

Poetical Sketches

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1981 - 2008

Michael Graeme

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by

Michael Graeme

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Poetical Sketches

For Helen

Michael Graeme

Introduction

This collection of poems consists of work spanning a period commencing in 1981. It is not a static work and it will be added to periodically, then reissued under the same broad title as more poems are written.

The works are arranged in chronological order and include a date, along with the place where the poem was either conceived or substantially written, and does not therefore necessarily indicate my place of residence at the time.

These sketches chart significant moments in my life and also reflect my personal pre-occupations. Earlier poems are driven by loneliness and a need to connect, to make way in the world and also deal with a nascent fascination for all things metaphysical.

A firmer rooting came through my marriage in 1988, and the birth of my children all of which contributed to firmer sense of human meaning and direction. The search for connection, however, remains the common factor throughout all the decades of my life, one explored at first hand, then given voice either through fiction or verse. Fiction provides for a longer process of consideration and gestation - the novels in particular consisting of many years of rumination. By contrast, poetry has a lighter touch, and attempts to capture life in minute detail, seeing reflections of the meaning of life in the patterns of the every day.

Michael Graeme

The Pale Blue Car

I pass her home and hope to catch her eye,
But that pale blue car's parked outside.
She's in the arms another tonight,
So I don't think she'll notice me.

I see her face most every night,
In dreams of peace and loving joy,
That end in cold daylight and bitter tears,
Because I know she doesn't notice me.

I see her eyes, her auburn curls,
A dress of silk, her lips, her curves,
Of these things I dream and one day hope to touch.
If only she would notice me.

Sometimes I stray to be alone,
To think my thoughts and conjure up,
Her ghostly image by my side, so we can talk,
Of days gone by and love so pure.

But then I stumble on that pale blue car.
With occupants as one within.
I bow my head and hurry by,
In case that she should notice me.

Why should I love one who doesn't care?
Someone who never sees my saddened glances.
Someone who doesn't know my heart.
Someone who'll never notice me.

At times I'll see her on her own,
She'll smile, we'll pass and say hello,
But then her voice cuts through like knives,
And makes me want to run and hide.

Cont...

Michael Graeme

Whenever I see the pale blue car,
I wish the arms of another were my own.
Just to tenderly touch one soft auburn curl.
Would surpass all my dreams of this one fair girl.

.....

Coppull 1981

A Winter's Day

A Winter's day, a lonely heart,
Despair and utter solitude,
And then a light, a ray of hope,
A simple girl with pleasing looks.

A smile, a talk, a heart that sings,
With all the joy that loving brings.
A timid question, quickly put,
A startled look, an answer - "Yes".

A quiet pub, with nervous talk,
And curves that tease a timid heart.
Then peace awhile as passion stirs.
Desire that's met with open arms,
Soft flesh and trusting nakedness.

A kind of joy you can't destroy.
Shared memories, foundations built,
With talk of rings and wedding days.

Then doubt, a temporary split.
As one again but no, too late.
Damage done, foundations torn,
Bitterness and one last "Goodbye".

A Winter's day, a lonely heart,
Despair and utter solitude.

.....

Coppull
May 1987

The Old Man of Coniston

Old man of Coniston,
Standing without rest,
While dynamite and Volvo-truck,
Take green slate from your breast.

You stood your ground,
You turned me round that stormy autumn day.
Through howling wind and driving rain,
“Go back,” I heard you say.

But come the spring,
You'd led me through,
Goat's Water's silent bowl.
And on your crown,
You'd sat me down,
With all laid out below.

My spirit soared like I'd undone,
The shackles of my youth,
And through the murky darkness,
I glimpsed the light of truth.
That's when, Old Man of Coniston,
You sent me on my way,
Through many restless wanderings.
To recreate that day.

Your Lakeland kin and Yorkshire's Dales,
And Scotland's noble Bens,
All tried in vain to be the same,
As you were for me then.
That's why Old Man of Coniston,
Whenever I pass by,
I feel your lure, I hear your call,
And I visit you sometimes.

.....

Coppull
Summer 1988

From This Old Cottage Window

From this old cottage window,
A tall tree I can see,
And beyond it in the distance,
A mountain calls to me.

It called to me last night as well,
In the evening afterglow.
It held me with its darkening form,
And would not let me go.

It pressed against the window pane,
As I lay in my bed.
In hushed sweet tones it spoke to me,
Come up and see it said.

For would it not be very fine,
To merge into my folds,
And climb into this rocky seat,
With all laid out below.

"Oh yes it would be very fine,"
I say and gaze in vain.
"But now all your rugged beauty,
Can only cause me pain."

No mountain, I will not climb you,
No matter how you try.
This weekend's for my lover.
To her I give my time.

For she is worthier than you.
She keeps me safe and warm.
But you, you'd threaten danger,
And try to do me harm.

Cont.....

Michael Graeme

But danger makes the pulse beat race,
At least it's so with me.
As worldly things are cast aside,
It sets my spirit free.

How can my lover understand,
Though she's to bear my name?
I sometimes need to walk alone,
To find myself again.

But mountain, you do not fool me,
Though to my heart you're dear,
For all your Alpine beauty,
Up there you're sweat and fear.

For you are made of rock and scare,
Piled high to make you whole.
And from this old cottage window,
You're a mirror for my soul.

.....

Dolwyddellan - N. Wales

May 1989

For Helen

You were the one I did not chase,
Nor dreamed that I would find.
Our paths were too remote to cross.
I truly entered blind.
The love we share and treasure now,
Was not by us contrived.
A greater hand looks after us,
Our meeting was designed.
Though our courtship days are over,
A closer life's begun,
And love can but grow stronger now,
Our futures are as one.
So now that we are on our own,
And we go on our way,
I pride myself in you, my wife,
On this our wedding day.

.....

Parbold

July 1989

Michael Graeme

The Singing Loch

At last I hear you Singing Loch,
Sing out your song I pray,
And gather up the pilgrim,
Who honours you this day.

You are the ageless anchorage,
You are the universe,
And if you die then so do I,
And fools shall have the earth.

They say they own you Singing Loch,
But how can that be so?
For though they see you shining,
Your song they'll never know.

Indeed they'd sooner pawn their souls,
To drain your waters dry,
And sell them off as Angel's tears,
For people who can't cry.

So sing to me of lands set free,
Where all mankind may range
And death stalks not your children,
To pay the landlord's wage.

.....

Parbold
July 1990

Spirits

A host of spirits stalk this place,
Their voices draw me so,
Towards these hills,
These misty moors,
These trackless, timeless folds.

I long to see that hidden face,
The face that's seen me pass,
Through childhood games,
And teenage pain,
To happiness at last.

I crave the wisdom of its age,
So I can see what's true,
And spurn all dreams of foolish pride,
Of wealth, of flesh, of youth.
I search a moody, windswept stage,
To find a shapeless door,
That bars all progress to my thoughts,
The way my thoughts should go.

Or is there nothing here for real?
Just something in my head.
So what I seek is in my mind;
This place is truly dead!
And all these spirits that I feel,
Are only parts of me,
Parts that here, in quietude,
Are finally set free.

.....

Parbold
July 1990

Hawkshead

I hear the gentle sound of rain,
So soft, so fine, against the pane,
And I am in Hawkshead once more,
Remembering the time before,
When you and I first passed this way,
One shy and clumsy Autumn day.
First heartfelt kiss, first tender word,
In growing shades of dusk I heard.
A walk, a talk, from shackles free,
Snug from the world, just you and me.
It seems so long ago and yet,
That moment I shall not forget.
For here it was that I first knew,
Without a doubt, that I loved you.

.....

Hawkshead
Autumn 1990

Ode to the Mountain Biker

Oh Mountain Biker riding tall,
On your pastel shaded bike,
Why don't you come and tell us all,
Where next you're going to strike?

You look so cool in your shiny tights,
And your Pea-Pod hat as well,
With designer specs to shad the light.
As you race across the fell.

I know that you're a tough high flier,
When you churn the paths to slime,
With knobbly little rubber tyres,
As you bounce and scrape and climb.

The way you rattle down the hills,
With your bum stuck in the air,
Gives ramblers such a smashing thrill,
We wonder how you dare.

And when we scatter from your path,
As you boldly spare the brake,
We hope you'll give us all a laugh,
And fall into the lake.

.....

Parbold
October 1990

The Colourful Hill Climber

How do you like my walking gear?
I think you'll find none finer.
For I'm a trendy mountaineer,
A colourful hill climber.

My jacket is the very best,
In subtle shades of blue.
It's what they'll wear on Everest,
In nineteen ninety two.

My boots will last me a lifetime,
And they are the snuggest fit.
I love the way the leather shines,
But they don't half rub a bit.

My compass is the latest make.
You point it at the sky.
A what's-it points which way to take.
But I don't know how, or why.

I really like this walking hype,
All this strolling up and down.
I look a proper hero type,
When I'm posing around town.

But don't you think that it's a pain,
To go and climb a hill?
In fact, it seems a pointless game,

And besides

Won't it be terribly draughty up there?

.....

Parbold
November 1990

The Muddy Moorland Way

I'll go the muddy moorland way,
And into those dark hills I'll stray.
With trusty pack upon my back,
I'll etch my boot-prints up that track,
Until at last somewhere on high,
I find a cleaner, broader sky.
And then with flask of tea in hand,
I'll take a stock of who I am;
Of what I've done and where I've been,
And ask if life is all it seems.
I'll go the muddy moorland way,
And though it takes the whole long day,
I shall return a stronger man,
Than when my journey first began.

.....

Parbold
February 1990

My Old Room

My old room looks so sad and empty now.
The Paper on the walls is scratched and worn,
And yet to me, it's really just the same somehow,
The same as on the day that I was born.

The furniture and colours have all changed, I know.
But still familiar memories I can find.
Memories of events that were so long ago.
Like postcards from the byways of my mind.

These four walls have been my study and my workshop.
And through this window, the broody hills have called.
While I've spent many fruitless hours at my desktop.
Or fingered chords of love on my guitar.

Here my innocence was moulded into manhood,
And from my childhood toys I slowly grew apart.
Imagination built my hasty towers of romance,
Which crumbled in the storm of broken hearts.

Many diaries once sat upon those bookshelves.
In them, catalogues of joy and pain I wrote,
Images and feelings that my thoughts once held,
A restless sea of words on which to float.

All the girls that I have loved come back to haunt me.
It was here that I would come to hide the pain,
When the game was lost and I was tired and lonely,
And all the world was cold and cruel and grey.

But now the golden fruits of life at last I've tasted,
And of all that's gone before, I've no regrets.
All the years I've worn in here I think weren't wasted.
And this scrapbook of my life I shan't forget.

.....
Parbold
February 1991

The Canal Bank

Dirt inland waterway,
Your silent waters weep,
While fishermen your dark depths play,
For little fish to keep.

Rats along the reedy banks,
Rats down little holes.
An old boat rotting where it sank,
With nowhere else to go.

Buckets floating upside down,
Condoms round the edge,
Poor old pussy long since drowned,
And beer cans in the hedge.

There's dog-dirt on the towpath,
Mind where you put your feet.
Pastoral wonder - that's a laugh.
It's cleaner on the streets.

.....

Parbold
March 1991

Michael Graeme

We Don't Cut Metal

We don't cut metal any more,
The lathes are dead.
Their silenced roar,
Resounds throughout the empty shed,
As men who once wore overalls,
Now sit at desks and scratch their heads,
At charts upon the walls.

But how can money make itself?
Somewhere the buck must fall.
It's lathes that generate the wealth,
Not charts upon the wall.
And all your clever acronyms,
And managerial play,
Are games that you shall never win,
Without hands to mould the clay.

.....

Parbold
April 1991

This Precious Land

I see your standards flying,
Across this precious land,
And the redbrick legions lying,
Beneath your guiding hand.

Your spies are out - I see them.
With their bright theodolite,
To which we're all beholden,
For tomorrow's building site.

No more the silent wild-wood.
No more the ferny glen.
All gone, all hid beneath death's hood,
Ne'er to be seen again.

.....

Parbold
June 1991

The Trespassers

Come leave your jobs behind today,
Your bills and money cares,
And walk the quiet country way,
To breathe some cleaner air.

But heed my sign for trespassing,
And heed my wire's sharp thorns,
And if you must go rambling,
Beware my big bull's horns.

Not through my farm - it's private!
My leafy lane is too,
That path's closed 'cos I've locked my gate,
There's no way you'll get through.

Don't wander in my hills today -
The game season, you know!
There's better men than you at play,
And you've no right to go.

You've got no land to call your own,
Beyond your garden gate.
What makes you think that you can roam,
At will on my estate?

So take the proper public road,
Like you're supposed to do.
There's better paths to tread, I know.
But it's good enough for you.

.....

Parbold
September 1991

Businessman

What are you doing business man,
So far away from home,
With trouser legs all wrinkled,
As you sit there on your own?

Customers in Newcastle?
Board meeting in Slough?
Then four hours traffic hotel bound.
What are you doing now?

Fish and chips at Corley,
On the M6 motorway,
And a quick read of your paper,
At the ending of the day?

And is your paper comforting?
Somewhere to hide your eyes?
To keep your thoughts from straying,
From that corporate disguise?

Or are you really unconcerned,
And merely passing through,
Oblivious to the rest of us,
Who barely notice you?

Your wife, your kids, forgotten,
In some bland suburban place,
Her parting kisses fading fast,
Upon your weary face.

A 'phone call from the hotel,
On the ten pence slot machine.
"Hi Hun. I'll see you Friday."
"Keep it hot - know what I mean?"

Cont.....

Michael Graeme

Or is it not like that at all?
No solace from the roar?
Just passion grabbed like fast-food,
With a wolf outside the door?

Meanwhile you sit there don't you?
Indigestion on the run,
A headache from the red tail lights,
And the week barely begun.

Still four hours traffic hotel bound.
A nightmare in the rain.
With just an Aspirin in your pocket,
To soak away the pain.

.....

Parbold
October 1992

Warrington, March 20th 1993

I heard it on the radio.
Another bomb it said.
There are people lying bleeding,
And children lying dead.

But how can that be so, I thought,
As I gunned the car for home.
It's barely fifty miles away.
How could I not have known?

How could I not have felt that pain,
And heard those anguished cries,
While I took my pleasure walking,
Under stormy Lakeland skies?

Or was Helvellyn angry,
With its rain and sleet and snow?
Was its wild wind set a roaring,
For a world they've ceased to know?

The motorway was gloomy,
At the fading of the light,
And the wagons slipped behind me,
As I drove into the night.

And as I chased the static round,
Again the radio spoke.
Someone had lost their legs, it said,
And all was black with smoke.

But innocence is no excuse.
Was it ever in the past?
Explosives in a rubbish bin.
No warning of the blast!

Cont.....

Michael Graeme

A tanker truck roared past me,
And gruffly forged its way.
He had business to attend to,
Not a moment to delay.

Perhaps he hadn't heard yet.
For I don't see how he could,
With his foot down on the throttle,
And his eyes fixed on the road.

But if he had why should he care?
It happens all the time!
How can he weep for every soul,
To be cut down in its prime?

My junction was ahead of me,
So I eased out from the lane,
And came up to the roundabout,
Shuddering with pain.

For sadness is a greetings card,
With hearts and crosses red,
And a mother weeping emptiness,
The sender lying dead.

I can't forget you Warrington.
Your grief was felt by me,
This Saturday March the twentieth,
Nineteen Ninety Three.

.....

Parbold
March 1993

Weary

I don't think I can work today.
My stomach's weary of the fray,
The cut, the thrust, the push and shove.
My heart is worn, I've had enough!

How can they rush about like mice?
How soon before they pay the price?
The days, the nights, the miles, the stress,
The meeting rooms, the crazy mess.

Dark suits swirl like dancers lace,
A mad quickstepping paper chase.
The forms, the charts, the plans, the waste,
Of sixteen years in this grey place.

A dreamlike world of deep worn grooves,
Where all is haste, yet nothing moves.
No love, no joy, no care, no praise,
Just fleeting, fruitless, mixed up days.

I'm tired, I know, a good night's sleep,
Will set me back upon my feet.
But were it not for bills to pay,
I'd pack it in, I'd leave today!

.....

Parbold

March 1993

Michael Graeme

Northbound

Northbound,
In the morning,
In the sleepy yellow light.
Suburbia slips behind me,
Out of mind and out of sight.
Gently on the throttle,
Gently on the wheel,
Engine hum,
Run car - run.
To paradise lets steal!

Northbound,
Into Summer,
Into all that's calm and clear.
Without fools to stir up chaos,
Nor to mock things I hold dear.
Bathe me in your beauty,
Bathe me in your peace.
Cool my lust,
Quench my thirst,
In paradise let's feast!

Northbound,
Into green hills,
Where nobody knows my name.
Where I can take my ease and roam,
Till the ending of the day.
Gold dust on the water,
Gold dust through the trees.
Gentle mist,
Siren's kiss,
My passions for to please.

Cont...

Poetical Sketches

Northbound,
Won't be long now,
I can feel her drawing close,
My faithful uncomplaining love,
For who's love I yearn the most.
Long have I been aching.
Long I've borne this pain.
Don't despair,
Almost there,
She'll make me whole again.

.....

Scorton
August 1993

Michael Graeme

Southbound

Southbound,
Into trouble,
With my briefcase by my side.
Dirty wagons belching blue smoke,
And a long, long way to drive.
Foot hard on the throttle,
Body tired and stiff,
Frantic pace,
Race car - race.
Let's get this over with.

Southbound,
To a meeting,
Then a shallow seminar,
With shallow men in business suits,
Who've forgotten who they are.
Coffee from a strange cup,
Coffee on the run,
Hotel bed,
Aching head,
And non-stop traffic hum.

Southbound,
To a city,
In a solid traffic stream,
With service stations flashing by,
Like faces in a dream.
Trapped behind a caravan,
No way to get through.
Pouring rain,
Blinding spray,
As tail lights pierce the gloom.

Cont...

Poetical Sketches

Southbound,
Like the sign says,
Far away from all I love.
How I envy all those people,
Heading back the way I've come.
Foot hard on the throttle,
Foot down to the floor,
Engine hum,
Run car - run:
Let's get this over with!

.....

Scorton
August 1993

Michael Graeme

The Dark House

Dark days in the summer sun,
With a dark house leaning over me.
I smell its breath,
Stale,
Like old bread.

There is no peace here,
Only dust and dirt,
And insects,
Like the darting silver fish,
Who feel the empty air,
With their fingers as they pass.
And worms,
Who suck their silent way,
Through the beams above my head.
And brown stag-headed beetles,
In my underwear.

These old rooms refuse to live,
Though I've sweated hours with tiles,
And warm paper.
But my fresh patterns fade,
Like flowers in a dry vase.
There is no spirit,
To sustain them.

It sits atop this grassy bank,
A pile of red and yellow brick,
And paint-peeled wood.
Every crevice a haven,
For the web-mad spiders,
Who spin and feast,
Upon neglect.

Cont.....

Poetical Sketches

The conifers look on.
An audience of shaggy, fat old men.
Blank faces in the garden.
Silent witness to the shin high grass,
And the nettle,
And the gaudy cellophane.

Slow - so slow,
Each room receives its gift,
Of fragile breath,
And the shadow of a pulse begins to beat,
Through long forgotten veins,
Still sluggish with the fat,
Of endless,
endless sleep.

.....

Scorton
October 1993

Michael Graeme

The Age Old Spirit

Too soon with darkness does the old year die,
As winter's hand lays still the sorry earth,
And summer songs on dusty shelves then lie,
Lamenting long lost days of former worth.

But still an age-old spirit lingers on,
In the glad hearts of those who dare to dream,
Of the dancing tunes of the flute and drum,
And of the sparkling bright-eyed holly's gleam.
Come spirit shine your lantern light around,
And lift our infant faces to the skies.

No more shall souls in shadows drown,
Nor smoke of evil prick our tearful eyes.
Then bless us all with hope this Christmas Day.
That Faith and love, at last shall lead the way.

.....

Scorton

December 1993

Awareness

I am aware - but why?
What difference can it make,
That I should value more the sunset,
Than the urge to procreate?
Or that I should wonder,
At the patterns in a leaf,
When it makes no jot of difference,
To the way it tastes to eat.

But the Blind Watchmaker,
Says we're only here by chance,
Just a blip of inconsistency,
In the Universal dance.
So what's use of love then?
And why did we learn to sing?
If it's all to end in vacuum,
What's the use of anything?

.....

Scorton

December 1993

Tickets to a dance

Once more we gather in the long room,
As the big man in his dark suit,
Presses to the fore.
He raises his hands as if to bless,
And calls us all to heel.

We listen,
While he plays the corporate tune.
Our hearts sink.
Three hundred and thirty jobs, he says.
No names yet - that's the law!
First we have the prelude,
Then the storm.

So we wait for weeks,
Trapped in shifting sands,
Of lethargy and doubt.
While more dark suits gather,
Behind closed doors,
To calculate our worth.
They score us for our attitude,
And usefulness,...

We see their heads through the window,
But we cannot hear them,
Nor any real sound,
But the ratcheting of rumour,
As they load the roulette gun.

Then comes the morning,
When we line up,
And take our turn to sit,
Before the big man's desk,
For him to aim the gun...

Cont.....

Poetical Sketches

Six times now I've faced him,
And survived.
Six times the gun was levelled.
"Click"!
Six times "click"!

I'm calm now as I wait,
Strangely calm,
As if I really do not care.
I watch the faces of my colleagues,
As they come out.
Some smile - tight faced,
The lucky ones.

There's some relief.
Ah yes, there's Ron - he's safe,
And Mike and Dave,...

But wait - yes there's one now,
I see the explosion in his eyes.
And the burns upon his face.
I've worked with him for fifteen years,
Laughed at his jokes,
Listened to his holiday tales,
But I let him go.

He's just a shadow now,
His mind fixed on another life,
Beyond these walls,
And though he's with us,
And we feel his pain,
He does not exist.
And ninety days from now,
His name will join the long role-call,
Of people who don't work here any more.

Scorton

January 1994

First Love

Summer days and the fresh-cut scent of grass,
Turn back the fast accelerating years,
As memories of hotbed days long past,
Fill up the grooves of first-love's acid tears.
Then images too stark, too real for words,
Return like it was only yesterday,
I gazed upon her fifth-form schoolgirl curves,
And slowly fantasised my youth away.
Down sun-bright corridors I'd watch her breeze,
With books and folders held against her breast,
Whilst I, that fateful moment tried to seize,
With fate's sharp knife plunged squarely in my chest.
Those moments, all so futile and so vain.
Those eyes so blind, she never saw my pain.

.....
Scorton
April 1994

Our Forbidden Ways

Our moorland way lies undisturbed,
The waters of our brook unheard,
And bluebells in our woodland deep,
All bow their heads alone and weep.

Our lakeside path, our forest ride,
Our way down by the riverside,
And all those sylvan haunts we've known,
Forbidden now for us to roam.

The curlew's plaintive, piping cry,
The rapture of the lark on high,
And every beat of nature's heart,
Are secrets kept while we're apart.

So let it be that when at last,
This plague upon our land has passed,
We'll walk again God's verdant ways,
And cherish all that He displays.

*Scorton
September 2001*

On Spitler's Edge

I was crossing Spitler's Edge,
With the sun touching the sea,
When a stranger on a dark horse,
From the distance came to me.

So I took myself aside a-ways,
To let the traveller pass,
And leaning on my crook I paused,
Amid a sea of grass.

From there I watched the sky ablaze,
Above a darkening land,
Until I felt a chill and spied,
The stranger close at hand.

He stood upon the hillside,
While his horse about him grazed,
And with his eyes cast westwards,
On that same sunset he gazed.

He wore a cloak of coarsest wool,
Around his shoulder's broad,
And, across his back was slung,
I swear, a mighty sword.

But I did not fear the stranger,
When at length his gaze met mine,
For I knew we shared that hillside,
Across a gulf of time.

Cont.....

Poetical Sketches

I nodded my slow greeting,
And he duly did the same,
Then he climbed upon his patient steed,
And ambled off again.

But turning back he caught my eye,
Then slightly cocked his head,
And smiled to me a kindly smile:
“Fare thee well, pilgrim...” he said.

.....
Scorton
April 2002

Michael Graeme

Winding Down
(From we don't cut metal)

We don't cut metal any more,
The lathes have gone,
Their silenced roar,
Resounds throughout the empty shed,
Where once the hands and minds of men,
From cold cast iron and brass's gleam,
Built us a world of heat and steam.
As expertly they turned away,
And engineered to perfect form,
Geometry of science born.
A skill, a time, a world laid waste,
Amid the echoes of this place,
The hands and hearts and minds all gone,
A time wound down,
A world moved on.

.....

Scorton
October 2002

Changing, but slowly.

What other feet have waked these wastes,
These long and lonely miles?
What other limbs have sought this cairn,
To rest and gaze a while?

What other eyes like mine have watched,
Although in ages past,
These curving waves of restless wind,
Stroke these russet plains of grass?

What other pilgrim's hearts have felt,
In the dusky twilight's fall,
An echo of infinity,
In the curlew's lonely call.

For it's here things change but slowly,
And everything we see,
Holds the certainty of all that's passed,
And all that's going to be.

.....

Anglezarke
April 2003

Michael Graeme

The Bungalow

There's little left but ruins now,
Of glory days gone by,
And images in sepia,
Of gardens in the sky.

Paved walkways and pagodas,
And a house upon a hill,
A place to gather up one's thoughts,
And measure out one's fill,

Of dreams and schemes and visions bold,
To change the lives of men,
Improving what had gone before,
With the flourish of a pen.

But what a man can render up,
In mortar and in stone,
Does not always last for ever,
Once the visionary's gone.

Sometimes a dream is just too big,
For other men to grasp,
So all we're left is ruins,
Of a dream that didn't last.

.....

Rivington
October 2003

The Vision of the Golden Flower

Be still, your heart, my true love said,
Do not my favours seek,
But through the stillness of your heart,
Listen when I speak.

Strain not against the path of fate.
Such fires you feel within.
But all your anguished cries be lost,
Like whispers in the wind.

That path shall turn your heart to stone,
And stone shall render nought,
Such are the storms inside yourself,
The harder I be sought.

So bide in faith and think on this:
Abandon all to fate.
Then surely shall I come to you.
And open up the gate.

And pressing through the garden shine
Upon your weary eyes,
A vision of such loveliness,
Behind a veiled disguise.

For love, you shall not know me,
Nor comprehending yet,
The nature of our destiny,
My face shall you forget.

And surely will I lead you then,
Into the lady's bower,
Where one more fair shall offer you,
A sweetly scented flower.

Cont.....

Michael Graeme

But take you not this offering,
The flower that she shows,
Lest make her sensuality,
A prison for your soul.

And locked inside that lonely place,
There shall you long endure,
Until the ending of your days,
Deliver you once more.

How many times, my well beloved?
How many times since then?
Spellbound by such loveliness,
You took her flower again?

A flower she holds, the sweetest rose,
And you are on your knees,
Believing such is all there is,
When all you seek is me.

So offer up your sense of self,
Be still, your beating heart,
This lady's love you shall not have,
And from her shall you part.

Then taking not her scented flower,
Your journey might begin.
When she reveals the hidden door,
And bids you enter in.

There find a bower within the first,
It walls adorned with jewels,
Where the blazing light of noonday
Casts shadows deep and cool.

Cont.....

Poetical Sketches

And from those shadows shall emerge,
One lovelier than the last.
And trailing silks and finery,
A golden flower she'll clasp.

From richness she reveals herself,
And twirls the golden stalk.
Scattering sunbeams in your eyes,
Seducing you with talk.

How well you've done to come this far
Into my secret bower,
Why, none are more deserving than
To have this golden flower.

And surely will she offer you,
That golden flower to take,
And all its riches due to you,
Of this make no mistake.

How her lips, they will invite you,
Her words they will entrance,
But do not take the golden flower,
If you seek to advance.

A choice of paths be then revealed.
Two doorways will she show,
One tall and grand, fit for a king,
The other plain and low.

Take you my word, that kingly way,
Shall bring you kingly fame,
But no more breadth of vision,
Than any might attain.

Cont.....

So take you then the other way,
The way that leads within.
That place is dark and null of form,
The place we shall begin.

Think then of light, and light there be,
Of worlds and be they born,
Think then a guide to show the way,
And from the void she'll form.

But choose her well for all you are,
Shall in her then be told.
Think well you then how much you trust,
This image of your soul.

Trust well your self? Your truest self?
To lead you through the void?
For any darkness in your heart,
The woman's heart destroys.

And instead be born a harpy,
Inviting you to dance,
Condemning to oblivion,
Bedazzling with a trance.

Or think you of the joys of flesh,
A harlot take the part,
Who's endless tawdry games reflect,
Her shallowness of heart.

And think not then of beauty lest,
She fade into a crone,
Nor think of love and loneliness,
Or icy cold she'll grow.

Cont.....

Poetical Sketches

So few have ever reached this pass,
And fewer passed this test,
Think then you pure and stout of heart?
Think you better than the rest?

Beware such self aggrandisement,
Or vain your guide shall grow.
And crossing then that wilderness,
The way she shall not know.

Thus round and round you'll circle,
Till anger take your hearts,
And both your selves raise demons,
And tear both selves apart.

But pass this test and from this void,
Shall step your truest guide,
And face you then the wilderness,
This woman by your side.

Let her lantern light the darkness,
And trust in what she says,
For only one of nature born,
Can follow nature's ways.

One treads the paths of wisdom now,
But such a gift comes dear,
When clarity of vision,
Reveals your greatest fear.

And you see the way before you,
Leads to the setting sun,
And your weariness reminds you,
How many leagues you've come.

Cont.....

And falling down into the dust,
Your spirit sinking low,
How your heart shall feel the distance,
The distance yet to go.

Think then perhaps a dwelling place,
Wherein you both might lie,
For a union of such virtue,
Some paradise might buy.

And there amid the wilderness,
A stately tree shall grow.
Yet for all its wondrous beauty,
My love you'll never know.

But think you strong then do not chance,
That place in which to bide.
But take the hand she offers you.
And let her be your guide.

Then striking out upon that way,
The way it was begun,
Draw you deep upon her wisdom,
And walk into the sun.

There shall you find my secret bower
A bower of purest light,
And there love shall we meet at last,
And there shall we unite.

And there shall I reveal myself
As all that's ever been,
And there shall I reveal to you,
What you've already seen.

Cont.....

Poetical Sketches

Your modesty alone my love,
Shall bring you to this bower,
And then, yes, only then my love,
Might you touch the Golden Flower.

.....

Scorton
January 2004

Old School Blues

The old school's standing empty now,
Its playground echoes thin.
No more our sons and daughters,
Shall brightly enter in.

A century of children's feet,
Four generations gone.
Loud rings the air with memories,
Of their dance and play and song.

Of All Thing's Bright and Beautiful,
And sums and ABC's,
Of Vikings and of Romans,
And England's Kings and Queen's.

And if we pause and listen,
To the silence of that air,
What images shall haunt us,
From down the dusty years?

Of registers, how many filled,
With names so crisply called?
Now scattered through the decades,
Like leaves tossed in a storm.

And windows tall like tombstones,
So brightly filled with sky,
Where children from their lessons,
Would lift a homesick eye.

And urge the clock beat faster,
To the ending of the day,
When the cheery bell of home-time,
Would send them on their way.

Cont.....

Poetical Sketches

And then how many left those walls,
Their young lives to begin,
On paths that led to Flanders,
And the forests of Ardennes?

All blood and bone and boredom,
And teary childhood morn,
Sleeping decade after decade,
Into the blackened stone.

And sepia prints of faces lost,
As time moves swiftly on.
Long may this place unite them all,
Even when it's gone.

.....
Scorton
April 2004

To Rivington Barn

Oh, let's go to the barn, my love,
And have a cup of tea.
Do, let's go to the Barn my love,
And see what we can see.

Yes, let's go to the barn my dear,
This lovely Autumn day.
The air's so bright and clear my dear,
Let's chase our cares away.

Yes, let's go to the barn my love,
This sunny afternoon.
It's work on Monday morn, my love,
It comes around so soon.

Let's leave the car and walk, my dear,
Let's kick some Autumn leaves,
Let's arm in arm and talk, my dear,
Remember all our dreams.

Like how we said we'd quit my love,
Live on the coast of Spain.
Or run away to sea, my love,
Our freedom for to gain.

Well, love comes at a price, my dear.
A home and children too,
And workday jobs so dull my dear,
But what else can we do?

Well, let's go to the barn my love,
Let's have a cup of tea.
And hand in hand, let's wish, my love,
For all that might yet be.

Tarleton
September 2004

The Ruins of Old Rachel's

Through stillness come the echoes of lost time,
The scrape of clog and crump of boot on stone,
 When voices part the amber evening-tide,
And claim once more these ruins as their home.
 So many seasons gone since once this earth,
 With callused hand and back set to the plough,
Saw furrows turned and land that showed its worth,
 In golden bounty, lost to memory now.
 For time does render all things unto nought,
 From blood and bone to dust before we know,
 Life's meaning lost the harder it is sought,
Each harvest won that future seeds might grow.
 Yet through the simple closing of my eyes,
All once that passed here comes once more to life.

.....

Scorton

January 2005

The Marks Upon the Stone

An ancient hand did mark this stone,
 Raised up against the sky,
When ferny fronds did gently sway,
 Delighting ancient eyes.

When forest paths led ancient feet,
 Through sunlight-dappled glade,
When this bleak wind-blasted moorland,
 Lay cloaked in velvet shade.

When forest folk therein did dwell,
 And slip with silent ease,
Like shadows 'neath the oak and ash,
 Like leaves upon the breeze.

Short lives they lived, those ancient folk,
 Brief seasons come and gone,
But full of life, of Nature's pulse,
 Immortalised in song.

All gone they, all trace erased,
 Yet when I close my eyes,
I hear the song and know the marks,
 Upon that stone are mine!

.....

Scorton
August 2005

**The True Story of Miss Muffet, Jack Horner,
and Humpty Dumpty's Accident.**

Little Miss Muffet went to her tuffet,
But there she saw sitting Jack Horner,
So she said to Jack, "Oy" that's my comfy sack,
You go and sit in the corner!

Well, off stomped Jack Horner, to his usual corner,
Where he picked up a mouldy pork pie,
Then took aim at Miss Muffet, all prim on her tuffet,
And grumpy old Jack let it fly.

But Miss Muffet she ducked, at the pie that Jack chucked.
And that pie, o'er the living room sped.
It crashed into the wall, flew right down the hall,
And bounced off poor Humpty Dump's head.

Well, Humpty looked glum and said, listen here chum,
You're starting to get on my nerves,
Said, Jack leave it out, you great egg shaped sprout,
The blame in this case is all hers!

Now Humpty was cross, and quite at a loss,
And into a temper he flew,
So he squared up to Jack and said you take that back,
Or I'll tell my dad over you.

Said Miss Muffet, now boys, please turn down the noise,
I'm trying to watch the telly,
But Jack didn't care, he was mad as a hare,
And hurled at poor Humpty his welly.

Well, Humpty he ran, as fast as eggs can,
And he made his escape through the door,
Then he scaled up a wall, but from there he did fall.
And broke into bits on the floor.

Cont.....

The Kings horses arrived and the men side by side,
And the Captain said what can we do?
Moaned Humpty, all lame, that Jack Horner's to blame,
Now quick go and fetch me some glue.

So, with Humpty all mended, the panic was ended,
And the Captain he gathered his men,
Then they burst through the door and they searched high and
low,
But Jack Horner was not seen again.

There was just our miss Muffet, curled up on her tuffet,
Quite vexed at the hullabaloo,
When down came that spider, and sat down beside her,
So she flattened it with her shoe.

.....

Hartsop
February 2006

The Less Familiar Way

I thought to take an old familiar way,
Pressed deep into the memory of the grass,
So then my thoughts familiar tunes might play,
Strolling through the landscape of my past,
Where footprints are so bold they call like friends,
With hale and hearty stories often told,
Nostalgic tales repeated end on end,
Alluring sonnets sparkling rich as gold.
But sweet nostalgia ne'er a soul did free,
For in the lap of comfort does it bide,
Shielding what cannot be clearly seen,
With shadows deep wherein we often hide.
So choosing then the less familiar way,
A deeper insight surely I might gain.

.....
Scorton
April 2006

The Wheel of the Year

Samhain

Bloodshot and spent, October Sun,
Slips low, while long do shadows run,
Until by Dark Moon's crescent rise,
The death of light be prophesied.

Then loud the Samhain fires shall roar,
Marking the season to withdraw.
A time when spirits gather in,
To share once more the hearths of men.

When headlong tips the darkening year,
As southward slips the sunlight's cheer,
And shade of night's dread hand hold sway,
Until the solstice of decay.

Imbolc

And then once more the days we count,
'Till eve of February mount,
And bright moon lights fair Brigid's way,
That she might come and bless the flame,

And keep alive through frost crisp nights,
The Imbolc prayer of hope and life,
That lost sun mount once more the sky,
And Brigid's goodness to him fly.

'Till Springtime's moons of glowing grace,
Doth soften the earth and yield a trace,
Of nature's bounty pushing through,
The miracle of life renewed.

Cont...

Beltain

Now Beltain fires mark turn of May,
When Sun shall warm the earth again,
And we shall kindle hearths anew,
As light o'er dark again wins through.

When May Queen takes once more her King,
That fruits of Summer shall they bring.
And all who blessings then do seek,
Shall through the fires of Beltain leap.

Thus Summer time at last is come,
And days grow longer, one by one,
Till solstice shall presage the time,
When dark shall come and light shall die.

Lughnasadh

But yet the eve of August come
That fruits of mother earth be won,
When Harvest Moon shall linger bright
And scythes shall reap into he night,

And so Lughnasadh's feast begins,
With nature's bounty gathered in,
When dance and games and stories told,
Enrich the lives of young and old.

And then shall quietly fall the night,
As Dark Moon comes to steal the light,
'Till Samhain fires once more shall burn,
And one more time the wheel be turned.

Cont.....

Michael Graeme

Another year but nothing lost,
For though the grass be pale with frost,
We trust in Nature's old refrain:
"All that once was shall be again."

Scorton
October 2006

The Song of Scope End

Returning to what was my first true love,
In whom once I'd spied the misty source of soul,
Among black mountains and the poets' verdant vales,
I climbed a pathway long and thence above,
The vale from Scope End to far Dale Head did go,
Seeking nothing there but to spend the day,
In walking,
Though not through walking seek to find my way.

Rather it was to live again those days,
When I sought in me the muscle and the strength,
Of that shy, angry youth within whose troubled mind,
The fires of disconnectedness did blaze.
And so thus it was, deep breathed, I came at length,
Into that secret realm, and there did find,
Rare silence,
Of the manifest world left far behind.

Upon Dale Head that day the light was thin,
For the verdant green lay pale beneath the mist,
And solidity of all substance there had waned,
As vagueness over certainty did win.
And thus with all firm reality dismissed,
And abstract notions coursing through my brain,
I saw her,
And there did feel the source of soul again.

Cont...

So fair of face, the stranger sat apart,
As she gazed out o'er the hidden vale below,
And then divining inside me what moved in her,
Her face did shine a light upon my heart,
Raising up love's lonely bones from long ago,
A hungry spirit then that fain would share,
With me,
Dark secrets sealed within a cryptic prayer.

Too much did prove this feeling in my veins,
And in great surprise I moved myself along,
Stern willed against how very much I longed to bid,
While mists swarmed thickly covering up my shame,
And I hoped my heart these thoughts would not prolong.
So sinking me once more into my stride
I walked on,
And from this source of soul thus did I hide.

Too well this kind of love I thought I knew,
So sudden and so searing in its touch,
But in my youth I had not really known its face,
From all the other loves I'd struggled through,
Gleaning naught when I been hoping for so much.
'Twas wisdom then that led me from that place,
Yet strangely,
Thereafter all the while did my heart ache,

Cont...

Poetical Sketches

But strange ache this, and not for something lost,
Nor for riches yet that I still hoped to claim.
I yearned for something without substance, without form,
A boundless love that comes without a cost,
And such a one that does not need to bear a name,
Yet from whose womb each one of us is born,
Searching, and
Wondering at the meaning of it all.

Nameless then this spirit in me was spun
Though quietly now as o'er Martcrag Moor I roamed,
Gazing down upon Derwent's shock of cobalt blue,
So that I thought my freedom had been won.
But coming down at length then to the road,
The source of soul revealed itself anew,
Quite shocking,
In the simple unfolding of a view.

Scope End, mid verdant vales, a shapely cone,
With a narrow strip of lonely country road,
Descending gently to the heart of woodland green,
Late Summer rich, with kiss of hazy sun,
And still that shadow of a love not yet bestowed,
Became at once a most mysterious key,
Unlocking,
A hidden door, within the heart of me.

Cont...

Michael Graeme

At once I was not there but was dissolved,
 Within the fabric of all I gazed upon,
While every atom of my being like stars became.
 And in a stroke was seemingly resolved,
 The cryptic prayer of two expressed as one.
What dwells without and dwells within are both the same.
 And at my journey's end there did I find.
 A walking,
 We are but the reflections of one mind.

The source of soul bends naught to will I'm clear,
 And rather by its thoughts to being we're born,
 That as a fragment of this greater self we bide,
Not long upon this sparkling thought-spun sphere,
 Bearing witness to a life lived quite alone,
While soul sieves wisdom through the mesh of mind,
 And gleaning,
All it can glean through these, its thought-spun eyes.

.....

Scorton

November 2006

Bringing home the bride

Yours is the face I've always known,
 But never seen,
Except in dreams and reveries
From the earliest of my days.

The heart that's ached for others,
Learned each sorry line from you,
And searched in vain for memories,
 Of times we have not shared.

A thousand faces have I known and struggled to describe,
 In tales of winsome fancy,
Vague trails of plot that petered one by one into vast steeples,
 That scraped uselessly the impenetrable void.
My life of words is but a dusty chest of tales,
 Each one in praise of you.

 These are not art,
 But photographs,
 Each one a facet of your face,
Like the brightly shining jewel I twirl between my fingers,
 Not knowing nor yet comprehending what it is I hold.

 You are them all, and more,
And everything I've felt I learned from you.
 You are a curl of corn coloured hair,
 A pair of soft school shoes,
 A white blouse,
 The press of linen,
And the scent of starch in sunlit classrooms long ago.

Cont.....

Michael Graeme

You are the darkness and the mystery I have sought,
Since my first awakening,
I sought it long in others.
But found nothing.
They were but flesh and blood and lacking.
And they tired me so.

Yours is the silence and the stillness of the watcher,
Watching my life and waiting,
Waiting for the time when I look up,
Into your eyes and know you are the one.
Not real,...

Your hand encloses mine but does not touch.
You reach out from the darkness,
By the warm lake shore,
And sometimes I feel your breath upon my neck.

Not real, ...
And yet a dozen names you bear.
You are She.
Immortal spirit and true.
Enter then and let your purpose in me be known.

.....
Scorton
December 2006

Beer cans

One grey December, when the light was pale,
I walked beneath the old brown hills of home,
To Anglezarke, the ancient lead mine's vale,
Where often as a child I used to roam.

The lake lay black as tar and mirror still,
As yet unspoiled by churning waves of day,
So that I held my breath lest I should spill,
Ripples,... and thereby give myself away.

For Nature takes disturbance as a crime,
And so in secret, was I taught to tread,
That sweet serenity I then might find,
In nature, unsuspecting, at her best.

'Twas thus, my footprints being the only clue,
I made my way into the misty dell,
That wondrous fall of water there to view,
A sylvan haunt where spirits surely dwell.

Then, wondering what it was that sparkled there,
I turned my gaze towards a glint of brass,
And suddenly my heart sank in despair.
At all the beer cans lurking in the grass.

The finest things in life cannot be bought,
Proof comes swift, each time the wild green calls,
Where priceless treasure freely might be sought,
But beer cans,...

.....how the beers-cans spoil it all!

Scorton
January 2007

Ghost Horses

What makes me think the words will come today?
That by some magic not yet understood,
This place can somehow show to me the way,
So words might then pour freely from above?
Or well up from that secret place inside,
From whence all thoughts come clear and ready made,
To slide into the puzzle of my mind:
A sense of something learned, of distance gained.

But now the mist obscures the mountainside,
And idly seeks the hollows of the vale:
Ghost horses on whose backs my lost thoughts ride,
Too lame to hunt and yet afraid to fail.
A greyness takes the shape of what I knew:
Fair hills of hope, all lost to memory,
Days of sweet grass and glory all too few,
So I am rendered blind to what I see.

Snow falls like ashen moths into the mud,
While making no impression on the land.
They are my thoughts those moths and do no good,
Quite useless in their flight to understand,
What makes me think there's any point to me.
But still I sit with fingers lightly poised,
O'er keys worn smooth from times words came with ease,
Words whose faint traces now bring little joy.

But no wise creature hunts on days like these,
So I must turn within and seek the warm,
And stir the glowing embers of my dreams,
In whose soft whispers all is granted form.

Hartsop

February 2007

The Dream of Love

I am hiding from the news today,
Deliberately resisting the button,
That will take me to the seamless bickering,
Of the mighty,
And to the picture postcards,
Of what seems to be,
An unimaginable hate.

It is a hate of white hot shrapnel,
Burning to a black char,
Whatever softness it lights upon.

It is the image of a face,
Tight lined,
Teeth bared,
Frozen in mid-roar,
A roar of ragged nonsense,
Blown wild upon a swirling storm,
Of hate.

How can I love that face?
How can I reconcile
The love long bred in me,
With the blackness
In those its hate-filled eyes?

That face says kill!
Kill the innocents!
The young and old and wise and kind,
And sweet and good.
Kill them all.
Kill me.
Spit!

Cont...

Michael Graeme

Spit upon my love,
My Sunday Schoolroom dreams,
The Our Father's of my trust and hope.

Yet love you I shall,
If I am not to be crushed,
By the weight,
Of even the imagining of you.

But only not yet.
Not today.
Today, I shall hide inside the dream of love,
And pretend,
That you are far away,
Not gnawing, rat-like, at the very heart,
Of me.

*Scorton
April 2007*

Autumn

How quickly now the light speeds on its way,
And velvet shades of night seek close of day,
As leaves once green turn gold, then crisp and curl,
And drying in the winds then twist and swirl,
Their dance beneath the branches black and bare,
While fledgling touch of frost sharpens the air,
And memory of how once the earth did shine,
Tells me how quickly now does near the time,
When nothing we once shared remains to keep,
And all that's left is Winter's silent sleep.

*Scorton
August 2007*

**The moment of our first hello
Celebrating 20 years of knowing you**

How shall I mark this day?
With shop bought card whose verse,
Seems quite unable to convey,
The essence of the times we've shared?
Or shall we exchange gifts?
A rose? Perhaps a kiss?
Or shall I sit a while,
Remembering those years,
Without the need to rhyme with tears,
For tears there have been very few.
Yes, I shall remember,
And in all that I remember, there is you.
You are the colour of my life,
Its warp, its weave,
The texture against which my fingers brush,
As if against your sleeve, your arm upon my arm.
My wife, my friend,
We run, we dance,
We jump the hoops of time,
But when in quieter times like this,
With candlelight and glass of wine,
We catch our breath and calm our minds,
The reassuring sureness of our love,
Is never far behind.
And in that love time stands,
The hands upon the clock sweep slow,
And though a wealth of life,
Has grown around us now,
This day still holds the moment
Of our first hello.

Scorton

29th August 2007

Our Modern Times

When I think of the town, I think only of what has gone.
I think of factories boarded and barred,
These once great houses of power all chopped,
Into an untidy miscellany of sporadic,
And shambolic enterprise.

I remember my own years,
Bent over drawing boards,
Tracing long, liquid lines with ink,
Or shaping metal from raw billets into intricate,
Structures of rare beauty.
Art by any other name.

And I think of the men and women who worked,
In the ugliness of its dirt and roar,
But who by their presence gave it warmth and meaning.
And on whose passing we are bequeathed,
This unredeemable emptiness.

There is no romance in an empty mill,
Nor in a poor man's pocket,
No nobility in the fall of a man,
From doing a man's work.
For a man's wage.

There is only the emptiness of an old town,
With nowt' but memories of its past,
And streets painted with an already peeling veneer,
Of cheapness, and the transience of these,
Our modern times.

Horwich

April 2008

The lost decades

Why do you haunt me still?
You should have gone,
Fallen through the hole that was my youth,
Into a universe of your own.

Why are you there?
There is no meaning left in you,
No purpose,
Other than as a useless reminder,
Of the way things might have been,
For we have no story,
Except a void of unused years:
The lost decades,
Of not knowing you.

Others passed your way,
To ply their trade of chances long ago,
Only to vanish,
When a deal could not be struck.
They have all slipped back into memory now,
Faces dimmed, their scent, their look,
The feel of every one,
Has gone,
While you remain, and feel,
And look the same.

With you, as with those who went before,
I might have found a place,
To be content,
To never wonder.
But some mistaken spell,
Cast long ago has kept us near.

Cont....

Poetical Sketches

And I cannot help but dread,
Your going now.
For with your going shall be lost,
The meaning of you.

And with its loss a piece also
Of the meaning,
Of myself.

May 2008
Scorton

The Fall of Burgh Lane

Of an evening, from o'er the meadow there once came,
A warm light from the windows of Burgh Hall,
And often, as I slowly made my way,
Friendly spirits would seek me out and softly call.

They were like echoes from a time that was between.
A time where past and present meet as one.
Often these ghosts appeared as if in dreams,
Taking the sweetly rendered forms of those I loved.

As the years passed and I sank more inside my mind.
These old spirits could almost seem flesh warm,
And their secret whisperings from long lost times,
Became a highly charged and theraputic balm.

For me, cold women and examination strife,
And the long work-day's soporific hours,
Ran counter to the sweeter tide of life,
And all my dreams of better things seemed quickly soured.

So seeking then the Yarrow's gently winding way,
And Burgh Lane's rustic unmade, ancient road,
I'd tempt these friendly spirits from their play,
Then take their arm and let them ease my load.

Thus in the company of ghosts my path I'd wend,
Their sympathy inviting my confession.
Always a patient, listening ear they'd lend,
And they'd advise me through insight and impression.

Their language was the murmur of the water's edge,
It was the gentle sway of leaves in air;
The sigh of grass beneath the wind's caress,
And by such abstract counselling my soul was spared.

cont...

Poetical Sketches

It seems in quiet are granted form the sprites within.
Seek then their help and they might serve you well,
But think of demons and your muse is slain,
You have free choice between the path to heaven or hell.

Burgh Hall has gone now and that lovely lonely lane,
Is built half way along its length with homes,
The meadow too will not be seen again.
Long fallen underneath fresh brick and tarmac roads.

And I no longer walk there lest my memory,
Of precious days with sympathetic ghosts,
Be crushed by this stale reality,
Of dog turds, televisions, cars, and mobile phones.

There is no trace now of that strange and subtle fold,
In time, through which the past might still be glimpsed.
It's gone, withdrawn from an unfeeling world,
A world in which all talk of spirits makes no sense.

While this living death creeps upon the valley's rim,
I keep now to the Yarrow's winding course,
And seeking still the answers from within,
I'll catch at times the whispered counsel of its ghosts.

They tell me go, forget this tragedy, and seek,
A future in another place whose peace,
Does not forbid old ghosts the means to speak.
Where by their grace both past and future are at ease.

Coppull
June 2008

My Old Boots

They sit on a shelf among the cobwebs,
These boots of mine, with leather pale and dry,
Deeply creased like the faces of old men.
They sag slowly into the dust and they sigh,
Among all the forgotten bricabrac,
As they recall the season they were new,
When the mountain paths went on for ever,
And when the dreary days of rest were few.

I take them down and blow away the dust,
Check inside for mice then set them back.
Their day is done, and I should throw them out,
But in the lines of these old boots I see the track,
Of a youth for whom the mountains were less steep,
A youth for whom the summers lasted long,
Upon whose tongue the rain fell soft and sweet,
And in whose ears the wind sang freedom's song.

They must have walked a thousand eager miles,
Known every hill in England bar a few,
These old boots with soles worn paper thin,
I could never throw them out,...

Could you?

*Scorton
June 2008*