many miles to roam.
A new life was before him, a rife placed within his hand,
Yet the last thing he ever wished was to ever leave the land.

The train swayed and rattled 'tween hedge and field of green,
And that scene made him remember how his young life had been.
He saw cows grazing in a meadow, closed his eyes to hear the cowman's song,
And from those distant days the echo, Cup Cup Come Along.

Soon he saw a pair of horses, their heads bobbing and weaving as they trod,
And he remembered when he'd walked those miles each footfall was a clod.
He saw a barn upon the hill, the door was open wide,
And how he wished that he could have the chance to take a step inside.

A cottage stood beside the trace, he remembered Grandparents old and frail,
For outside the door a well, clearly seen the winch handle and a pail.
In the corner of a field a corn rick stood with thatch to keep it dry,
And his mind created a picture of thatching in those days gone by.

He saw a dog and a flock of sheep, with a man who looked quite old,
They were standing in a kale field where the hurdles made a fold.
He had seen that scene so many times and it returned him to the hills of home,
Where the sheep he knew were luckier they had the golden gorse to roam.

There would be no meadow now, no singing in country air so pure,
'Twould be the shouting of NCO'S, a soldier's life now to endure.
Yet he was so grateful for those eighteen years that now seem a different age,
And that train now passed to another chapter, like the turning of a page.

He travelled all the country, Devon's Moors as well as the mountains of Wales,
To the highlands of Bonnie Scotland, to Yorkshire with her Dales.
He visited the city, large villages and towns,
But nothing that he ever saw replaced the love of those South Downs.

He tried hard to be a soldier, but he could not forget the farm,
He fantasised of his own place in days so full of charm.
In silent hours on many days old dreams he had to spurn,
Because he knew deep down in his heart, that those old days never could return.

LISTENING TO OLD GEORGE

I spent many hours with Old George, talking of times long ago,
About the wherefores and the hows.
We spoke of his school days and old farms,
And his forty years upon steam ploughs.

We sat at lunch times as we ate our bread and cheese,
And as we talked you'd see his eyes travel in a dream,
As fields and lanes he'd tread again,
Long ago, back in that world of steam.

He said the sun had not had the chance to lighten up the day,
When the ploughing team arose to get their labours underway.
The fire each day would be revived from yesterday's dying ember,
And their season would last right through from March until November.

They were a motley looking lot, two drivers, steersman, a foreman and a boy,
And knew the land upon which they worked, farming had been their life's employ.
With two steam engines, cultivator, plough, water cart and a living van,
And apart from the boy they'd been together since the team began.

They ploughed the flat and with the hill and valley they could cope,
With an engine stationed at each end, the plough was traversed with a rope.
Their lifeblood was the water that the horse drawn tank would bring,
As it waited in the farmyard for that steam whistle to sing.

One pip of that whistle sounded, 'twas the signal for to stop,
While two told the other it would start.
Three called the foreman from the van, four called the boy,
While a long and short one called the horse and cart.

While the two drivers kept the engine at work.
And the steersman rode the plough,
The foreman found new fields to work,
While the boy cleaned and cooked the chow.

The van had two double bunks,
And one spacious single bed.
The bunks were for the men and boy,
The single where the foreman laid his head.

There were no stopping in the daytime,
When the foreman relieved each driver for his chow.

While once the grub was ready,
The boy took his turn upon the plough.

'Twas all a familiar sight during spring, autumn and mid-June,
The smoke rising above the hedge, the air filled with the whistles tune.
I saw the scene merely a couple of times, for they lived a hundred years ago,
And they proved to be too expensive, as well as cumbersome and slow.

Nowadays they are seen at rallies and shows and are a party of history,
They were the first mechanism on the farm, the first change they were to see.
My old mate had been a foreman, driver, cooksboy, oh so many years ago,
And 'twas he that would tell me all those stories as together we would hoe.

I've heard other stories in the blacksmith, as we stood beside the forge,
But most of what I know today came from the lips of dear Old George.

THE VILLAGE OF YESTERDAY

The village of my childhood in memory will remain,
The cottage in the meadow, the hedges down the lane,
The street that winds along with little houses by its side,
Who vainly use the Hollyhocks their lovely face to hide.

The little shop that contains everything you might desire,
The halfpenny sweets, the margarine, the flour, the match to light the fire.
'Twas here the ladies would gather, a place to air their views,
To pass on the word of birth and death and any other news.

The Church stands as it has a thousand years at the first part of the hill,
Its bell would beckon villagers who soon the pews would fill.
'Tis here they still give thanks for the harvest, but now no procession or no band,
No showing off a shock of corn like when it was cut by hand.

The Smithy is so quiet now, no fire to lighten with its glow,
But it still stands proud on the same old spot, a nice little bungalow.
The old flint School stands lonely, empty, no sound of running feet,
No pupils to add to the thousands that had sat at desk and seat.

The new Inn stands where the old one did, but replacing it is hard,
Because the by-pass has secluded it, now no foxhounds in its yard.
The old lane has felt the tread of oxen, horse, steam engine and the car,
The farmers and local gentry and visitors from afar.

It has stood during the reign of Kings and Queens, through Parliaments and wars,
And those who made the history books have trodden on its floors.
There are no old farm workers now, with kerchiefs and yorkers 'neath the knee,
Who sat within hedges, eating hunks of bread and cheese, while drinking bottles of cold tea.

The landowners' houses of the district, that could be seen where'er you'd roam
Have either been demolished, made into schools or a great big nursing home.
The houses stand proud in Malthouse Close, but history could tell,
That this had been a farmyard with its scenery and smell.

The Chapel stands beside the road, where Salvationists read sermons to us all,
And where many years before my time the village pump stood in its wall.
The Off Licence of old Aunt Annie and the Ball Tree in the road
Disappeared so long ago to build the new Inn and to widen out the road.

The Reading Room is empty now, no daily papers on display,
No working men to exchange their views at the evening of the day.

Yes, it may be now my back is bent and my head a thatch of grey,
But my old mind sees it all in that long off yesterday.

A MID MARCH MORNING

We welcome the day that this morning will bring,
The pleasure of birds as they flutter and sing,
The joy of our sight as the scenes we behold,
The marvels of nature, with mysteries untold.

Laburnum wears again its yellow cloak and Dandelions appear,
The daisies, now night and frost hold no fear.
Hares start to gather, they frisk and they play,
Pair up and mate before going their solitary way.

Birds start to work, gathering bits with never a rest,
Each journey of straw, hay, mud, anything that will help make a nest.
Other animals return they had spent the winter asleep,
Now the kiss of the sun calls them from burrows so deep.

No words have to be spoken at this time of year,
For nature's works make it abundantly clear,
That each living thing that lives under the sky
Can only survive if they multiply.

The winter has been dismal, we are glad to leave it behind,
This mornings like shedding a cloak and freeing the mind,
My steps are much lighter, my head happy and gay,
My heart full of thanks for such a wonderful day.

MY BRITAIN

This is my Britain into which I have grown,
And all of its acres-their pleasure I've known.
I have met all her rivers, including the Tyne and the Tees
Her lakes and her bays and all of her seas.

I've met all of her moorlands, I've felt the touch of despair,
When the whole ground has quivered whenever I'm there.
I've jumped over her stones as water sings of old dreams
I've clambered the banks of her musical streams.

I've climbed the Quantocks and Cotswolds so fine,
The craggy old peaks of those called Penine.
I've travelled the flat land of East Anglia's plain,
And marvelled at acres and acres of grain.

I've been over to Ireland where Leprechauns are said to be born
And as delighted to see the sun rise over the Mountains of Mourne.
I've climbed up to Snowdon in the sun and in gales,
And had the pleasure to share the beauty of Wales.

I've seen the Vale of Evesham where the vegetables grow,
And the thrill of Scotland's Highlands covered in snow.
I've walked over the sand near the two of Dundee,
And have startled a seal that sloped off to sea.

I've been up above Barrow on the Cumberland coast,
Where great mist covered hills look like a ghost.
And up on North Yorkshire Dales, walking in cloud,
On the rough coast of Cornwall with waves crashing so loud.

I've dallied in Dorset and found peace in her coves,
Marvelled at the beauty of Wiltshire where the sheep graze in droves.
Visited Stratford and Buckingham too,
Had fun at Blackpool and waited at Crewe.

The blossoms of Kent held me spellbound 'tis true,
And the bells in the woodlands of Northants covered in blue.
Quaint cottages stand in the villages of Warwick and Staffs,
The beauty of Lincolnshire's Tulips along with the Daffs.

The church spire at Chesterfield crooked and tall,
And Derbyshire's jewel that they call Hardwick Hall.

The river at Bedford where the rowers to ply,
And Box Hill at Dorking where painted kites fly.

I've seen the bright lights of London, the Palace and Big Ben,
The castle at Edinburgh, her hills and the glen.
I've seen the Minster at York, the Cathedral at Wells,
I've been among the Cockneys and heard the chimes of Bow Bells.

Yes I've travelled these islands from the top to the toe,
And discovered her beauty in each place that I go.
Yet wherever I have been, there's only one place for me,
That's Sussex, where the downlands of home run down to the sea.

MAN'S PLACE

I've travelled miles and covered acres with the horse and the harrow,
And I've sowed gallons of clover seed with the old Shandy Barrow.
I've watched swathe after swathe shudder and fall to the ground,
As I sat on that mower as we went round and round.

I've heard the scream of the rabbit leaving its throat,
When it has become unfortunate to be the prey of the stoat.
I've been frightened by snakes as I tread through the grass,
And stand to one side to let them silently pass.

I've travelled the lane, my ankle twisted by stone,
While the great boughs above creak as they groan.
I've walked all alone no one to share my spoken words,
Apart from the animals, insects and birds.

I have witnessed birth and death when life is taken away,
The dawn at beginning and dusk at end of the day.
I've trodden the hills when the snow's deep and white,
And trod over the field in the darkest of night.

I've suckled the calf and watched lambs at play,
And spent days in the brookland making the hay.
I've worked 'neath the sky in its sun and its rain,
And witnessed thunder and lightning time and again.

I've walked close to nature and marvelled at the colours I've seen
The mass of blue sky above the acres of green.
And for what I can't see our Master gave us a nose.
To share the smells of the sea, the earth and the most fragrant rose.

I was given ears for the bird song and sound of the sea,
The running of water, the call of the animals, the buzz of the bee.
The works of nature are gifts to us all,
From the tiniest of flowers to the trees strong and tall.

We should respect each living thing and the sun and the rain,
The fruit of the tree, the root of the plant and the earth with its grain.
We shouldn't think that we know better than nature's fair hand,
As we build with smell and with noises over each yard of land.

We have changed everything now even the crops of the land,
And modern day people cannot understand,

That he is not separate and when God gave him birth,
It was merely to take up his place on this bounteous earth.

THE WIND

The wind has been my only companion, when I have been all alone,
Travelling that same hillside as loudly she'd groan
Travelling through woods and fields covered in thistle,
I've heard her music playing like an old penny whistle.

There were times when I found her difficult in rain and in sleet,
When she tried her darnedest to knock me off my feet.
Yet at times she was so gentle and filled me with awe,
Creating moving pictures using the hillsides of straw.

I've met her down at the seaside on a troublesome day,
And she has made me wet through from blowing the spray.
She has kept boats off the water when she is blowing a gale,
But has made them happy and daring when her blowing has filled up their sail.

She has worked on the hill, turning windmill hour after hour,
Helping to turn the summer grain into flour,
I have seen her playing with children her heart happy and light,
High on the hillside flying the kite.

She has kissed me on a hot summer day following the plough,
Soothing and cooling the sweat on my brow.
I've seen the Foxglove swat gently as it soothingly croons,
And it seems to disappear completely at the changing of moons.

It has made friends in the woodlands, the Willow and Larch,
And torn great trees asunder in the rough days of March.
It has gathered with others and in hurricanes blown,
And yet in the hot days of summer those little seeds sown.

It's torn limbs from the trees and autumn leaves from the boughs,
Which signalled the coming of winter and time for the ploughs.
It has found me in hayfields where its whirlwinds amaze
And I've blessed its cool company on those long summer days.

It has tortured my fingers in winter days cold,
And I have heard of its stories from men now bent and old.
I've looked up high above and seen it high in the sky,
As herds of white clouds go galloping by.

I don't think there has been a day when it hasn't touched my face,
No memory recalled, no date, time or place.

But wouldn't it be funny if the wind didn't blow,
For so many things we see tumbling would have nowhere to go.

Where does it come from? Where does it go?
Who teaches it to sing, to moan and to blow?
I imagine I see it smiling mischievously at me,
As it skips over the wave, far from the shore and over the sea.

THE BIG FIGHT

'Twas in the early hours of the morning in August Thirty seven,
When World Champion Joe Louis fought contender Tommy Farr.
A balmy clear mid-summer night,
The same one that a young couple drove through our county in a car.

The young yokels sat beside the wireless,
Listening to the crackling sounds,
As punch after punch was delivered,
Through fifteen dramatic rounds.

Tommy didn't quite make it,
He couldn't muster up the power.
But the young men enthused about the fight,
Through to an early hour.

That young couple thought they had better put a move on,
For they had stayed longer than they ought and now were late.
While another, a carter who lived in Barkers Lane,
Arose from bed to share this day of fate.

He slowly rose and dressed himself,
Descended stairs and made a cup of tea,
While the young couple let their hair blow,
As they sped along in their little MG.

The carter gathered halters from the stable,
Then to the meadow to start another working day.
The engine of the little MG hummed between the hedgerows,
The couple sang as they went happily on their way.

The carter called the horses to him,
But one rushed on past and through the gate.
He vainly ran to shut it,
But alas he was too late.

The horse galloped through the empty yard,
And straight out in the street.
Its mane and tail a flying,
With a clattering of its feet.

That young couple came speeding,
In the early morning light.
And the crash that followed,
Left a horrible mangled sight.

The horse was torn to ribbons,
Creating a bloody fleshy pile,
While the couple and the little MG
Had travelled their last mile.

The boxing fans ran up the street,
Curiosity in their mind.
For they had heard the crash,
And wondered what horrors they would find.

They found blood stains in the gutter,
A tangled mess that was once a car,
And forever a reminder of the night,
That Joe Louis fought Tommy Farr.

THE OLD DRIFT ROAD

The drift roads of old England that scar those rolling downs,
That pass us by so high above our villages and towns.
Created by the feet of men and the hooves of many beast,
To travel from the western hills to the flat lands of the East.

Along those high tracks one could flee, free from marsh and mire,
When they first spied the raiders sail, or the wood smoke from their fire.
Those early ways those nomads could travel at their ease
With the ceiling of the sky above the valley full of trees.

Some travellers stopped and settled where once had all been green,
While others passed by on those tracks to watch the changing scene.
The farmers came and created field systems with their toil,
And plants that had once just grown wild were cultivated in the soil.

The invading Romans in their legions built Cities and new roads,
And waggons and chariots passed along these hills with many, many loads.
Gradually the nomadic life disappeared, people settled in a family band,
Cleared vegetation to create a living from the land.

The animals produced meat and fur, the land its crops bestowed,
But still up high above them ran the old drift road.
Those roads were there before the waggon, but goods travelled on this track,
When horses in long single lines passed with big packs upon their backs.

The Normans with their manors came and the land was once more seized,
And those that tilled and worked the soil were once more far from pleased.
Then the hills became the home for sheep, wool was the product that was sought,
And fairs began to appear where sheep were sold and some were bought.

Those drift roads were busy again as they linked hill and fair,
And a million hooves trod from flocks of sheep that came from everywhere.
Dew ponds were created for deep thirsts to be appeased,
Where shepherd, dog and flock of sheep could once again be pleased.

Then enclosures came that enclosed the field and lane,
And though everywhere there was a ditch and hedge those drift roads still remain,
Now hikers pass with heavy boots and a knapsack for a load,
But I wonder if they realise the history beneath their feet along the old drift road.

COLOURS

Wouldn't the world be dismal with no colours to make it bright,
And everything would merely contrast as daytime does from night.
No sea to be of greens and blues and the colours of its surf,
No sheep to stand out like little dots upon the greenness of the turf.

No Daisies to sprawl in meadows where coloured cows now graze,
No Buttercups beside bubbling brooks where we oftimes choose to laze.
Those hedges besides those rambling lanes would have no flowers there to show,
And the blooms that adorn its banks today would have nowhere else to go.

No Poppies in the harvest field, no scarlet tunics on display,
And with no flowers there would be no scents among the hay.
No butterflies to dance and weave and wear patterns bright and gay
No bumble bee to buzz and hum on a lovely summer day.

No barley to change from green to brown with the coming of the ear,
No Primrose to adorn our banks at the beginning of the year.
There would be no need for daffodils to silently stand and nod,
No hymn of bright and beautiful to sing to our dear God.

The woods would look so solemn, no green leaves to appear,
No carpet of the brightest blue for a short time of the year.
Country cottages would stand so stark, no whitewashed walls, no golden thatch,
No Delphiniums and Hollyhocks in the little garden patch.

The autumn time would lose those coats of many kind,
And the picture of leaves changing from green to brown would be only in the mind.
Birds would have no coloured plumage to attract a willing mate,
So there would be no morning chorus and the day would start a little late.

Children's cheeks would no longer be of rosy pink, no eyes of brown or blue,
No hair of red, blonde or brunette or any other hue.
Animals' coats would be the same, no grey rabbit, no red fox,
No need for flowers to have names, no Marigolds, Pinks or Phlox.

So let us cherish every colour that our eyes behold,
For 'tis they that give us richness, not the silver nor the gold.
Let us each make sure in our little way that this earth will always show,
That each colour that our God bequeathed helps this old World to glow.

WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES

The council houses of old Millfield, create my memories scene,
The road leading up from Busticle to what we all called the Green.
A collection of fourteen houses that surrounded an area of grass,
That was pitted with a thousand foot falls as each tenant would pass.

It had been the site of a village mill before the world went to war,
But after those years nothing could be as 'twas before.
The grass had grown green around the tents lit by an old oil lamp,
For now the mill had disappeared, and prisoners of war made camp.

They left for their homes and houses grew, the canvas disappeared,
And in a land that was fit for heroes, rented homes had now appeared.
These were the homes of the working class, poor people understand,
Who had no hope to own a house, most gained a living from the land.

'Twas here that I spent my young years, in a house so full of love,
Where we could look out to the country field and the downs high up above.
Around the green the privet grew, hedges high and low,
While across the grass there was rutted paths as we all went to and fro.

But here was football in the winter and cricket 'neath the sun,
And an athletic track where no better men had run.
There were marbles rolled across the path, while around the girls would skip,
With hop scotch on the road as well as top and whip.

There was lots of laughter, but it had its fair share of the tears,
Yet 'twas a wonderful old world then as I look back through the years.
The milkman came and ladled from a small churn to a jug,
While later came the pony, a float up the hill to lug.

The baker came with horse and cart, with a loaf too hot to handle,
'Twas in those days when we went up to bed in the company of a candle.
Vegetables in the garden, rabbit hutch, and hens for our daily eggs,
No buses to travel on, mother said that's why our Master gave us legs.

In flickering evenings, snakes and ladders and ludo on the floor.
And those heady days of carol singing and knocking on the door.
Schooldays with our friends and holidays that seemed so long,
And lining up to get the cane when the games we played went wrong.

There were days when all was quiet and a solemn sight was seen,
As the funeral procession carried a familiar face in their last crossing of the green,

Days when the midwife came, a baby in her black bag, they lied,
But it wasn't long before we knew just how that baby had arrived.

Days when everyone was happy, when they gave their daughter as a bride,
One of those very few days when in a car they'd ride.
It sometimes return to that piece of land, no longer is it green,
For the tarmac now stands black and cold where that open space had been.

The houses that had adorned each end, had given way to modern flats,
Now no football pitch, no skipping rope or homemade cricket bats.
Yet when I stand there and close my eyes, I am sure that I can hear,
The laughter from those boys and girls who shared my yesteryear.

THE PICTURES OF THE MIND

It's been summer in this darkened room and I have walked with you again,
The boughs above have filtered the sun as we ambled down the lane.
We rested sitting on the style and we made those promises again,
As we walked among the cups of gold when you wore a daisy chain.

I can see it all so clearly now and feel the velvet of your touch,
The flashing of those lovely eyes and the smile I love so much.
You're one at my side this moment, my heart flies among the birds,
Your presence is captivating and there is music in your words.

And although your hair is silver all my memories are gold,
Going back to young passionate years and the companionship of old.
I look into your lovely old eyes and see memories galore,
Like the waves of the seas of yesteryear rolling up the shore.

I look at those lovely lips of yours and it brings back that youth of mine,
When I would hold you tightly in my arms and they'd taste of the sweetest wine.
I'm glad I have those memories, I'm so proud you wore my name,
It really broke my heart dear when that old reaper came.

It is all so silent now and yet your laughter echoes in my ears,
While any tears we may have shared have been washed away by years.
But the milestones of life remain, those pictures on the wall,
The photographs of little girls and our boys so strong and tall.

But one day soon I'll be there with you when we walk together in the sky,
And look down upon all those memories that happened in those days gone by.
You taught me how to smile dear, you taught me how to laugh,
'Tis many years since you have disappeared to leave just this faded photograph.

MY LOST LOVE OF YESTERYEAR

I love to walk that rolling downland, I love to feel your hand in mine,
To hear those little words you utter as our fingers lovingly entwine.
I love to walk that rolling downland, 'neath those massive skies above,
And to shout up to every cloud dear that I have found the one I love.

I love to walk that springy turf dear and to know that you are by my side,
When we dream of future years dear, when you will be my blushing bride.
But we had seen just sixteen summers, your parents said "Be patient dear and wait",
Yet I know that deep down within my heart dear that tomorrow would be too late.

Then your parents moved away dear, the time at last had come to part,
My whole life was bent and broken, there were tears within my heart.
But each day you sent a letter, the postman soon became my friend,
'Till the words said you'd found another and our love affair must end.

Now when I am on my own beneath those clouds I so clearly see your face
And I wonder where you are today with him that took my place.
And when I walk that rolling downland I have to shed a little tear,
When I think back to those youthful years and that lost love of yesteryear.

GRANNIE LINDFIELD

Grannie was Victorian from her bonnet to her toe,
Her life governed by those disciplines that she had learnt so long ago.
Those lessons learnt at home and school and her young years as a wife,
Were to dictate the path she trod through every year of life.

She had been born in the country, grew up with parents on a farm,
Was taught to wash and cook and clean and present a house so full of charm.
Brothers and sisters were plentiful, but in the late 1880s 'twas a struggle just to eat.
So school days over and off to service was a half a sorrow half a treat.

With uniforms so crisp and clean and with bellies filled with food,
She took her lowly place in life with price and servitude.
Learning the rules of etiquette the correct way to lay a table,
And when no one was watching flirting with the young lad from out the stable.

Their courting days were many, saving pennies from their meagre pay,
Until their hands were entwined together as they walked on their wedding day.
A country cottage was their home, a place of new found joys,
And soon to make their life complete they had two bonny little boys.

Those lessons that she had learnt in life were soon put to the test,
And nothing was good enough unless she gave it of her best.
The front step gleamed, the kitchen range shone in the sombre light,
But that room was a haven of safety in the darkness of the night.

The front room a glimpse into history through the pictures on the wall,
While the Aspidistra on the green beige cloth stood resolute and tall.
Upstairs the great big old bed filled with feathers white as snow,
Was made by her dear mother oh so many years ago.

The years had taught her to scrimp and scrape, not to spend when you could save,
'Twas a motto that she kept 'till she was laid within the confines of her grave.
She was to us grandkids a disciplinarian, but she would never rant and shout,
And believed that whatever you couldn't afford, why then you went without.

She believed that home should be a haven, a place of security and rest,
That we should all be Christians or at least try our very best.
The gas light hissed there in the evenings, the logs spit upon the fire,
She made me go to Sunday School and be a member of the choir.

When Grannie died at ninety three, riches she didn't have any,
And her greatest boast throughout all those years was that she had never owed a penny.

MICHAELMAS

Michaelmas is the beginning and the end, the days of silver and of gold,
When things can have new beginnings and harvest means to gather things of old.
It is the time to bid old farms goodbye and new ones bid hello,
It is the time for threshing gangs to start to cause the golden grain to flow.

'Twas time for teams to plod and plough, for stubble to be opened by the furrow,
And time for rabbits to go to ground in the safety of their burrow.
'Twould soon be time to let rams free to set another lambing time in motion,
And for flocks of migrating birds to gather before setting off across the ocean.

Soon trees would start to shed their cloak, leaves changing through all the shades to brown,
And the nuts of another harvest would tumble to the ground.
Sunsets would cover up the sky as night time began to fall,
And silent acres echoed the sound of the lonely Owl's call.

Beaters would now arrive treading the brush and gorse, rising Partridge and Pheasant in the air,
When the blasting of a dozen sporting guns rose in the quiet autumn air.
Soon Foxhounds would gallop the land while Beagles trod the grass,
And poachers hid with ferrets to watch gamekeepers pass.

The barns would ring with the sound of harvest home a farmer's thanks with food and beer,
And the church would give thanks for the harvest at this time of the year,
Farmworkers' holidays now took place visiting ploughing match or old farm sale,
Or a trip to town with the hard earned cash for a new suit and pint of ale.

Soon a new year would begin those same acres they would plod,
And next year's harvest would be grown with the help of God.
And so when Michaelmas comes again it is difficult to say,
Is it like dusk at the very end or dawn at the beginning of the day?

MY CATHEDRAL

Some Cathedrals are built of brick
Some old are built of stone
But the one I cherish is not built at all
And is my very own.

'Tis created high my Cathedral
Where one can view the hillside and the vale
Where one can share in God's creations
In the sunshine or in gale.

One can feel the wonder of his glory
Hear the trees sing hymns with the chorus of the birds
And as the corn fields rustle
Hear the wisdom of his words.

One can see the magic of life's cycle
As insects hatch and buzz and fly
And pictures painted with soft white clouds
Floating high up in the sky.

Hear the beautiful song of the Nightingale
Its notes caressed by summer air
As the smells of the most precious scents
Drift from everywhere.

No hassocks here to rest the knees
But downland turf so fine
No organ or no bell to toll

No bread or taste of vine.

'Tis up here midst all this beauty
One needs no sermon or no prayer
For the presence of our Master
Can be found everywhere.

From the great majestic Beech trees
Clothed in the finest leaves of green
To the tiniest of daisies
In each petal his gentleness is seen.

To hear the sweet notes of the Blackbird
To lowly croaks of frogs beside the pond
Where eyes follow great floating clouds
To lands so far beyond.

To see the cows a grazing
And watch sheep safely in their fold
Old barns that were the flints of fields
And sunsets made of gold.

Oh how I love this open air
And the wide expanse of sky
That makes the mind so much at peace
And gives pleasure to the eye.

In my Cathedral there's no alter

But valleys, hills and banks

And shady nooks 'neath billowing trees

Where one can kneel and silently give thanks.

MANGEL HOEING

The field was one of twenty acres,
Green shoots patterned it in rows,
All the farmhands congregated in it,
In their hands they held their hoes.

'Twas the time to do some piece work,
Bent backs were offered to the sun,
Coats and bags lay in the shaded hedge,
Mangel singling had begun.

Their cants had been decided,
The foreman had marked their row,
The surplus plants must be chopped out,
To allow the selected ones to grow.

The hands clasped loosely the handle,
The feet trod sideways o'er the field.
This would be the initial task,
To create November's yield.

The hoers pulled and pushed their blade,
Plants wilted beneath the June sun's rays,
And the brows perspired of those shirtsleeved men,
'Twas summer's warmest days.

Thirsty bodies craved their drink and food,
From the hedge came those bottles of cold teas,
While wrapped in spotted kerchief,
Came those favourite hunks of bread and cheese.

Then when at last the sun was sinking,
After through a half acre blades were drawn,
'Twas time to bid the field goodbye,
Until once again 'twas lit by dawn.

Their bodies ached as they trod the lane,
With joy the little cottage came in sight,
And they knew there was no need of a lullaby,
To make them sleep tonight.

They knew that they had earned their pennies,
Which would fill long winters need,

With new clothing and strong footwear,
And that young family would feed.

So although the day was long and lonely,
With the work repetitive and hard,
The effort that they spent that day,
Would help to keep the winter cattle in the yard.

Much though must be given in summer,
To those long weary winter days,
When store cattle were fed the roots and grain,
Racks filled with summer's hay.

That's why those men must labour,
Why brows must drip whilst backs are bent,
And the monies from their labours,
Must be very wisely spent.

THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH

He sat within that public house,
All around him there was a young and happy bunch,
Who eagerly told the dashing waitress, "We will have a ploughman's lunch".

He smiled for many times he'd enjoyed that meal,
With his Father and Grandad at his side,
But then 'twas not a Public House but hedge
Beneath an Elm with branches high and wide.

The older men took out their kerchief and their knife,
Then fitted in one hand with simple ease,
A great big hunk of crusty bread,
An onion and a great big wedge of cheese.

They took a cut with their trusty knife,
Bread, cheese and onion was what they called their bate,
There was no pickle, no lettuce leaf,
Nor no serviette or plate.

As he had sat beside his Father and watched him carve his bread,
He hung on as though 'twas silver to every word he said,
For the old man couldn't last forever, life passes as a shower of rain,
And words of wisdom spoken are meant to be passed on again.

Those great old Elms stood there before him,
A green canopy that seemed to almost reach the sky
Had appeared the same when Dad was a boy,
And he thought would look the same until he'd die.

Now he sat within this Public House,
Many years had passed him by,
He'd seen his children and theirs be born,
And the old folk he'd seen die.

He'd seen the farm devoured by bricks,
And as he gazed around the present bunch,
He smiled as they ordered their midday meal,
How could they possibly know, how to eat a ploughman's lunch.

There were no meadows now with grass and trees of green,
The Public House in which they sat covered the ground where they had been,
No loveable old characters, in corduroys coloured chocolate brown,

But young me in suits and ties who worked around the town.

The sight had jogged his memory to times when 'twas a joy,
To talk to the older men he knew when he was just a boy.
These young men would love it too this happy laughing bunch,
If they could have shared with those old men a proper ploughman's lunch.

OUR INHERITANCE

Agriculture is the trade that ties man to the land,
It is so close to nature that it helps him to understand,
That nothing can be free in life it takes a little toil,
But God created everything so that the answer is in the soil.

So it was all those years ago he had learnt to keep alive,
And to maintain a bounty of plant and fruit he would forever strive.
He learnt to use the strength of God's animals always at his side,
And the earth he needed in those early days he learnt to call a Hide.

He collected with his fellow man to help the soil create its yield,
Historians call this today, farming the open field.
They cleared the land and ploughed each strip for the corn they'd raise,
And when harvest was all over collective animals would graze.

They worked and sweat upon that land each and every day,
Until progress with its enclosures took their freedom all away.
Now they had a master and to him they'd have to pledge,
For a crust and a cottage they'd labour twixt his ditch and hedge.

They laboured now over a hundred years, attitudes would harden,
And as great local towns grew, land was changed to Market Garden.
With empty bellies inadequate clothes they worked in frost and rains,
While profits were almost doubled with the coming of the trains.

The special crops would grow and trains they would pass,
As acres that had once grown corn were covered up with glass.
There were tomatoes, peaches, nectarine and lettuce by the score,
City dwellers consumed them and clamoured out for more.

The valleys that had supplied the wild mushroom in the early morn,
Were to witness the building of new sheds a new industry was born.
Then the call for this product slackened, the huts fell into disrepair,
And the nostrils smelt the scent of death hanging in the air.

The stricken site was cleared away, houses and shops soon grew,
Many people came to live and each face one saw was new.
The valleys of the hillside were filled with the rubbish they threw away,
While the rolling hills we loved to walk became a modern motorway.

Today we are never hungry, we never shiver from the cold,
We have all the medicines we want to help us grow quite old.

We have a modern heated house and seldom work out in the rain,
Television to fill our time and glasses to help us see again.

We travel fast to different places between high banks beside the road,
While at our side great big juggernauts pass with their massive loads.
Yet there is something missing that appears our right from birth,
It is the knowledge of how things grow within our inheritance, "The Earth".

SLEEPING

I had spent the night sleeping on an old hayrick
High up where the hills meet the sky
I closed my eyes as the day departed with dusk
And dawn told me the night had passed me by.

I opened my eyes to the blue skies high above
As I lay on my pillow and mattress of hay
And watched as that great artist was busy again
With a mass of colour he created the day.

That night the stars had brightened my room
The windows barred their way
And I felt I was the only person on earth
That witnessed the comings of the day.

I saw the darkness depart and shapes start to appear
Of the fields, the hedges and trees
And my nose filled with smells that filled me with joy
As flowers opened and awaited the bees.

I enjoyed every note of a great chorus
As birds gave thanks with their morning prayer
And saw dew kissing the leaves of each hedgerow
Until a million jewels sparkled there.

Those birds had been my alarm clock
As a thousand voices whistled a tune
And I thought Heaven couldn't be lovelier
Than a really wonderful morning in June.

Then the air was filled with a voice so proud
As the Cuckoo called out its name
And my eyes caught the sight of the fox cubs
Outside their earth playing a game.

The rabbit breakfasts quite close to its burrow
Enemies galore, but he must take a chance
To eat the sweet tastes of the morning
With a frequent furtive glance.

The hare leaps by this morning scene
His destination he'll not declare

For his life is spent always on the move
His home is everywhere.

The butterfly starts his day quite early
Full of hope with little strife
For he has so many things to do today
And his is a very fleeting life.

The farmyard below awakens
Cockerels call while cattle low
And as all of day awakens
The cacophony of noises grow.

I chew a stalk from within the haystack
My sense of taste joins my sense of smell
Now all my senses are awake
I'm at peace with the world all is well

So with all I see, touch, feel and taste
The smells around, I feel divine
I have no fortunes in the bank
But at this moment the world is mine.

I BELIEVE

I believe that skies should not be poisoned.
I believe that waters should be pure and clean.
I believe that efforts of creation,
Should be maintained pleasant and green.

I believe that animals should be protected.
I believe of their freedom on land and sea.
I believe it matters not whether a mammoth whale,
Or a busy bumbling bumblebee.

I believe birds should fly free from shot,
I believe animals should prance free from snare.
I believe the insects God created,
Should hop and jump and fill the air.

I believe that flowers should be left to blossom.
I believe their colours enhance our days.
I believe their scents were sent from heaven,
And should always fill our country ways.

I believe there's beauty in our morning sunrise.
I believe that it's reflected at the end of day,
I believe the skies are full of pictures,
As great white clouds float on their way.

I believe that the dew's a jewel.
I believe it lovely as it adorns grass and tree.
I believe I'm lucky to behold such beauty,
With eyes that are such a gift to me.

I believe the suns a lover as it kisses your skin.
I believe the summer wind a mother as it cools your brow.
I believe the rain was sent to please us,
And the time to live is here and now.

I believe that those with sight should help the blind.
I believe those with hearing should be the deaf man's ears.
I believe those with youth and agility,
Should help those who have seen so many years.

I believe that those with food should help the starving.
I believe that those with riches should help the poor.

I believe that those who live in style and comfort,
Should knock upon the poor man's door.

I believe that wars are cruel and stupid.
I believe to kill and maim are evil deeds.
I believe the colour of the skin is unimportant,
But that man should be free to pray in many creeds.

I believe that I was with five senses gifted.
I believe they were given to appreciate my land.
I believe to those I was granted reason,
And it is only now I'm old that I truly understand.

GOLDEN MEMORIES

The front room was a quiet place
Where seldom would we tread
'Twas where the Aspidistra grew and
Walls covered with aunts and uncles who were dead.

The kitchen were we ate our meals and
Spent the day until was late
Where shadows were broadcast on the walls
From the gleaming leaded grate.

Those days out with Gran at Worthing all
Spruced up for these trips
To buy some brand new clothes and a
Restaurant for fish and chips.

I stayed with Gran so many times
Treading above the stair rods bright
To climb and lie within a great
Big feather bed where I would spend the night.

Mondays was her washing day among
The steam she worked so hard
With the blue in the water she scrub and
Rinse, then to the old mangle in the yard.

I knelt many times at Grannie's feet
The paper on her knee.
My head was sore with the small tooth
Comb, but my scalp was clean and free.

The brass glistened on her bed post
She had reached the age of ninety three,
And that link with that Victorian age
Was taken away from me.

If there is one thing she'd like remembered
One thing among the many
Was that she had struggled through all those
Years and had never owed a penny.

I quite often think of my old Gran
And cast eyes high above

To thank her for a thousand things
But most of all her love.