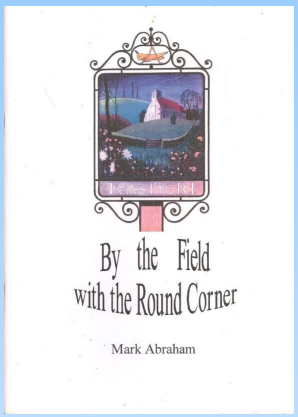
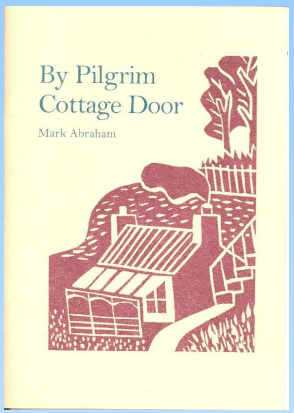
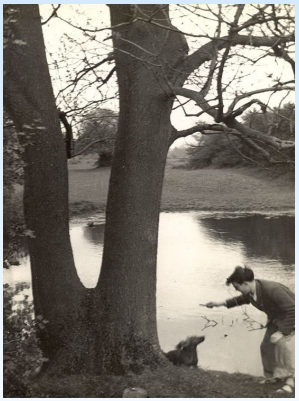




A Tatsfield Tapestry

by

Mark Abraham



C o n t e n t s

A Tatsfield Tapestry

Welcome

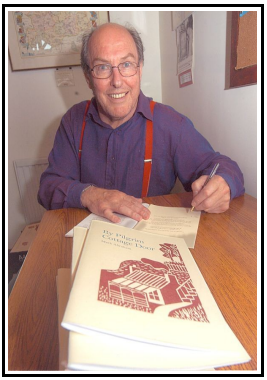
Welcome to this website,
let it shine out from your screen,
stories, songs and images,
so far scarcely seen.
It's all about a village,
an island in the hills,
where life is sometimes boring,
and sometimes full of thrills.

It's set out as a hanging -
a tapestry, not a crime,
with songs of different sizes,
some do and some don't rhyme.
With stories known as legends
that may be new or old,
they're gathered in three sections,
and ninety poems, all told!

Each one of us makes our Tapestry
and chooses where it be,
but this is 'A Tatsfield Tapestry',
that's mostly what you'll see.
It's built on my experiences
as I grew from child to man,
so therefore read it as you wish,
with pleasure, if you can.

20/11/12

FOREWORD

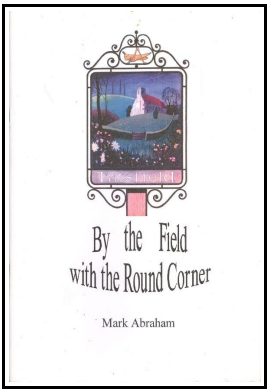


'A Tatsfield Tapestry' was intended to be a collection of poems written by myself, Mark Abraham, around the theme of my childhood and after in the village of Tatsfield which sits at the highest point on the North Downs. This village is in Surrey, but forms a peninsula partly stretching into the county of Kent. As it turned out, the whole collection has been published in three parts, each with its own introduction. The first section is entitled 'By The Field With The Round Corner', published as a small booklet in 2001. The second, also published as a booklet in 2004, is called 'By Pilgrim Cottage Door.' The third part, however, is being published on-line here for the first time! This is named 'By The Sound of Princely Hooves.'

At the end of these three parts and their separate forewords is a section of notes on all 90 poems in the collection. These were created at the request of certain interested parties in the village who felt that some pieces needed further explanation. I am thinking in particular of Eileen Pearce and Ian Mitchell who I both wish to thank for their interest in the growth of this work. I also want to thank my wife Ruth and my son Luke who have supported me all through the writing of every single poem.

There is some repetition of information in the three forewords which follow, mostly because they stand exactly as they were first published.

By The Field With The Round Corner Introduction



The 33 pieces in this section have all sprung from the village of Tatsfield which sits on the Surrey side of the border with Kent at one of the highest points on the whole of the North Downs.

However, they have been picked out from a larger collection to be named 'A Tatsfield Tapestry' because it is hoped they may carry a wider appeal than just for those readers from the immediate area. And because this is mostly where I grew up, these pieces do tend to reflect some of my earliest memories, memories which start in the Second World War and continue on until the 1980's.

I am indebted for the help of Dorothy Burgess, Victor Greenfield, Jaya Graves and Robert Delahunty who each read the larger collection and who made useful suggestions, most of which I have tried to accommodate. I also wish to thank Peter Sansom and members of the now defunct Holmfirth Writers' Group, West Yorkshire, as well as those in the I*D Books of Shotton, North Wales, for the support I have received over the years with much of this work. This last group includes Clive Hopwood, Maureen Coppack, Chris York, Joan Owusu, Walter Griffiths and others, but particularly Alan Seager for editing

this collection and turning it into a book. Thanks also to friends in the village itself who have shown support and corrected my failing memory on many occasions. These include Eileen Pearce, former editor of the Tatsfield Parish Magazine but now also of the Tatsfield Millennium History Project. Some of these poems appeared in both these publications in the late 1990's. But also thanks to Rosemary and David Brown of Paynesfield Road and Tony Watson with whom I went to school, all three for their support and for helping, now and then, to jolt my memory.

The front cover has been taken from an original by my father Sydney Abraham created when he painted the first village sign which was set up on Westmore Green in 1953. I'd like to thank Maureen and Stephen Coppack and Alan Seager for the work that went into the cover as a whole. The present village sign now shows Tatol, supposed progenitor of the parish name, standing in the virgin forest and holding an axe. There now follow the 33 poems of this collection.

1. The Animals Of My Childhood

Of all the animals
of my childhood,
the war-time chickens
and their quacking mates,
our neighbour's cattle
and the drone of bees,
none I recall so well

Our old dog Bill,
our mad, prolific cat,
the wolves and bears of fairy-tales,
the passing glimpse of fox
and a hundred thousand singing birds
of a timeless summer long ago,
none I recall so well

None shall I ever
recall so well
as the rat, the rat, the mythic rat
who died maybe one day
beneath the corner boiler-hatch
where my mother chased him
and in terror struck a match

I catch the burn
of his screaming, curling death
upon my own dear skin,
and I marvel at the force
that carries him on high
far, far out of the chimney
and into the silent sky

2. My First Banana

I had seen them before
in shop windows, of course,
but never for real; plaster-casts
painted a dirty cream-colour
and far too dusty for eating,
and my grandad, always the joker,
often drew pictures for me,
taunted me with a mystery
that was not to be solved
till the passing of war.

But one day it was different.
There in the Infants,
Mrs Colbreath stopped us working,
said she had something
for all of us to see.
Someone's brother in the Army,
home on leave, had brought a banana,
and there it was,
not to be passed around,
kept safely in her hands.

So I went home, full of news
which my grandad promptly deflated.
"Ah, but did you see inside?"
I had to confess
I'd not even touched the skin.
Later, bananas
were as common as spiders,
though much tastier, and later still
I found my story had sprung
from every school in the land.

3. Barrage Balloons

There they stood,
the spore-heads
of a giant fungus,
strung out
in a fairy-line
along the hills,
bulbous silver growths,
all of them hungry
for the tiny planes
that flew so many,
their tails ablaze,
towards the open city.

Each rounded fruit
brought its own nest of ants
who busied themselves
around the roots,
who joked with us,
told us stories,
now and then gave us
silver strips of elastic
for our catapults
and showed especially
by their presence
that something was being done.

But one afternoon,
from my grandad's veranda,
we watched in awe
as two of these marrow-caps,

grown amorous in the summer sun
and helped by a steady breeze,
embraced each other,
kissed and then caressed,
but tangled with their stems,
this act of over-zealous love
costing one its life, torn asunder,
dragged quivering to the ground.

4. Jack

He came to us
out of the open sky,
small, black, feathered,
dropped down where my mother
threw bread each day,
rested in the trees close by,
grew more friendly,
called his name often,
his grey nape shining
almost as bright
as the steel of his eye,
helped my father in the garden,
had his own cage for a place at night
always with the door off its hinges
and showed us, for a few months,
how much spirit
could be barely contained
in such a small creature,
till someone passing
on the road above,
unseen, unproven
but gravely suspected,
stopped him
with a single pellet.

5. Halliloo

I remember sitting in the back
of the family car as we'd drive out
of the village past Botley Hill,
over the top towards Worm's Heath
there in the rear seat next to my sister
watching the countryside, cosy, familiar
in every shine or lack of sun.

Before long, looking to the right,
on a good day we could see
the wooded slope of Shooters' Hill
and the tilt of the land beyond
down to the City and the Thames unseen,
and all the trees and fields before
from Beddlestead to Fickleshole.

But I always chose to sit on the left.
I knew if I waited, soon I would catch
the deep Doone-valley of Halliloo
there with green upon its sides,
always inviting me to stop
and visit, but I never did,
too far from the village then to go alone.

I didn't even know its name, only found out
years later, up north, reading a report
that told how Halliloo was to be sold off
to a consortium from Amsterdam,
that this dry valley in the Downs
would gain three artificial lakes
and make a perfectly tailored golf-course.

6. Healer

When the picture fell,
someone stepped forward
where she sat in shock,
glass splintered on the table
before her, and for a moment
not a breath in her body.

Someone gently laid hands
on her shoulders
and her one lung opened,
filling with air.
She turned her head, trying
to catch sight of the other.

But someone stepped back
into the stunned crowd,
not waiting to explain
this gift of touch,
not waiting for the thanks
she surely would have received.

Through the frosted windows
the afternoon sun moved on.
Now the clatter
started once again,
and someone came
to clear away the mess.

(Incident involving my mother in The Old Ship, Tatsfield)

7. Ship Field

A meadow with three people raking
The sun in the sky burning down
The hay lies thick on the stubble
Left long enough now to be brown

It's three hours since any have eaten
Though not quite so late in the day
The hats that they wear barely cover their eyes
Their shoes are full of hay

Just as they think they must finish
Without any trees for a shield
They see a lone figure still some way off
Walking the length of the field

As they watch, there is something he's holding
Though the sun is so bright that they blink
But soon it's a tray fully laden
A jug and three glasses to drink

And now within earshot they greet him
Calling through lips that are dry
Each rake is laid flat, teeth down to the ground
The sun still high in the sky

8. Thames Pick

In a field of flints,
naked to the autumn rain,
this one stood out,
caught his searching eye,
there where it lay balanced
on the edge of the furrow,
shaped as it was, not by frost
but by human endeavour.

Later, at the museum,
someone told him
a little of its meaning,
its neolithic style.
Chipped by a hand-axe
beside the London river,
it was the furthest to have wandered
past the Quaggy to the Downs.

Just for a few days
he was a local celebrity,
his name in the Chronicle,
front page, half-way down.
Fingered its surfaces
so artfully splintered,
the first one to hold it
for five thousand years.

There on the slopes
that border his valley,
each stone has a reason

for how it is shaped.
For three weeks he kept it
at night by his bedside,
then a child found another
quite close to the school.

9. 1944

Did I really stand in that field
more than fifty years ago?
small boy in short corduroy trousers,
squinting up into the sky,
my left arm raised to shield my sight,
watching the planes as they went out
over our village, over field and wood,
going out south like birds migrating,
endless procession of wings and propellors
almost as wide as the sky itself,
planes and more planes,
planes of all shapes and sizes,
big planes, little planes, huge gliders
drawn like chariots by horses
that were more planes,
planes with smiles on their faces,
planes wearing beards or glasses,
long planes, short fat planes,
all going out in one direction,
all with but a single rumble
like a monstrous swarm of bees,
all going out for one thing only,
and of course at once I knew,
small as I was,

knew as we all knew then,
though it must have been the greatest secret,
knew, even as I ran shouting,
running downhill through woods and history,
down through the trees
to our cottage in the valley,
running and still more running
as the planes above kept coming,
calling and calling to my mother as I ran
that here and now was come at last
the day and night of reckoning.

10. Treasure Trove

I was told
when still a child
that deep in the bank
against our neighbour's fence
someone had once dug up
a pile of golden sovereigns.

I cannot vouch
for the truth of it
but see him even now,
standing by the grassy slope
and pointing where he thought
the hoard had lain.

So I watched
in our garden
for the merest penny,
especially when my mum,

turning the spade for my absent dad,
buried the rubbish in the latest trench.

As she moved
around the plot,
now and then she'd catch a tin
pronged and rusty on the fork,
while old discarded tea leaves
gleamed in the soil in their thousands.

The only thing
special that she ever found
was under the house itself,
a few strange bones, not sheep or cows,
and all she did was put them back,
cover them up, and never to mention again.

11. Mr Stevens

He was the local self-appointed
road-mender, took it on
as a labour of love, picked flints
wherever he could find them,

white bones to the flesh of clay,
each one random in its form
and history, yet taken together,
he turned them into piles and banks

of distinctive patterning. He paid
two boys a penny a day
and always maintained the Council

would find a way to reward him.

This then is how I heard of it,
as a rumour turned into a legend,
that people thought him a bit soft
in the head, something of a joke,

But it turned out quite different.
He was indeed paid for what he did,
and people came at certain times
to collect the piles he made.

One day, close to the valley track,
I stood in the heat of summer
under the canopy of leaves
half-blinded by the dark.

And there, as my eyes grew used
to lack of light, I made out
in the slope of the road behind me
a perfect symmetry of stones

stacked by his hand, clearly
the work of a craftsman
where, in the stillness of the wood,
his heart had almost touched the sky.

12. Lost Cat

One day, a small cat, black and white,
came through the field from Biggin Hill,
crossing the frontier of two counties,
the red collar its only passport
bearing the name of its owner,
same name as the family
on whom it descended,
my name, Abraham.

And there my mother, full of humour
at its intuition, rang Biggin Hill,
called across the border into Kent,
and the two women, unrelated,
then laughed with each other
at such a strange coincidence,
arranged for the traveller
to return to his home.

13. Goatsfield

Past the house
where my parents lived
there ran, not the cobbled street
of the city, not even
a six-lane highway
as flat as the edge of the sky
but a simple country lane,
one made of flints through which
the soil could breathe
and the rain soak back
into the ground, where each day
the good sun drew up
the aura of the earth,
where stones hammered
by Medieval hooves,
had lain packed together
for barely one minute
in the whole day
of the history of the world,
and yet were more ancient
than any of the cottages
that had gathered along its way.
Here was a road
where, if you looked,
sometimes you found ironstone,
which we called meteors,
embedded as if in one blow
from the ends of the universe,
or the cast in flint
of some sea-urchin,

dry as death now
and miles from the sounds of the sea,
or the chipped blade
of a stone-axe, rejected at birth
because it had chipped too much.
A road more than fit
for carters down the centuries,
for cattle going home to the farm,
for lovers entwined as they spooned
beneath the hedges of bread-and-cheese,
a real road,
a road for a hedgehog
to run as safe as the wind,
for a fox to sniff by night,
a road indeed that's full of life,
a road that is a road
and not a shroud.

14. Cuckoo

I heard a cuckoo in a play
cry cuckoo cuckoo far too quick,
for they who'd made that cuckoo sing
knew not how measured was his spring.

I heard a cuckoo in a clock
cry hollow like a dead machine,
for they that marked how time shall pass
knew only wheels in wheels of brass.

But then I heard him in a wood
cry cuckoo, and at once I saw
a boy who played beneath the tree
and knew for sure that boy was me.

So take the cuckoo and his mate
and have them build a nest of gold
that they might dare be cock and hen
and my poor life make sense again.

15. Fly-Past

Every day the planes came,
each one with a roar
too loud for any metaphor,
with the rattle of windows
and the death of speech,
and then the silence made the greater
by a numbness of hearing
that lasted longer
than the passing itself.

There was a time before
when quieter, more civilised creatures
would rumble on by,
slower and smaller
and driven by propellor.
We'd sketch them in our books at school
marked with patriotic eyes,
others with crosses
always blown to smithereens.

Now it was an era further on,
a time of balance,
we were told, that kept
the world from the brink.
We saw only these birds of prey,
their tails as if on fire,
the glamour of their passing
holding a peace as hollow
as the echoes in the hills.

16. An Evening At The W.I.

I cannot remember
why we were there
or what we were waiting for,
but no-one came
to take us in hand
and soon we were running
from end to end
across the wooden floor.
And the noise we made
grew louder still,
as we wound ourselves up
as children will
with a game of hee
and falling about,
and filling the hall
with laughter and shout.
But then, in a flash,
from the door at the back
that must have been open,
no key in the lock,
there came a young man
who climbed on the dais,
and calling out suddenly
cried,”What's this?”

But we knew straight away
that he meant no harm,
for his manner was certainly
friendly and calm.
And so it began,

him taking his ease
to find the best way
to turn off the noise,
and soon we were hooked
on the skills he displayed,
the stories he told
and the jokes that he made,
that we sat ourselves down
and we let him go on,
until with no warning
he'd filled up the evening,
so all too soon
it was time to go home,
for him to return
to wherever he came,
but none of us ever
was able to learn
just who he might be
and what was his name.

17. Snow

Though never at Christmas itself, the snow
was the icing on our Christmas cake,
was the world turned from all colours
into the one colour of innocence,
from all angles into the shape of smooth and round,
the trees bent double with their extra leaves,
the hedges lost beneath the raising of the fields,
the telephone-wires stretched and whispering to the ground.

For us it was the best time of all the four seasons,
the time when sledges came out of hibernation,
were rudely shaken, dragged out of sheds and chicken-houses,
or fresh born in one morning from planks and pieces of firewood,
their runners filched from the metal straps of beds,
their bridles anything from a chain to electric cable,
ready to fire us from the tops of the icy hills
down into the arms of the valleys themselves.

First day, first hour that the snow was ready,
there we'd all gather on the pathway to the church,
each of us dragging a platform behind us,
scarves and balaclavas, gum-boots chafing legs,
all sizes, all ages, gender no favour,
usually to a certain place five minutes from the village,
though once we were there we'd pick and choose
just where to make our run.

And soon there was a wide road marked out upon the hill,

a road cut deep across the drifts, smudged darker
than the bright light of the world all about,
a road composed of a pattern of footsteps
always pointing up at either side,
while in between was broken snow
and double lines crossing and re-crossing
down to the heart of pure delight itself.

Green Hill was the name of this highway
though never called Green when it was,
and though it was tipped as steep as we could make it,
it was the leveller of all levels, the bringer of infinite space,
where rivalries were forgotten, where bullies faded into the crowd,
where all at once even the most solitary
had too many friends even for them to count.

And after the long haul up, with our carriages strung behind us,
then we'd reach the very top as high as we could go,
run, pushing the sledge so that it gained momentum,
leapt forward at the right instant, tummy flat to the wood,
our faces inches from the rush, jumping bump by bump,
as close as we could to stare at the ice
till we reached the opposite slope.

18. Journey

We sat together
on a south suburban bus
all those years ago,
and my father said,
"Do you know?
You've now got a little sister."

For where was the chance,
with my mother away convalescing,
to hear them talk of great events
and to watch her grow big
with the wonder
and the treasure of the spring?

It was just a tiny moment.
The rest I soon forgot,
except the sky and the busy clouds,
the afternoon dawdling journey,
and my father's flat Northampton voice,
all those long tumultuous years ago.

19. A Tree Speaks

I have an arm
that's twisted at the elbow.
I cannot remember how or why
yet it seems it grew like that,
but it doesn't bother me.
As far as I know that's how it is!
I do get more than the passing bird
or squirrel that use me for a rest.
And children from the village come
by the path diagonal to the slope
and call me Chair, climb up,
take turns to rock in the breeze
because they can sit so safely.
Birds may be quick on the wing
but at least they know
the value of stillness.
Now take those others
that arrive by night.
They're something like children
only smaller, much smaller,
with glow-worms for lanterns,
dressed all in last year's leaves,
with feet that barely touch the ground,
and voices like the lost river
of the valley below, while each time
only one of their number is chosen
to sit in the crook of my limb!
Now these ones – they call me Throne!

12/3/02

20. Mist

He loved the very murmur of the word.
It conjured up a vision of strange shadows,
of distant sounds miraculously near
and him pressing forward carefully
into a world so changed,
as if it were the bottom of the sea.
And those times
when he walked home from school,
though he always knew
exactly where he was
by the trees or corners
that would suddenly come upon him,
it never ceased to astonish
how new the journey was.
Sometimes he would stop
in his tracks, knowing
that now, far below,
the whole of the Weald
lay stretched out unseen.
He was still amazed
that the Downs ended
only a few score feet away.
What if he were to step forward
to the very edge of the scarp
and walk out over the countryside
just as the Romans had done
through the ancient forest
all the way to Pevensey,
only this time far above
the woods and fields,

just to keep on walking,
the clouds never ending
till he reached the wide Sahara?
Perhaps he might even barter
for a camel, swap it for
the only precious thing he had,
the harmonica in his pocket,
and then return
through the whiteness of the clouds
till he reached the village green.
What would his neighbours think
when the mist cleared
as suddenly as it had arrived
to reveal him with so foreign a steed,
while it emptied the duck pond
into its thirsty hump?

21. Untitled: Plane Crash

In the ground
stands the lone propellor
like a three-limb tree,
only there are no leaves,
no fruit or bark,
only the dull shade of metal,
a single cross disabled,
marking the spot beyond which
nothing else is recognised,
strange crop in an open field,
strange harvest for the farmer,
but stranger still
for those on the road
staring from the passing windows.

Post war air-liner crash near Beech Farm, Worm's Heath.

22. Tank (2)

And there,
in one of the quietest of valleys,
an ancient army tank
lay far beyond distress, a strange lump
against the furrowed clay,
its iron bones its only gravestone.

Sometime
back in the War,
the fliers from the aerodrome
had fixed it for a bull's eye.
Now the only blows it ever felt
were the pebbles from our catapults.

Inside
there was nothing
but a carpet of powder and walls of rust
lit by a thousand tiny windows.
You could trace the angle of each entry
just with the poke of a finger.

One shot
I recall, had gone in
several inches across the roof,
melted its way till it dropped through,
not even clutching at the empty air
like a loony toon beyond the cliff.

But then,
all at once, the whole thing

had simply disappeared, dragged off
by a farmer anxious to unclutter his land.
That was the end of our best monument
to a time of unspoken nightmares.

Indeed,
it was the biggest,
most collectible piece of shrapnel
ever seen, more tangible certainly
than any frozen girder twisted earthwards,
screaming naked in the burning of a city.

We never went there again.

(Army tank at Beddlestead)

23. Biddy Lanchester

In the village of my childhood
she was someone of character,
whose son was a puppet-master,
whose daughter a famous film-star,
whose summer home was a round-house
that turned in a circle on a single rail
so that the door might chase the sun
and change the view from the window,
whose history was all mixed up
with strikes and radical movements,
and who never married
but lived with her partner
so that her family had her committed,

such was the madness of that century;
who was my mother's friend and mentor
from when she was still quite young,
who sat with her
at the birth of my sister
as one woman to another,
and whose house was sadly
burnt to the ground
the day we were going
for afternoon tea.
A woman long dead
but whose friendship still touches me
across these fifty years,
to her now only a fading memory
I offer up these lines.

And for that couple who one day
encountered an elderly somebody
on the slope that looks over the valley,
perhaps it was she out walking
on a trip from the other side,
following the familiar path,
noticing how the trees had grown,
searching for the wild strawberries
that were once at my grandparents' gate.

24. A Country Tale

When he was eleven and she was nine
and the hay in the stack smelt sweet as wine,
something dimly understood
dared him ask her if she would.

As if struck dumb they both stood still
while the sun burnt heavy on the hill,
then she with a look that he never forgot
demurely answered she would not.

Five summers passed the village by,
while she grew handsome he grew shy,
yet deep in the fables of his night
sometimes she whispered that she might.

One day, with others in the lane,
was it the hay she smelt again?
"Do you remember what you said?"
But look who now is turning red.

Only later did he see
that she was made the same as he,
only later understood
that now she thought perhaps she would.

25. Flint

Inside this moulded, rounded stone
is all that's left of an ancient sponge,
who'd drink the waters of the deep
if only it could, if only it could,
who'd fill the keep that holds it fast,
would swell to break what crushes it,
would burst this stranglehold at last,
if only it could, if only it could,
would breathe, would ride the waves again,
be free from such a strange domain.

It sleeps forever, deaf to all,
but if you shake it in your hand
you will not break that creature's heart,
if only you could, if only you could,
for all that's left is yellow dust
to mark just where that sponge was lost,
unless of course you find a frog,
if only you could, if only you could,
a rare event that has been known,
a living creature in a stone.

12/6/2001

26. Maesmaur

Welsh name in an English village,
mis-spelt slightly
in an English way,
spoken as a labyrinth
across a barren heath,
recalls for me my double childhood,
one half amongst the hills of chalk
that fixed the manner of my speech,
the other more secret,
deeper in my heart,
marked by seas and mountains
and a people as ancient
yet as fresh as the sun each day,
who with their songs and gossiping,
their different history
of how we plundered from the east,
their gentle welcome
and their easy listening,
their less concern for class,
gave me my first true insight
of things beyond my shell.
And if indeed the old lion
does begin to let go
the scarlet dragon's tail,
whatever from this may flourish,
I hope I'll learn
to slough my Saxon skin
and dare expose
the Celt that lies within.

('Maesmawr' means 'big field' in Welsh. This piece was written before learning of the history of the Welsh princes in the village from which the name descends.)

27. Hidden Gem

(with thanks to Dorothy Nimmo)

All I know
is that a doctor made it
for his daughter,
had it built as a copy
of the family home,
the big house in the lane.

When we children
came upon it, father and daughter
were both long gone.
We could only gawp and wish
at the tiny gables, the door
just wide enough to climb inside.

We got by
with rough tree-houses,
boards across branches,
sheets of corrugated iron
that doubled up as sleds
in deep winter.

One year, a friend dug

a pit by our gate,
covered it with a stretch
of asbestos, earth on top,
till my mother, unknowing,
crashed into the den below.

These days, the dream palace
is caught in next door's garden,
well behind a younger building.
Those who pass, holding
an adult by the hand,
have nothing at which to point.

But, still being like mother and child,
these two stand, as if waiting forever
but split by a length of fence.
Do you suppose they've come to know
the little girl and her father
now will never return?

28. Trees

Yes, we used to climb the beeches,
find one with a branch hanging low,
just reachable, swing up
till ready to lever ourselves
clear of the ground, work upwards
to gain the body of the tree
thirty or forty foot
high above the earth
but where there was now a multitude
of small strong limbs stretching
like a ladder all the way
to where the thinner branches
moved with the wind,
broke through to the blue
and sunlight of the sky.
And there we would carve our names
on a piece of bark
so all those who followed
would see it, and we'd call down
to our friends waiting below
that Yes, we could see
the main road in this direction,
or somebody's house in that.
For us, it was trophy-hunting
on a grand scale
and we never ran out of victims.
None of the trees we knew by nick-name,
except for a few of course,
yet most were as familiar
as the village itself.

Only those that didn't reach down
kept their secrets to themselves.
I tumbled only once
and that was not
on a conscious climb
but filching a visit to a friend's tree-house
when I knew they were all away.
I slipped my footing at the top,
fell half the tree before my outstretched arms,
like angel wings, caught on two thick boughs.
But even then I wasn't safe
until, with my breath returned,
I squirmed my way back
onto the rope-ladder
and found my way to the ground.
The tree that saved my life.

29. So Now You Know

The man of Kent stands to the east,
the Kentish man the west,
and while the Medway flows between
each swears he is the best.

Some say it grew from ancient times
when east was mostly Jute.
Some say it came when Cromwell's men
divided up the loot.

But whatever the cause of such a thing
the two shall not be one,
while those across the estuary
can smile at all the fun.

30. Confession

Near where I stood
and watched the planes
in forty four
I hid a brass key
by a bomb-hole
that was left from the war before

The key was from
my grandma's place
stolen when I stayed
and the clock then unwindable
in some measure
was time delayed

Of course they knew
who did it
time was not on my side
but they persisted
wore me down
till at last I cried.

So I went back
as instructed
to the middle of the field
searching the hollow
in the sward
my guilt my shame revealed

But now the grass
had taken the key

as if it was its own
and I had nothing
in my hand
nothing with which to return

The clock was stopped
but they built houses
in the place where I had stood.
Has anyone ever
found time to spare
in their garden by the wood?

31. Stardust

When we got to the ward
my father said,
"For God's sake
don't mention the Comet.
For she's got it into her head, it seems,
that when great Haley last came round
that was the time when she was made.
And though her dates are a little awry,
he's back to carry her off on high."

Indeed, my mother lay
keeled over on a reef of pillows,
going down fast with everything on board.
She stared out at us
from somewhere far behind her eyes,
talking of footsteps and more footsteps
and how it was all worthwhile.
But already Haley was beyond the sun,
his tail before him on the homeward run.

At home we sat and talked.
He felt she'd given up, and who could blame,
fighting for forty years with just one lung
and plenty else besides.
Would he come north? I asked.
My father paused, thinking my sister
still would need a link.
And all the while a mighty snowball burned
as Venus through another quarter turned.

And yet she rallied,
on the third day rose again,
cracked her old jokes and was the nurses' pet,
until the doctors, thinking of the bed,
talked of her going home, and so my dad,
my gentle but exhausted dad,
began the long panic that led to the funnel of death.
Comet, as you ride on through the depths of outer space,
who's that walking around your dark and frozen face?

32. Shepherd's Crown

There it lies in the clay,
a shepherd's crown,
with five fingers gripped like a fist
in star-fish pattern
round its body like a ball.
Wash off the mud.
It will make a fine ornament
for your book-lined shelf.

Some called it a witch-stone,
suspecting it of magic,
told tales of Gorgon heads
that turned to stone
all those who looked too hard,
thus explaining
bones in rocks,
shells a thousand miles

from the ocean.

But I have seen the same
by beaches on our English coast,
some hairy, most in fragments,
empty husks where once
creatures passed their days.
These we call urchins
of the sea,
that hide beneath the sand.

Indeed I have a perfect specimen,
found in a tiny rock-strewn cove
on Anglesey.
How it survived the tumble of the waves
I cannot say.
More fragile than the fantasies of men,
more hollow than all superstition,
I keep it safe upon my shelf
next to my ancient stone,
the two to prove
how durable is life.

33. Font

(for David Thomas)

You weren't of the village,
or so it was said,
until you had slipped

into the wet of the pond,
into the green of the slime,
gone home crying

with your pants soaking,
spent a full hour
in front of the fire

while someone rubbed you down
with a dry towel,
found fresh clothes,

and laughed at your misfortune.
But I never did, never tripped
at the brick surround,

never fell over the edge
of the perfect circle
for a true village baptism.

But I did throw skimmers
on its surface, collect tadpoles
in a jam-jar on a string,

watch the water-boatmen
speed this way and that,
wade in as far

as my wellies would allow,
play I-spy with the tiny fish
that hid beneath the weeds,

test the strength
of the ice in winter,
slide the full diameter

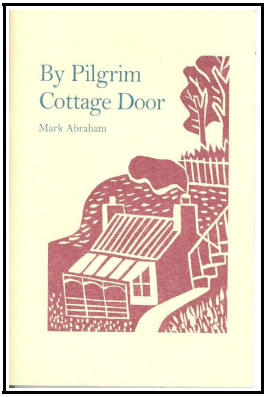
when it was safe and solid,
and I did crack my back
when I tumbled while slipping

and kept it a secret
for two whole weeks,
tossing and turning at night

but only on my front.
Does that entitle me at least
to a dip in the font?

(Tatsfield pond tradition)

By Pilgrim Cottage Door
Introduction



This collection of poems is the second third of a series of pieces based on the village of Tatsfield, the most easterly parish in the county of Surrey. The first section, also published by I*D Books (Connah's Quay 2001) was called "By the Field with the Round Corner", and the two collections taken together are meant to constitute part of an overall series of poems called "A Tatsfield Tapestry."

Pilgrim Cottage was the name of a tiny two-room house, no more than a shack really, where my mother and I lived for most of the Second World War. The building was knocked down in the seventies when Barry Watson, who then lived there with his family, built a much larger home on the same plot. By that time the property had changed its name to Treeview, the title which it still enjoys. The first collection of village poems was launched at the WI Hall on Paynesfield Road, Tatsfield, on the 24th October 2001. Barry, incidentally, has very recently published his first booklet of verses entitled "Fireside Poetry." We wish him good luck with his efforts.

There may be some obscurities in a few of these pieces. Sithersay (page 62) is taken from a supposed name for Titsey in the Doomsday Book and Elsa, in the same poem, is the actress Elsa Lanchester who tells us in her autobiography (Elsa Lanchester, Herself), how she once

made love in Titsey Woods. “Time-slip” is the only poem which has already appeared in the first collection, only here it has a revised middle stanza.

I must thank the following people for their contribution to the final form of this booklet. First there are Dorothy Burgess, Vic Greenfield and Dorothy Teague who all read the poems and made recommendations, as well as Hussein Al-alak who helped me with the editing. But I must also express thanks yet again to the I*D Writers' Group, especially Maureen Coppack, Alan Seager, Carol and Stuart Taylor, Ruby Roberts, Luigi Pagano, Clive Hopwood and others for their support and useful comments at all times. And further thanks to those friends in the village itself who have continued to help, namely Eileen Pearce, Rosemary and David Brown and Tony Watson.

Many thanks also to Mike Carter and the Manchester Area Resource Centre (MARC) for all the work put into setting up and actually printing this booklet.

The cover design is based on a lino-cut made by my father Sydney Abraham sometime in the 1940's, originally as a Christmas card, and shows a stylised version of Pilgrim Cottage itself, with its tin roof and veranda front.

Mark Abraham, November 2003

34. Apples

She lay there barely surviving
for several weeks
in a room at the back

of the old flint mansion,
imperceptibly changing
like the apples

on the floor of the loft
above her head,
each fruit uneatable

when first picked,
but all of them waiting,
separated each from the others.

On the dry wooden planks,
the long winter moving
unseen towards the spring,

the apples reaching out
for the first bite,
for apples are meant to be eaten,

the seeds falling free at last
into the break of light,
as she lay there mending.

35. Midnight Rover

(in memory of my cousin, John Bromwich)

There in the summer moonlight,
the shadows as sharp as day,
he takes the village in his stride,
at night comes out to play.
The houses all are dreaming,
no movement on the street.
There's nobody there to question him,
his freedom is complete.

His bedroom, set above the ground,
with free air flowing under,
has made it easy to devise
the means for such a wander.
He's cut a trap-door in the floor,
hidden beneath the mat,
and so, when everyone's asleep
he creeps out like a cat.

No harm is meant, he's only a lad
who's looking for adventure,
to hold the village to himself
and no-one else to censure.
He takes a walk wherever he wants
and whenever the night is clear,
the dome of the sky above his head
and the fox to give him cheer.

He takes the street in the middle.

No car will knock him down.
The gardens all around him
are there without a frown.
He comes and goes, then sleeps till late,
wakes up, receives no blame.
How strange he's never come across
others who do the same.

36. Grasshopper

"I've come to take your daughter back,
she who was lost when young,
sleeping all day in the open field,
but found because of my song.

For he who saved her followed me
and there she lay alone,
and you declared that on your crest
my picture must be shown.

With all your high connections
you had me made of brass
and there above the Royal Exchange
I saw what came to pass.

Beneath my feet both money and power
were bartered every day
and still the poor who filled the streets
were left to waste away.

That's not for the creatures of the field,

we forage what we need,
and though at times our lives are hard
we'd never live by greed."

And so it is her wedding day,
where many of those in church
were friends when she was still a child,
and followed in the search.

But even as they take their seats,
before the bride is in,
they see a stranger in their midst,
a fiddle beneath his chin.

He's dressed in green from head to foot,
the fiddle of similar hue
and when she arrives on her father's arm
that is the fiddler's cue.

He plays as merry as the lark
that rises to the sun,
and she begins to tap her feet
as never before she's done.

They dance together through the door
no matter what any might say,
and so across the fields of grass
he's carried her far away.

37. Forge Field

(with thanks to Dennis Travis)

I remember seeing, when still a child,
an open gate and a broad green field,
and piled on the ground in the clear spring air,
horseshoes, horseshoes, by the score.

Here was a place that was set aside
for a travelling smith to ply his trade.
All fire and hammer to the sky,
then on again, on again, come what may.

Now homes and gardens claim the land.
The field is tarmacked end to end.
Gates and fences, vehicles, bins,
only the name, the name remains.

A road in Biggin Hill.

38. Lucifer's Lustrous Garden

When God sent Lucifer down to Hell,
the last few moments, as he fell,
he clutched with former angel's hand
in desperation at the land,
found something sharp on which to grip
and for a second ceased to slip.
But that on which he drove his nails
was not the granite peaks of Wales,
was not the limestone Pennine fold,
but North Downs chalk, too soft to hold,
and soon he slithered, tearing the land
in deep dry valleys like a hand,
until at last, screaming, he fell
into his everlasting Hell.

When God perceived the damage done,
the chalk laid naked to the sun,
at first he brought the ice to bear
to smooth the edges of the tear.
He caused the western wind to rise
that soil might filter from the skies,
that seeds of grass and silver birch
for every patch of earth would search,
that oak and beech their shade might lend
and fill the valleys end to end,
that buttercup and bluebell too,
that flowers of every shade and hue
would so enrich the open field
that soon the wound might be quite healed.

(Home-made ' legend' of how the valleys of Tatsfield were created)

39. Elsa Lay By Sithersay

Elsa lay by Sithersay
upon a bed of summer grass
while all around the trees stood high
as if to shield her from the sky.

Where Elsa lay, Napoleon's men
made prisoner by their English foes,
had planted on the empty slope
a thousand saplings each, for hope.

Elsa loved with all her might
the one who pressed her to the earth,
hugged and kissed him yet again
as if he were all Napoleon's men.

The trees, their only witnesses,
drew more than water with their roots,
for now the fire of Elsa's love
burned bright on every branch above.

The force of all her loving
was strong enough to turn the clock,
and there beneath the open sky
Napoleon's men came riding by.

40. Dogger

(In memory of Gordon 'Dogger' Wells)

So how then can I say it?
We went our separate ways,
he a self-taught mechanic
while I was stuck in a haze.
He built himself a four-wheel drive,
to make it economic,
then drove across the Sahara
and sold it for a profit.

Soon he ventured further afield,
looking for where was best,
built other vehicles when at home,
while he partook a rest.
Sometimes he travelled with a mate,
together they'd drive and plan.
Then he got all the way to Australia,
this trip on his own.

Maybe it's how I heard it,
as only half a tale,
that he was out in the Outback,
all alone on the opal trail.
But how then can I tell you?
how can I really tell you,
that what he thought was a fossil
was a fucking hand-grenade?

Now the chalk-pits gleam in the sunshine

though never as bright again,
and all the trees on the Downs above
were taller way back then.
Now the motor-way runs behind the school
and the school is twice the size,
but I still hear his voice, still catch the smile
that shone from out his eyes.

41. White Scar

White scar I remember,
you were no ancient Horse.
White gold was the treasure
that crumbled under force.

Once I climbed upon your slope,
too steep for young as then,
clinging for breath by finger-tip
before I slipped again.

When my mother was near the end
and ready to fly away,
white scar on the hillside
was all we saw that day.

Once the scarp was full of trees
and rounded by the rain,
but now the wound is healing,
the hills forget their pain.

There is no sound of pick-axe,

no rumble of the truck.
Only the wind with feet of green
spreads out across the chalk.

But white scar on the hillside,
white scar in my dreams,
like a beacon in the sun
is how it always seems.

White scar on the hillside,
all open to the sky,
and men that are covered as if in snow,
I see them walking by.

(Oxted chalk-pits)

42. Daisy Bank

It was a day of feeling sad
beneath an empty sky,
but far too long ago
for me to recall just why.

I lay in the grass and sobbed
with the rhythm of my grief.
I was too young to know
that tears should bring relief.

But then a female voice
said, Boys don't cry like that,

and something in me jammed,
stopped all the rat-a-tat.

Since then I've grown, filled out,
become an upright man.
A family and my own career
I've taken in my span.

But if you ask me now
what makes me tough inside,
what makes me clench my teeth,
that's easy to decide.

I hear a certain voice
that tells me, Don't do that.
My face is hidden in the grass.
There's no more rat-a-tat.

But tears are drops of rain
that heal us from within,
and as the silence grips the heart
that's where we men begin.

43. Emblem

So where is the yellow scabious
my mother swore she'd seen,
growing so well in our own red clay,
as healthy as a bean?

Where once a busy windmill
was turning night and day,
until they built a lighthouse
for the ships that ride the sky.

Where the valleys below Polesteeple
spread out just like a fan,
and close where the Roman road dips down
and out across the plain.

Where one conspirator tried to hide
and two more fled in shame,
and where the famous Thunderbolt
was given half its name.

For if I found it where she said,
whether there's cloud or shine,
I'd put a cutting on my coat
and wear it as a sign.

A flower that's most unusual
that should by rights be blue,
a flag that's clearly more than fit
for one of Tatol's crew.

44. Roman Villa, Lullingstone

Flints,
under the river,
on the river bank,
by the roots of trees,
scattered across the fields,
marking out the flower-beds
of the cottage gardens.

Flints
in the walls of houses,
each one shattered flat,
the dark obsidian
fading into grey,
the white of their edges
stained by the clay.

In a single room
enclosing all the farm,
only the cellars now
spread out from the mosaics,
squared up in more flint,
stacked, fused together,
ancient coral.

I was here before
as a boy on my bike,
picking my way to the east
from my grandfather's village,
the cold Kentish afternoon,
and then only Bellerophon

staring at the sky.

But as I walk
with my head-phones
through a modern alphabet,
I see my grandfather's garden,
sloped, terraced,
the same nodules,
identical cement.

45. Warning To Golfers

Strip the flint from out the clay
and rain will wash the soil away.
But keep both clay and flint together,
the land will flourish, whatever the weather.

46. Rondeau

There was a village in the south
That I knew well when I was young
Where woods and fields were mine to own
While I could roam wherever I wished

With deep dry valleys carved in chalk
Like fingers drawn across the Downs
And tops once open to the wind
There was a village in the south

Before, the farms had succoured sheep
That helped to feed the English looms
The city seemed a life away
That I knew well when I was young

There in the valley stood my home
With oak and beech and hazel-tree
And I would walk alone to school
Where woods and fields were mine to own

Then came the sound of falling trees
As builders whistled in the wind
But I was young and paid no heed
While I could roam wherever I wished

With streets of semis and the spread
Of roofs and aerials by the score
How can the field-mouse or the crow
In all their dreams begin to know
There was a village?

47. Secret River

The secret river Tattle
rises by Beagley's field.
It trickles down through Ninehams,
its presence unrevealed.

Hard by George's Road it flows,
not far from Gorsey Down,
where soon it joins the Colegate brook
without a single sound.

Then, at the foot of Ricketts Hill,
it gathers the Kemsley stream,
its water full of ghostly fish
as if it were a dream.

There's one more junction yet to come,
with the Beddle, and then beyond
the valley runs deep and deeper still
till it reaches Keston Pond.

48. Tanglands

It must be a castle
or I never will wed,
a fine English castle
for a proud Spanish maid.
You'll not have my dowry,
my love or my hand,
unless there's a castle
for me at the end.

Sadly he stares
at his house by the lane,
where the valleys cut deep
into forest and down.
A castle it's not,
just a big house of flint
where the borders of Surrey
meet the edges of Kent.

But he scratches his head
and thinks of a plan
to capture the love
of his lady in Spain,
and soon, in the valley,
no stream for a moat,
the sounds of construction
are heard day and night.

And so in his letters
he tells of his love
and hints at the splendour

where soon she will live,
as there from her window,
she looks to the north,
and feels in her heart
this must be her path.

When the wedding is over
the bride and the groom
both travel by carriage
the long journey home.
As they come up the hill
by the old Roman road
she spies the one tower
as white as a cloud.

At first she is angry.
She knows it's a trick,
for though there's a tower
the rest is a fake.
But then, when she sees
how the work is so fresh,
her pride turns to laughter
and ends with a blush.

So they pass all their days
in the house on the slope,
which of course has no drawbridge,
portcullis or keep.
There's just the one turret,
a gift to his queen,
and though it's a Folly,
for them there is none.

49. Tatol

Because his smile
was hidden away
when he was very young
and never seen again,
behind his back
they called him Lively.
And if they heard his footsteps
or his knock,
they'd wait as silent
as a cuckoo's wink
until the cloud had passed.

And so, cast out
of his own city,
lonely and unwanted,
he went off into the wilderness
by way of the south road,
followed the Ravens' river
with its birds
as black as life,
climbed on up
and into the hills
till he reached the final scarp.

And there, with only
an axe in his hand
and the brave trees
to be battled,
he carved out the first field,
opened the sky

to the downland,
let in a tiny chink of light
to warm the stone
of his heart.

And where the hazel
twisted in his hand,
yielding a spring
beneath the chalk,
so room by room
his farmstead grew,
as field by field
the woods drew back,
while creatures of the forest,
more welcome than ever was he,
taught him at last to laugh.

And those who later
made their own journey
came upon
a sunshine of a man,
whose fame, whose presence
worked like a lodestone,
raised all their hopes
much higher than the hills,
while he himself
lived out in truth
the radiance of his name.

50. The Old Man Of The Weald

(For Julie Picton)

Curved under the clay and the sandstone,
under the limestone of the Ashdown Forest,
lies the Old Man of the Weald.

Deep, deep runs his sleeping body
as if he rests in the swing of a hammock,
the earth like a blanket keeping him warm.

His head and his feet rise at either end,
break out into the sunlight,
form the very edges of the Weald itself.

For a long time he has lain there sleeping
while we, like tiny insects, have come and gone
across the green forest of his eiderdown.

Do you think that he does not know that we are there?
He saw the spread of the Celts and the Romans
and how they were all then swept away.

He felt the killing of wild animals, the wolves and bears,
and how his bed is now criss-crossed
with the sharp filaments of roads and motorways.

Each hair on his skin is a million invisible shells,
and his body is as white as the frozen snow.
He has slept since all this land was once the sea.

But one day perhaps he must begin to wake.
Nothing lasts forever, even sleep.

There will come a time when he'll raise his head.

So what will it be then, when at last he moves?
Will it be the passing of history
or the first day for a new humankind?

Will it be overwhelming earthquake and volcano
or something truly sublime?
Or will it be so gentle that no-one sees him go?

All we know is that there he lies
under the cover of clay and sandstone,
the Old Man of the Weald.

And if we treasure the life we lead,
with the earth and the sea and the sky,
we will go on tiptoe to let him sleep and dream.

51. Theft

(after Carol Ann Duffy)

The most unusual thing I ever stole?
That was a hand-gun, a revolver,
made of steel with all the guts torn out,
only the butt and an empty barrel,
a hollow tube with which to point at death,

but something at least to hold in the hand
and see how snug it fitted and pretend
to aim, and then go bang
at a bird in a tree or perhaps a telegraph pole,
then make as if to blow the smoke

out of the open end. And whose gun was it then?
Not mine of course, but the rightful property
of Tony Watson, from my own village,
a boy in the same class as me at school,
whose dad had picked it up somewhere

had it stripped down to render it harmless,
just a toy to tempt the light-fingered.
So after he'd shown me and when he wasn't looking
I slipped it from the cupboard in his house
and pugged it in the armpit of my coat.

But just as soon as I made it mine,
so all the interest flew out of my heart
and the same day, when we were out sledging
and Tony not around, I put it in a drift

near where most people would probably pass,

and soon, of course, someone picked it up,
Michael Lucas who called out, “Hey,
guess what I found here hidden in the snow,”
and showed it all around, to me as well,
till one of them declared that he was sure

the gun was Johnny Roberts', who was playing
with it earlier, but who'd had to go home,
and since he only lived next door, this one
kindly offered to take it back for him,
but I don't remember any more,

since by then it wasn't my concern,
always the same with things that came my way,
once they were safe and in my hands
they seemed to lose their lustre, all their spark,
but I'd never think to put them back again.

52. Story North From South

I was raised in Charlie Peace country,
not far from Cudham town,
deep in the South
where the apples of Kent
grow fat in the summer sun.

But Charlie was known as a villain
who travelled both far and wide.
In a Manchester suburb
at last he was stopped,
but shot the policeman instead.

Two brothers were blamed for the outrage
but before anybody was hanged,
they caught him again
for some other foul deed.
He confessed and the death was avenged.

In the wall at the side of the Seymour
the bricks were once altered for blue,
in case we no longer
found time to recall
how some can stoop so low.

And I live in my house in the city
only two minutes, it seems,
from where Charlie
who should have known better,
put an end to all his dreams.

Now even the Seymour has vanished.
It's there in the architect's plan.
The lorries queue up
as they tear out the earth.
Only a few trees remain.

Was published in 'A Celebration of Poetry' for
Chorlton Arts Festival 2008

53. Waiting For Guido

He stood by the lychgate
on the night of fires,
hoping to catch the sound of hooves
as Bates, or even Fawkes himself,
might thunder by, as tales do say,
upon the remnants of his horse.

He stood by the lychgate
for a single hour,
taking the path across the fields,
wrapped up against the autumn chill
with scarf and hat, with collar tight,
at what might therefore run its course.

He stood by the lychgate
but only the wind
took any notice, dared to come his way,
sang all around him in the beeches,
rode the land as if it were its friend,
made him pull the harder at his coat.

He stood by the lychgate
of the solitary church,
in all the darkness of the sky
saw only a single rocket,
learnt years later when he was so much older
it was the wrong time, even the wrong spot.

54. Church Wood

(with thanks to Ruby Roberts)

Across the world there are pockets
where stones will sometimes dance,
points on the Earth's construction
that can never be there by chance.

Perhaps they stand on a line of springs
where the water breaks free of the chalk.
Perhaps they occur where ancient tracks
combine, or cross at a fork.

So remember the trouble at Church Wood
for the builders who came every day,
only to find that the work they had done
each time was blown away.

Night after night, when they'd all gone home
the stones went heel and toe,
and soon the trenches that were dug
had nothing left to show.

Here is a church that will never be built
and a wood where the spirits dwell,
but who shall ever cast them out
with chapter, verse or bell?

And who or what commands the stones
beneath the evening star?
Is it the earth or the trees themselves
when we dare to go too far?

(Church Wood is in Titsey)

55. Fragment

(for Linda Flower)

This is the thing
that all my life
I know that I've been seeking,
and here I am in familiar trees
as if my heart is breaking.

Now I hear people
coming towards me
beyond the twigs and brambles,
a woman with children at her side,
the youngest runs and tumbles.

I hide myself,
for I know in my heart
that something there is hurting.
Soon they will pass along the way.
There must be no such meeting.

Now in the woods
I am all alone.
It seems I have succeeded.
But already the trees, the berries and leaves
and why I am there have faded.

56. At The Fork In The Road

(For Robin and Ann O'Niell)

He decided
he would spend his summer afternoons
cycling down
the long hill to the valley below,
would ride around
near where he knew that she lived, hoping
he might see her,
perhaps even little by little
get to know her
and by so doing, one day
would be able
at last to ask her out, somewhere
all to himself.

On the third afternoon
there she was on her own bicycle, up ahead
on the road before him,
so he caught up with her and rode along
beside her, this girl
who was in a different class at school,
who smiled at him
whenever he saw her about the place,
this girl who he thought
the most beautiful person in the world,
far too beautiful for him,
this boy who lay awake each night
thinking only of her.

So they rode on
side by side, together up a different hill,
chatting about nothing
as if they were the best of friends,
getting off and pushing
when the long hill grew too steep,
but still chatting,
though afterwards he had no memory
of exactly what about
until, at a fork in the road,
she said suddenly
that here she had to turn off, had to go on
in a different direction.

And he decided,
since he had found her after only
three afternoons
and still had the whole of the summer
to come searching,
that this was an excellent beginning,
that little by little
he would find her and get to know her,
until one day,
when he felt the time was right,
he'd arrange a date,
the two of them riding their bicycles,
all to themselves.

And so it turned out
that every afternoon of that long summer
he rode off down the hill
and all around the area where she lived
but never saw her again,

while she, from the very first moment
that she left the fork
decided, in her young woman's heart,
that even though
she had smiled at him on purpose every time
she'd ever seen him,
here was someone who she liked a lot
but who didn't seem to care.

57. Barbara Allen

The first song that I ever learnt,
and this is worth the telling,
is Gilly and me by Titsey Wood,
as we walked with Barbara Allen.

Now Gilly would play upon his pipe
as we sat down on the stile,
but I looked hard in Barbara's face
and prayed I'd see her smile.

She always sang in a sweet high voice,
both sacred and profane,
while Gilly and I would walk the fields
that lay by Blue House Lane.

They say she came from Scarlett Town,
somewhere across the ocean,
but Gilly and I were almost grown
and freedom was our notion.

I've often tried to catch her words
and shape them with my pen,
but all I see is Botley Hill
and boys who would be men.

All I see is the world we knew
that still goes round and round,
and Gilly who might have played so well
if he was not underground.

(In memory of Roger Campbell Gillies)

58. Time-Slip (2)

(for David Brown)

Whenever the snow lies thin upon the ground,
filling the dips, yet missing all the humps,
those that fly from Biggin Hill
can trace the road the Romans built
across the fields, beneath the trees,
pointing directly to the sea.

One day perhaps, a legion of men
were startled by the noise above
and saw a bird with rigid wings
as big as any house, and yet
before they'd time to think or run
it passed as quickly as it came.

So how long therefore will it be
before there's someone overhead,
bound to be shaken by the sight
of men with armour in the winter sun,
treading the line of drifted snow,
leaving no footprints as they go?

59. White Bear By Fickleshole

White Bear whispers to the ghosts of trees,
White Bear weeps on the southern breeze,
White Bear stands by the tavern door,
now she is frozen and for ever more.

Who is this Fickle whose hollow we survey?
Who is this Fickle had more than his say?
Who is this Fickle never faithful to any?
White Bear would tell us for the price of a penny.

Which is the penny we need to donate?
Pieces of silver or pieces of eight?
Penny of Alfred to place in her mouth?
No, penny of Ella who came from the South.

White Bear was frozen when Ella's foul scent,
ran with the wind through the forests of Kent.
White Bear was frozen by all the discord,
as Ella the pirate rode out with his sword.

Who was this Fickle who ran with the crowd,
swearing allegiance to Ella out loud?
Who was this Fickle had more than his day
for learning to sharpen his dagger each way?

So find me a penny, not shilling nor groat
before my resolve should stick in my throat.
Before my resolve should freeze where I stand,
go find me a penny to lay in my hand.

It must be a penny from Ella the Cruel.
The sword was his master as he was its fool,
and the bear that was brown, at a stroke overnight,
was frozen with sorrow, with sorrow turned white.

So find me a penny and one that is old.
It must be from Ella whatever you're told.
Let Fickle be faithful and willing to give,
and so let the White Bear once again live.

60. Walking With Syllables

(after Clive Hopwood)

It's late evening.
I walk through the city,
following the line of light,
watching out for car or man,
keeping my eyes wary,
keeping my step as bold as I can.

When I was young,
I'd walk the lane at night,
pitch-black, my hand held in front
fending off the sudden tree,
knowing every corner,
knowing at least it was only me.

61. To My Sister Never Born

To you my sister, never born,
a message in a bottle that was tossed
into the first ocean of your life,
was shattered sadly long before
the tide might carry it to the shore.

To you my sister never born,
we, from the same womb that were sprung,
discovered you each in separate ways,
one by clarity of dream,
one by dowser's pendulum.

Here was set aside for you
in this small corner of the earth
family, school and growing up,
but that to which we all aspire
was never tempered in your fire.

You, the smallest of the three,
bright as a button as befits the last one out,
to cope with siblings far too big
might well have given laughter and refrain
and shaken loose our family pain.

But yet without you, so we staggered on,
a group of parts that never learnt to fit,
while other homes ignored the doctors' plea,
had children anyway, spread their limbs,
created life to follow all their whims.

And so my sister, nameless and unknown,
these words I've struggled long enough to find,
and now with little more to say
can only wait for when we meet
in that strange land that needs no feet.

62. Jug And Trousers

They cut the tree in slices where it lay,
but first the saw was used to bring it down.
I cannot tell you now what tree it was,
only it stood as slender as a mast.

The logs we planned to roast upon the fire.
My mother asked the men to cut them so.
After they left there lay a little pile,
so one by one we stacked them in the shed.

But as we slowly gathered what was left,
they were, we saw, of every different shape.
Tho either end was open to the light,
the circles altered each with limbs or bends.

One was cut where there had been a branch
that made a jug that stood upon its base.
And so we did pretend to pour the sap
that never flowed as smooth as any milk.

Another was cut where once the tree had forked
to form a pair of trousers, upside-down.

Reversed again it seemed to question Y,
just why the tree had suffered such a fate?

One came from where the trunk was rather thin -
an anchor, but an anchor that would float,
and so was better meant to be a rake
to draw the other sections from the heap.

And yet again, a fork quite on the slant
which made a sort of foot complete with heel,
and tho it stood more firmly than the rest
with this we stomped flat-footed on the ground.

Of course there were the lesser twigs and leaves,
quickly destroyed by burning near the stump.
There was no final rattle or collapse.
The tree had ceased as soon as it was felled.

But this we did not think of when we played -
or rather worked to clear the mess away.
Such is the end of trees and other plants
that do not see the passing of the light.

Perhaps the logs were weeping in the sun
never to be attached as one again,
their death a slow and numbing drying out,
but we heard nothing, gave it not a thought.

15/9/09

63. The First Shot

(for Barry Beevers)

So we went out
with the gun in our hands,
up the slope to the very top

And into the wood beyond,
looking for something as a target,
just to see it could be done.

A single chaffinch in a tree
was watching us, paused for a moment,
but innocent, on a twig of tasks,

and we took aim and fired,
though I can't remember who
since we were both equally guilty,

and the bird fell
exactly where we found it, still alive,
its head terribly mangled

and its left eye hanging down,
blind and useless,
but the rest of its body beautiful.

So there was nothing to be done
except for a stone to finish it off
which we did speedily.

But I'm glad now that we found it,
and didn't go on with our shooting,
so that we saw the meaning

of our meaningless crime,
so that we learnt the shame of it
with the very first shot.

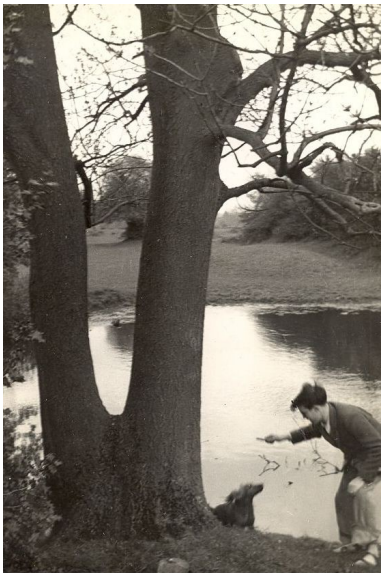
Here was a creature that had died
but not in vain, that with its last breath
it saved all the others.

64. At Blue House Lane

From my old school in the valley
you could see the church upon the hill,
surrounded by a clump of trees,
I'm sure you'd see it still.
But from one particular corner
at the far end of the field
the trees took on the shape of a heart,
and I understood from the very start
just who was there revealed.

But I never did keep a tally
with each time that I took my place
to watch the hill that stood above
and conjure up her face.
There came a particular morning,
such things occur in the lives of men,
when the trees were pruned and the shape was lost
and the very same week I found to my cost
she'd left, and never was seen again.

By The Sound Of Princely Hooves
Introduction



My father, Sydney Abraham and our dog, Bill by Ivy Cottage Pond, late 1930's

The title of this third and last section of the 'Tapestry' refers to my hunch that the Church Lane 'ghost', which quite a few people in Tatsfield have claimed to have witnessed as the sound of passing horse's hooves, is far older than the present belief that this was Guy Fawkes (or even Bates, another co-conspirator) fleeing justice for his part in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605.

Neither man was anywhere near Tatsfield at that time, Fawkes himself was actually in custody from the moment the Plot was 'discovered' while Bates was fleeing northwards into the Midlands. However, I do believe that the thread that connects them to Tatsfield's 'ghost' is the notion that they were traitors. The real 'traitor' was more likely Owain Lawgoch, son of the then squire of the village, the family of royal Welsh descent, who had traveled to France to fight against the English in the Hundred

Years War. With ex-patriot Welsh soldiers already fighting for the King of France he was hoping to lead a rebellion at sometime and thus regain the crown for Wales. Actually he was assassinated by a supposed friend who was sent out by Edward the Third to get rid of him. As soon as Lawgoch was dead, agents of the English King arrived in the village and totally destroyed his house which had stood by the church just behind where Streets' farm still stands today. I feel it is much more likely that the 'ghost' is meant to be his spirit riding up and down Church Lane, trying to find his lost home. There is no way of proving this, of course, but to me it seems a much more logical source for the story.

I am indebted to my friend Dorothy Burgess of Southport in Lancs who suggested that this whole collection could at long last be published on-line, which is where you have found it. I also wish to offer thanks my wife Ruth and our son Luke for giving me all the support I have needed to put this whole collection together. And thanks also to Bob David, the present editor of the Tatsfield Parish Magazine, who has kept a lively interest in the making of this book, especially in its later stages. Finally thanks to my good neighbour Dave for helping collate and publish this collection. This last foreword was completed 8/9/2012.

65. Ebenezer Inn

In our post-war living-room
behind the Swedish range,
there was an open fire-place
like a theatre with a stage.

The fire was a water-heater
and worked as an oven too
but there instead we used it
only to heat the room.

It was a kind of monster
that dominated all.
There was no way to move it.
It was there for ever more.

Besides, the house was council owned,
for which we paid in rent.
Nothing could ever be altered
without permission sought.

My father was a painter
by trade and hobby too.
He saw a way to soften
a thing too big to move.

He'd decorate the hollow
in which the oven sat,
to bring a note of levity
into our humble patch.

And so he painted extra pipes,
their shadows all awry,
with bits of trees and blossoms too,
and other things besides.

There's much I've now forgotten
but one thing does remain,
an inn-sign showed his grand-dad there,
who'd been a publican.

Ebenezer Abraham,
that was the patriarch's name,
and so a sign was added
for The Ebenezer Inn.

I doubt if ever such a pub
was seen in his home county,
but here my dad created
a thing of some hilarity.

His first work as an artist
was painting signs for pubs,
direct and simple, to the point,
to catch the eyes of plebs.

And here was a very personal joke,
a bearded Victorian man,
to represent his ancestor
with Ebenezer Inn.

So when we moved, the work remained,
and those that lived there next
probably painted the whole thing out

to cover up our tracks.

Now poor old Ebenezer
is lost to public view,
and only a man with x-ray eyes
would ever come to know.

(At 5 Whitewood Cottages)

66. Thunder

We used to watch the thunder-storms,
the flash and then the rumble,
as we sat safely from the rain
under the front of our cottage,
stare out over the wooded slope,
crying aloud in wild pleasure
at the brightest displays,
counting the seconds, one, two and three,
till we heard the first clap
that told us just how near
or far the strike had been.
But I only realised long after
that my mother had meant it so
in case I grew frightened of the storms,
frightened of nothing really
since mostly this was nature
shouting its head off,
breaking the static in the air,
making its own fireworks.
In any case, at that time,

there were far more fearsome thunders
to endure, the siren warning
with its rising and falling,
the rumble of the bombers
high above us in the night,
cohorts on their way to towns
and cities further north,
but most immediate for us,
the foul uneven anger
of the dying doodle-bugs,
which we often saw,
and from which we learnt by sound
those that were ready to peter out,
the final splutter, then the awful silence
broken only by the bang.

(At Pilgrim Cottage, Nineham's Road)

67. Owain Lawgoch

He came from my village
in England, and yet
was as Welsh as ever could be.

His surname meant a Hand of Red.
So was it a birthmark,
steady in the sun,

or the scar of a crime committed,
like the hands of Macbeth
that water would not clean?

So it's Lawgoch forever,
tho not a name behind his back,
but that which he used for himself

even as another pursued him
to the wars in France, pursued him
in the pay of the English king,

befriended him until that day,
and just when least expected,
he stole the dagger of his friend

and thrust it into his heart.
Therefore, as Lawgoch bled to death,
who then had hands of Red?

68. Our Luki

(with thanks to Ruth)

She was a mad cat, our Luki,
and extraordinary for her size.

Small and black, she was the best mother,
took to her work
with seriousness and joy,
trained her kittens with live baby rabbits,
but also brought home their parents,
with not a mark to show how they had died.

It being war-time,
when every gift was welcome,
my mum would drop them in the pot,
in a stew with barley,
though our valiant supplier
always had her share.

One summer, we went off for a fortnight,
left a window open so she could come and go,
and returned to find the living-room floor
like a charnel house,
odd bits of creature left half chewed,
and yet another bunny
lolloping sadly round the carpet.

Her patch was immense.
Sometimes we'd see her
up at the church,

nearly a mile across the fields,
and surely she went much further
in search of who knows what.

Most days
she was the perfect companion,
but now and then
her eyes would blaze
and we'd know to throw her off
before she'd sink both teeth and claws in flesh
in a strange and private rage.

Did she forget for a moment
that at times she was meant to be tame?

She died at nine years old,
burnt out.
With many of the village her descendants,
this was her true success.
For me, as a small boy,
she was the first Cat ever.

69. In My Lifetime

When I was small, below Clark's Lane
you could see the Roman road,
it's surface bare to the elements
as if it were freshly trod.
Perhaps at any moment
a squad of legionaries
would turn the corner, full of life,

beneath the leaves and berries.

But I never knew just what it was,
only it ran so smooth,
easy enough to walk its length
just like a modern path.
And yet it came from nowhere,
ran on for a little while,
only to disappear again
before it reached the stile.

And now it's the twenty-first century.
My hair is turning white.
I've parked the car beside the road -
a little jaunt, I thought.
But then I could not find the track,
the foliage grew too strong,
and a barbed-wire fence cut right across
where the blackbird trilled his song.

On every side, the thicket
completely barred my way.
With all the branches overhead
the sky was hard to see.
There was no open stretch to walk,
nor any shred of hope
that I might catch a glimpse
of Caesar's men upon the slope.

31/5/04

70. Uvedale

These were the Lords of Titsey Place.
From earlier times they came,
and if we search in the records
it's easy to find their name.

Sometime in the seventeenth century
they sold to the Gresham family,
who carried the common grasshopper
as a marker for their story.

But an Uvedale came to Enfield
soon after they lost the estate.
Sixteen hundred and seventy
seems an appropriate date.

This was a Doctor Robert,
as all the experts show,
who rented the Palace as a school
that boys might learn and grow.

But it seems he was also a gardener,
and this was a rare combination,
who nurtured his trees and bushes
as he fostered their education.

He planted the earliest cedar here
by the main street of the Town.
It stood till the Pearson Brothers
built their shop, and cut it down.

Now there's Uvedale Road in Oxted,
beneath the hills of chalk,
and Uvedale House and Cottage
that stand in Holly Walk.

But today, in the London phone book,
no Uvedale can be found.
The Lords of Titsey, like the wolf,
have long gone underground.

(Written in Enfield Town itself)

71. Jam Jars

There was a row of jam jars
on the stone steps
to the cottage

and I filled them each with water,
poured from one to another,
slurped them in the sunshine

till suddenly, the siren wailed
and my mother pulled me
into the Morrison shelter

that was a steel box around the bed
and there we waited for the all-clear,
but long before at last it came

quite suddenly, we heard
the shattering of glass
the breaking of jam jars

with the scattering of water
over the edges,
splashing and washing

the steps clean of healthy dust
where the shrapnel ricocheted,
strafed where I'd played

but the water, on dry concrete,
was not enough to cool
the angry heat of metal.

72. How Nineham Got Its Name

Nine old cottages down in the valley.
The wind blew in one rickety gate,
so then there were eight.

Eight old cottages down in the valley.
Thunder and lightning came from heaven,
and then there were seven.

Seven old cottages down in the valley.
But the landlord, as usual, was up to his tricks,
so then there were six.

Six old cottages down in the valley.
A great swarm of bees chose one for a hive,
and then there were five.

Five old cottages down in the valley.
A body was found tucked under the floor,
so then there were four.

Four old cottages down in the valley.
Wood-worm and rot crept in from the tree,
and then there were three.

Three old cottages down in the valley.
But one was all paper and second-hand glue,
so then there were two.

Two old cottages down in the valley.
The last just faded away in the sun,

and then there was one.

And the one that was left
was the best ever was,
and that's where we lived, forever because.....

(Nineham occurs elsewhere in several places in Surrey and is actually from an old Anglo-Saxon term meaning land enclosed)

73. Skyfield

What I remember chiefly
was a place on three levels -
first the Great Valley, that lay
beyond the edge of the chalk,
where the old Roman Road
ran out across the fields,
yet only visible now and then
when the light snow of winter
sometimes showed it in the hollows.
A Valley laid out like a plain,
once a great Forest
but still easy to imagine
since everywhere there were so many trees.
And when we stood on the very scarp
the whole was stretched out, undulating,
till the last line of hills before the sea,
hidden on their southern side.

Next was the level
on which we lived, cut

like the fingers of a hand
with valleys higher up and slopes between,
more woods and fields, but
many tracks still rough
and not made up, great puddles
even in dry weather, and always
the clay, thick with flints,
the small scattered village,
the church and school away
from the rest, and our cottage
in the valley, two tiny rooms
with a roof of tin, and all
on a slope like everywhere else,
up and down to the shops,
up and down whichever way we turned.

But forever hanging above us was the sky,
the third level, and who knows but the busiest,
for this was where clouds and sunsets passed,
where there were frequent thunderstorms
and changes in weather in all seasons,
where birds flew, and bats
flitted by in the evening,
and above them came the planes,
the markers of war, doodle-bugs
and balloons to catch them,
fighters fresh from the aerodrome,
and often at night, the rumble of bombers
on their way to the City, keeping
us waiting till the all-clear came,
a siren far more welcome than the sound before,
that single tone that turned us back on ourselves
and into the depths of sleep.

(This piece links several others together in one)

74. Climbing

When I was young I climbed trees,
and breathed in the country air,
carving my name on the highest branch
to show that I'd been there.

Then, when a man, I climbed ladders,
and painted the frames and the sills.
But I'm not so sure I'd do it again
despite my various skills.

And now that I'm old I climb steps
and go in and out of the door,
and hope I still have many a year
before I climb no more.

75. Leith Hill

A mountain is only a mountain
when it's over a thousand feet,
and Leith Hill is a mountain
that felt it was incomplete.

For it knew it was never too big, too big,
still higher would do the trick,
so someone in all their wisdom
created a tower of brick.

So it grew and it grew

but never enough.
There were too many feet
and the growing was tough,
and the growing was oh so tough.

Now the tower they made fell short, fell short,
the building just came to a stop,
till someone, almost as a joke,
put a flag-pole on the top.

But despite all the human endeavour,
the problem was never resolved,
though tall and taller yet again
was how that hill evolved.

So it grew and it grew
a little each day,
as the wind that blew
from the wild, wild west,
did its best to blow it away.

And the people who live in the county
when they see it from far, so far,
like to repeat how a mountain
tried to reach the distant star.

For there's many an individual,
and most would leave it unsaid,
whose lives are like the mountain
that tried to lift its head.

So it grew and it grew
like a child at play,

but you mustn't get too above yourself,
or try to climb to a higher shelf,
is what the people say.

But now that the ice is melting
and the sea is beginning to rise,
each year it's getting so hard, so hard
to measure for such a prize.

For since we count from the sea itself
while we're down here standing still,
the waves will rob our glorious height
turn a mountain into a hill.

So it grew and it grew
but never enough,
it wasn't a mountain
and all that stuff.
There were too many feet
to make it complete,
and the coming and all the going,
and the knowing was oh so tough.

76. Poem On Plain Paper

It was the vaguest memory,
his father carrying him
on his shoulder,
his father's left shoulder though,
he remembered distinctly.

No more than half a minute,
bearing him through the gate,
but it was the first paragraph
in a long story
filling the valley right to its brim.

And it was the earliest time
he recalled his father,
before this dad, like so many others,
went off and left them both
to the days and nights of the War.

Yet his father, stationed in the Middle East,
only ever saw one bullet fired
while the two of them lay in the darkness
and the bright sun of the air-raids,
tucked up in their shelter round the bed.

And seeing it all again,
he promised himself
that one day he would return,
would do his best to write it down,
first, last, and everything in between.

And though his father did come home,
only later did the son learn
that the War had never ended,
that in all those years he'd stood and waited
by the gate to the rest of the world.

77. For Tatsfield Persons Only

(originally written for Rosemary and David Brown's grandchildren)

I come from Tittle-Tattlesfield,
high on the North Up-and-Downs,
where half the names might seem to spring
from out the mouths of clowns.

I lived on Ninety-Nineham Road
that ran from Ship-Shape Hill,
and though the house itself is gone
the road is running still.

There was Tingle-Tangle Castle.
There was Hot-and-Colgate Hall.
They packed a lot of funny names
into a place so small.

The posh end was at Ricketty Hill,
the shops were near the pond,
and Kemmersley-Karsey Valley led
to Begin-again Hill beyond.

There was Whitewash Lane and Bedlamstead
and Ten-Green-Botley Hill.
My word, the folk at Pains-Me-Field,
they certainly had their fill.

But there were some names, quite ordinary,
for serious-minded people,
like Hallilоo and Fickleshole,
and somewhere called Polesteeple.

78. Ballad Of Thomas Hook

Red how I want you, red.
Flames of the seven haystacks.
Orange and yellow they burn in the night
to twist his jealous heart.
Red is the shade of her hair,
auburn it shines in the sun,
as I walk the lane to trace her steps,
red, how I want you, red.

Green are the fields I pass,
blue is the sky above.
Why should he stand so much in our way?
He's her master, not even her pa.
Seven by seven she does all the work,
but still it is never enough.
Surely for him too pretty by half,
grey I don't want you, grey.

Red, how I need you, red.

White are the sails of the ship.
Seven long years across the wide sea,
transported for spoiling the hay.
But only one stack did I light,
I'd never have ruined
the whole of his store.
Black in the morning, black.

Gold, now I hold you, gold.
The seven long years are done.
Fierce was the sun that raged in the sky
on the far side of the world.
Now that I've served my time,
purple the rest of our days.
Let rain and the rainbow carry away
the tears of a colourless night.

After Lorca's 'Romance Sonambulo.' True story from Titsey/ Limpsfield recorded in Bertie Hammond's book of Tatsfield etc.

79. Beaconshaw

(for Tony Watson)

Because they dealt in secrets
they knew the end was near,
arranged to slip across the sea
while still the coast was clear.
That final meal together,
the taxi at the door,
the hurried parting late at night

as they fled from Beaconshaw.

If ever there be injustice
and you see it burning bright,
surely you do whatever you can
to put the matter right?
And because they dealt in secrets
it was easy to make things fit,
to share the knowledge that they had
with those left out of it.

But secrets stretch their fingers.
Secrets move with the tide.
Secrets have their roots in dreams
made manifest with pride.
Stand on a hill and shout it
to every passing cloud,
there cannot be truth without secrets
and it cannot be said too loud.

Now Beaconshaw is a country house
lies hidden away from the lane,
but such a night as when they fled
will never be seen again.
They hired the local taxi,
made sure the coast was clear,
and Melinda kissed her husband's lips
though now her time was near.

(Story of Burgess and Maclean fleeing from Britain to Russia)

80. Pathway

It was a public footpath
from off the village green,
where someone put a fence around
to claim it as his own.

His garden stretched the length of it,
but a garden far too slim.
He thought a little extra
would surely do no harm.

There was a legal precedent,
it's twelve years and a day,
to place a fence round common land
and wait as time goes by.

And if indeed the fence remains
and no-one breaks it through,
then after what's allotted
all other claims must go.

And so he hoped, and so he prayed
that none would contradict,
but take the longer walk instead
as if it were a fact.

But soon there arose some conflict,
a group of other folk,
who after days of grumbling,
responded to his cheek.

They made it known the time and day
that they'd remove the fence,
to walk the path their neighbour blocked.
It only needed once.

And this they did, most civilly,
a dozen men or more,
armed with cutters for the wire,
while others came to stare.

Had they learnt that freedom calls
in many different shades,
just as the peasants knew so well
who saved the Surrey Woods?

The Levellers and the Chartists,
the stories then and now,
of how we've always struggled on
to find the right way through?

And he who'd made his private bid,
and stood by the open door,
behaved with the utmost courtesy
to all who gathered there.

81. The True Story Of Charlie Muller

Charlie Muller was his name,
though he never guessed,
the name we used when he was near,
for secrecy was best.
A private code, a nonsense term,
by which we called him to his face,
and never once did he suspect
his was a special case.

A most abusive foreman
the factory could employ,
he'd sworn at others every day
since he was still a boy.
All those who stood beneath him,
however old or young,
could find themselves receiving
a lashing from his tongue.

The factory was in business
making quality tiles.
The work was hard, but comradeship
kept everyone in smiles.
Only Charlie Muller
was a blot upon the sky,
and everybody felt the same
whenever he passed by.

His own true name was never used
for that would turn his head,
so people found another phrase

that we could use instead.
So Charlie Muller, he did this,
and Charlie Muller that,
and never did the fellow twig
what we were getting at.

He was the foreman loader,
in charge of filling trucks,
and all day long the air was filled
with bleeps and ruddy clucks.
The men themselves were hardly sweet
in how they called a spade,
but Charlie Muller beat them all
when we was on parade.

One shift, it was beyond a joke
for those in the loading bay.
He used his tongue more like a fist
at all who came his way.
The men declared enough was enough,
this time they'd go on strike,
and Charlie Muller, for his pain,
could take a running hike!

There had been other warnings
with Charlie Muller told
that if he did not mend his ways
the Union would be called.
That may have helped for a little while
but today it was no joke.
All the loaders were agreed
as one to stop their work.

One truck was left just three tiles short,
so the man who was at fault
dared to load them up himself.
The factory ground to a halt.
Even the men on piece-work,
with orders turned by hand,
as soon as they heard the story
were willing to make a stand.

Of course, there was a meeting.
The management was informed.
Here was a serious incident
with Charlie Muller blamed.
And so it was decided
that he wouldn't get the sack,
but as a foreman in the plant
they'd never take him back.

At once the strike subsided,
the work no more delayed,
while Charlie had a minor job
with a barrow and a spade.
It seems that justice had been done.
To make the punishment fit,
the man who swore at half the world
had to clear up all the ----!

(Incident at Redland Tiles)

82. Princes Of This Parish

(with thanks to Stuart Taylor)

The record only gives their Norman names,
listing them all as vassals to the King.
This is the merest fragment of a tale.

Edward had made the youngest swear an oath.
He'd lose the throne but gain instead some land.
The record only gives their Norman names.

He'd lose the throne of Wales, but save his life,
and then perhaps his son could live in peace.
This is the merest fragment of a tale.

And so it passed, but sons of sons remember,
and one whose hand was red ran off to France.
The record only gives their Norman names.

There with Joan of Arc he was a hero,
until a spy was sent with dagger drawn.
This is the merest fragment of a tale.

Their mansion now is nothing but a field.
The village had forgotten it was there.
The record only gives their Norman names.
This is the merest fragment of a tale.

83. Temples Emporium

Temples Emporium stood square on the hill,
flowing with movement, though outwardly still.
It shone with all colour, all manner of shape,
and never for once did it dream of escape.

From there you could hear any bird of the trees,
all of them singing their best in the breeze,
both blackbird and robin, both throstle and finch,
even the phoenix perhaps at a pinch.

There you could smell every flower of the field,
bluebell and orchid, wild roses revealed.
There you could witness the coming of spring,
each season tied up in a bow of fine string.

There you could touch every leaf of the forest,
hold in your fingers the fruit of the harvest.
There you could feel the wind from the south.
Temples Emporium opened its mouth.

Of course they sold tea, they sold sugar and spice.
Whatever you needed they'd get in a trice.
But it seemed that the whole of the country around
came in through the door and was yours by the pound.

My mother and I climbed the hill of Polesteeple
till we found the great mansion that sang like a chapel.
You could spend every day looking here, looking there
at all the wild creatures that prowled by the stair.

Now at Temples Corner, suburban and small,
nothing remains of the palace at all.

The trees have grown short and the phoenix has flown.
Where is the Emporium that once was our own?

So I'll stand on the highest high point on the Downs,
look over three counties and all that surrounds.
From the depths of belief to the flesh of opinion,
I'll pray the Emporium come back from oblivion.

84. An Oxted Recital

(with thanks to Beatrice Harrison, who played the cello)

A cello and a nightingale
sat down one night to play,
with every intention in their hearts
to sing till break of day.
The nightingale polished his breathing,
the cello stretched out her bow,
and when they believed they were both in tune,
they declared they were ready to go.

The cello knew a piece by Brahms
but the nightingale favoured a jig,
and so they argued back and forth
till the moon arose, quite big.
Then they agreed on Mendelsohn
or maybe Peters and Lee,
but they felt, whenever they started off,
they were each in a different key.

But all the while, unknown to them,
a team of engineers
recorded everything they did
as music to the ears.
And so it went out on the BBC
more than half across the world,
a nightingale and a cello
with all their gifts unfurled.

And there in a Surrey garden
as the moon and the night sped on,
our two intrepid players found,
as a team, they couldn't get on.
While listeners to the wireless
thought the instrument and the bird
were one of the finest duos
perhaps they'd ever heard.

(From a series of incidents in a garden in Oxted
recorded before the Second World War)

85. Queen Of The Woods

There in the middle of next door's garden
stood the Tree,
a tree of walnuts, foreign fruit they say,
full of legends down from ancient times,
and the garden, then only a smallholding,
had geese with chickens and ducks,
and cattle chained wherever there was grass,
enough to feed them for a while,
enough to make ends meet.
And there on the tilt of that piece of land
the walnut-tree watched the comings
and goings, and filled her life with silence.

And I never forgot the dapples and the shade
she spread beneath herself in that other garden,
with poles stacked against her
like a teepee, and always knew
that she was something special,
that she was Queen of the Woods,
even tho she was not on our patch,
and on through the tears of growth
and terror she stood there, watching and listening
with all her tiny double-brains, the days
passing like the flickering of a war-time film,
yet as healthy as the heart-beats of a child.

But when we went back, much later,
my wife, my cousin and myself,
to scatter the ashes, the walnut-tree
was still there, listening and watching,

the wigwam of timber long since gone,
but the fence moved over, and the garden wider
so that the Tree stood waiting
right on the border of both plots
now owned by others, tho I swear the branches
moved a little in the wind when I called out
to my friend,
when we left the urn by chance in the sun.

16/10/12

86. My Grand-Dad And His Musical Saw

(in memory of George William Bromwich)

My grand-dad played the musical saw.
He'd hold it between his knees
and bend the blade this way and that
for different notes and keys.

The bow was carefully resined.
He drew it back and forth
and thus a strange but haunting voice
was heard upon the Earth.

And as he played, his heart beat on,
and as he played, he breathed,
and we who sat and listened caught
the magic he bequeathed.

In ancient times the arrow-stick,
curved by a stretch of thread,

evolved into the fiddle
or was plucked as a lute instead.

From ancient times a piece of grass
held tight between two thumbs,
became the whistle and the fife,
while sticks beat out the drums.

But my grand-dad played the humble saw,
the same as he used for wood,
and whether for song or carpentry
his artistry was good.

And so the stories gathered
how he entertained at home,
how he never played beyond the door,
or thought perhaps to roam.

But when my grand-dad reached the end,
as if to mark the score,
a coffin-maker plied his trade,
with hammer, nails and saw.

Yet no-one brought a blade of steel
to bend against the bow,
to sing at least for one last time
before we let him go.

The saw itself, his faithful friend
who'd seen him through much pain,
went back into the tool-box
and was never played again.

87. Family Photo (2)

Man with the dog plays with the stick by the water,
dog with the stick leaps in the pond by the tree.
Stick in the water breaks the trees reflection,
tree looks down upon the other three.
But all of them now are gone, and gone forever,
only the photo in my hand holds them still together.

And all the while it seems we never knew
that here was a pool of ancient royal import,
that when the farmer came to fill it in,
no one raised a voice or spared a thought.
And all of them now are gone, and gone forever,
only the photo in my hand holds them still together.

(Based on the photo in the introduction to this section)

88. Black Dagger

(for Tim and Soz Holland)

Black Dagger Wood
was where we often strayed.
Black Dagger beeches
in the Black Dagger shade.

Black Dagger birds
made jungle sounds each day,

and foxes big as tigers
sometimes joined our play.

Black Dagger pirates
hid behind each leaf,
with cutlasses and pistols,
there we played the thief.

We climbed, we ran, we argued,
we shouted all around.
We breathed the very shadows
from everything we found.

The Black was just as midnight dark
as the hollow of an eye,
the Dagger sharp and arrowed
as the dapples from the sky.

Indeed, the place was full of light
and rounded everywhere,
but still we called the Dagger Black
and most when we were there.

Black Dagger in the beginning,
Black Dagger was the one.
And we were the first to set our feet
where the cover cut the sun.

The Forest of Black Dagger
stretched as far as the eye could see.
The days passed by forever
till we went home for tea.

(Childhood name for the woods in Kemsley Valley)

89. The Sanctuary Ring

If the story was really true,
who stole the ring then
from off the village church?
Not a tiny band of gold
but a circle of iron
too large for any finger,
and yet more precious still,
that hung from the wall
outside by the door,
that those maybe
who fled retribution,
or ran from angry neighbours in a throng,
might seize the metal, if they could,
and claim asylum where they stood.

And if the story was really true,
local children had their own version,
cried Fainits,
with the fingers crossed,
a safety valve against injustice
or part of the games they played.
And so, all down the long years
the ring waited,
a symbol of safety
in a world of cruelty,
a thing that clacked against the stones
if anyone chose to swing it,
till someone came along one day
and simply cleared the piece away.

And yet perhaps this sanctuary
was just someone's imagination,
that in truth the ring was only there
to tether a horse in passing,
and now, in the age of the car,
it had fully outgrown its use?
It should have been treasured
as a slice of history,
but with no thought of checking,
perhaps the wall was tidied up,
made ship-shape for the eye.
There was no haven for the ring itself.
We let it go. Our silence was the thief,
if the story was really true.

90. By Nineham Head

(with thanks to Beryl Baigent)

He stood at the top of Nineham's green valley,
in the very last dip of Beagley's field.
The scarp was before him but still lay quite hidden,
but a spring at his feet was newly revealed.

And the land was all tundra, still fresh from the glaciers,
cold but not frozen, the beginning of thaw.
Everywhere mosses, then grass, a few birches.
A pale wintry sun was all that he saw.

And he bent to the water, where something was shining.
It gleamed in the bubbles, a shape caught his eye,
put his hand in the fountain, where it came to the surface
and drew out a flint that he raised to the sky.

The flint was well fashioned, still wet from the river
and created to fit in the palm of his hand.
A craftsman had made it, had used it and lost it,
perhaps when the snow still covered the land.

And he looked at it closely, saw the maker had picked
a stone that was marked with the print of a shell,
knew that the flint had therefore been sacred,
that for some secret purpose the maker chose well.
Then into the water, right up to the elbow,
he buried the arm that was empty and bare.
The water was freezing, but still he was probing,
till he caught on some weeds he felt growing there.

And he pulled, and they came right up to the surface,

but there in the light he saw they weren't green.
Instead it was fur, and as brown as a berry,
the darkest and longest of fur he had seen.

And after the fur there came out a creature,
tall as a house as it stood by his side.
All its face was extended, its nose elongated
and two mighty teeth thrust forth from inside.

He blinked as he looked, confused but delighted.
He knew that here was a mammoth of old.
One of those creatures from a time before history,
of unanswered questions and tales to be told.

But the mammoth surveyed him, calmly stood watching,
the water still dripping all down her right side.
And there in the sunlight, both their breath coming cloudy,
the two of them waited till one might decide.

And then she was speaking, but not even whispering,
the words in his head, his ears full of wind.
"The knife in your hand was the one that destroyed me.
Here in this valley your ancestors sinned.

"I was the last, the last of my nation,
here in this valley I wept for my kind.
This blade on a spear put an end to my weeping,
brought me, in dying, some small peace of mind.

"But he who eclipsed me, took me out of my sadness,
knew what he'd done with the blade that he made,
decided to offer the flint as a sacrifice,
the flint with a shell, where you hold it, inlaid.

"Out of the depths of the earth sprang the water

and into the flow of the spring fell the knife,
but though he made peace, so he thought, with the underworld,
he never knew peace for the rest of his life.

"And now you have found it just as he left it,
have brought it once more all into the light,
my spirit must follow wherever you take it,
or the sacrifice made can never be right.

"Don't worry my friend, I won't cause you a problem,
you're not stuck with a mammoth wherever you go.
I shall alter my form, you will find me invisible.
But keep the flint handy as something to show."

Then out of her mouth there came a black raven
that flew in a circle all round his head,
while the mammoth grew small, as small as a chicken,
then smaller again, like a spider instead.

The raven flew down and sat on his shoulder
as the mammoth, so tiny, now scuttled away.
And there as they stood, man and raven together,
he waited to see what the other might say.

"I am the bird that fed on the mammoth
there as she lay with the wound in her heart.
Her flesh is my flesh and so I must follow.
However she wants me that's where I start.

"She is not in the water, she's not gone forever,
but still she is with us, wherever we go."
Thus spoke the raven that stood on his shoulder,
its voice not a croak, but clearly and low.

"I am the raven, the bird of creation,

so say the people who live on the ice.
As the glaciers receded, in the birches I settled.
The living I make in this land will suffice.

"I am also the bird whose name is this river,
the River of Ravens that flows to the Thames.
The river that once began at this fountain
but now only flows in the deepest of dreams.

"As all the ice melted the chalk became porous.
The water then sank to the clay underneath.
That left all the valleys as dry as you know them,
to be covered in downland, in beeches and heath.

"So the river came out much nearer the city,
but long before city was thought of, of course.
The land was all forest and full of wild creatures
where my family and others were clearly a force.

"So the water at Keston was known as our river
though in truth we were strong everywhere in this land,
but just like the mammoth our numbers have dwindled
as people destroyed us, and our woods, out of hand.

"There's only one place you'll now find the raven,
at the Tower of London, our sanctuary home,
and they say if we're gone then all London will follow,
so they make sure we stay, too happy to roam.

"The flint in your hand with the shell marked upon it,
this is a sign of things yet to be,
things that might happen if people aren't careful
and don't have the sense to learn what they see.

"This spring is an image, the water a phantom.
As soon as you leave all this will be gone.

But the flint in your hand will remain with you always.
Keep it forever, now this time has begun.

"As the earth grows the warmer from all your endeavour,
so water shall rise to the top of the chalk,
and then when it's ready it will break through the surface.
All through the fields you will see a new brook.

"So the rivers again shall return to the valleys,
valleys that once were of downland and dry,
and the mammoth that sleeps in the land of the beeches
shall wake from her slumber, shall rise by and by.

"And this is a warning for all human beings.
When the water breaks through you'll have traveled too far.
The mammoth returned is there to remind us
of all you're destroying here under the star.

"You think you are safe, that there's no-one to stop you
with all of your enemies routed and gone.
But Gaya herself, Mother Earth, she is waiting.
She lies there and watches the things you have done.

"She lies there and watches. You're just like the mammoth.
You're strong and you're many, most powerful of all.
But you still need to breathe, you need food, you need water.
Compared to our Mother you're still very small.

"Take the flint with the shell and show it to others.
Speak, if you can, of all you have heard.
Out of sight, out of mind, I'll stay with you always.
I'll speak to our Mother. I'll help spread the word."

And he stands at the top of Nineham's green valley.
In his heart he is altered, is not what he seems.
Now what he sees are the mammoth, the raven,
the flint in his hand, and magical streams.

And he knows he must turn, go back to the village,
discover once more the life he knew well,
must seek out the others most likely to listen,
and keep with him always the knife with the shell.

Must keep with him always the flint with the fossil
that was thrown in the spring as an object of power,
and then to be saved for the whole of humanity,
a guide for humanity's darkest hour.

So he knows he must turn and go back down the valley,
find others to share in the things that he's heard,
must tell what he knows and deal with resistance.
He will take a deep breath and find the first word....

25/5/03

End note

This third collection finally put together February 2009, but so me alterations and adjustments have been made September 2012.

Notes For A Tatsfield Tapestry

By The Field With The Round Corner

1 The Animals Of My Childhood. The earliest form of this piece dates from the seventies, when Ruth, myself and some friends were involved with consciousness-raising workshops. It relates to identification as a small child with all the animals that I saw around me. There was a real incident at Pilgrim Cottage when a rat got into the house and we ended up chasing it until it apparently escaped by getting into the open fireplace we used to heat up a traditional cast-iron bowl for boiling water. My mother lit the fire but we never found any remains. What the workshop produced was how much I had identified with the rat itself, something perfectly normal for a small child, but which I had probably repressed. This write-up, which is still not the whole picture, shows only too clearly how one of poetry's functions is to tell a story in as short a form as possible.

2 My First Banana. This comes directly from an incident in my Infants class at Tatsfield Primary School. A lot of people today have no idea that because of enemy blockades of the North Atlantic during the Second World War many items, like bananas, were completely unobtainable in Britain. Only a few examples got through, brought in by individuals.

3 Barrage Balloons. As part of the home defences,

also during the War, a line of barrage balloons was set up along the North Downs, as well as at other places, in order to catch and destroy as many flying bombs ("doodle-bugs") as possible before they got to London. Each balloon needed manning by Army personnel and there were several permanently established in Tatsfield during hostilities. The two balloons which we watched getting in a tangle were both based along Maesmaur Road.

4 Jack. This story occurred in the garden of The Red House, Goatsfield Road, date unknown. This property was my parents' last home in the village, their last home together anywhere.

5 Halliloo. This refers to a beautiful downland valley which lies close to Beech Farm on the Westerham-Croydon Road. Some years ago I heard that a consortium was going to take over part of this valley and turn it into a golf course, similar to the one that now dominates Tatsfield parish itself. At the time there was a campaign based in Woldingham against the development of this enterprise. I did send a copy of this piece to those people but never received a reply.

6 Healer. This refers to a real incident which happened to my mother on one occasion when she and my father were at the Ship Hotel enjoying a lunch-time tipple. My mother of course for most of her life had only one lung as a result of contracting TB during the Second World War.

7 Ship Field. This again is a real incident which occurred when 'Ship Field' was in its largest form during the War. The three people raking the grass were my mother Barbara, a young girl called Toni who used to stay with us from time to time from Balham, South London, and myself. The person bringing the well-earnt drinks was Ian Monteith, then proprietor of the Ship. We were working at the far end of the field, at the area now known as the Square.

8 Thames Pick. One thing I learnt to do during my teens was to 'beach-comb' the local fields in Tatsfield, a hobby I had developed while I was a living away at Tywyn, Merioneth, in North Wales. The local clay-with-flints is particularly rich, not only with many different marine fossils, but also with neolithic worked flints. A trained eye can soon pick out scattered worked fragments like small scrapers, arrow-heads, or hand-axes. On one occasion I found a particularly unusual tool which I took to one of the major London Museums where it was identified as a 'Thames pick'. Furthermore, no-one had found such a piece so far from the Thames area, thus indicating there had been movement up the Ravensbourne valley. There was a write-up about the find in the Sevenoaks Chronicle which can no doubt still be traced. I was about sixteen at the time, and the reporter who wrote the piece was Mr Reid.
The piece I had found was later donated to the small museum which Mr Hammond established at Tatsfield School. There I thought it was safe, but unfortunately I have recently discovered that the

whole collection has since completely disappeared. This is a lost for everyone, but especially the children of the village. I do hope someone starts a new museum for the area.

9 1944. This piece is firmly placed in that corner of Ship Field which is now covered by Shipfield Close. That is where I stood and watched the planes, while it dawned on me pretty quick that I was watching something momentous and from there I ran down through the path in Ship Wood, which still exists, to Pilgrim Cottage in Ninehams Road where my mother was already standing and watching in the garden. The planes, which pretty well filled the sky, took a whole day and a night to pass.

10 Treasure Trove. Not one of my best pieces, but it records a number of 'digging' incidents from the War. The 'hoard' of coins, I was told, had been found at the bottom of Hunts' Bank (also known as Daisy Bank) quite specifically on the left hand edge, looking up. Hunt's Bank is now part of someone's garden which lies next to Treeview, the present name of Pilgrim Cottage.
The poem also refers to how we got rid of rubbish during the War, by burying it. I have no recollection of such stuff being carried away properly, as it is today. I have no idea what the bones were under our cottage and I have never heard of anything more being found by Barry Watson when he knocked the building down in the seventies.

11 Mr Stevens. I wrote the original version of this

piece on a train journey from Manchester to London, as I remember, and it is based on what I recall my father telling me about this gentleman, as well as Doris Geary's reference to him in her 'Tales of Tatsfield'. The example I mention of his work could once be seen in the very last corner of Ship Wood as part of the embankment of Nineham Road itself, but I question now whether this can be discovered, since on my very recent visit to the village (August, 2009) the trees have now extended all over the open space that once existed between the Chestnuts and Ship Wood itself. Mr Stevens appeared to have operated during the first half of the twentieth century.

12 Lost Cat. Another real incident reported to me by my mother, which happened at The Red House, Goatsfield Road.

13 Goatsfield. This was written after an evening out listening to the Liverpool Poets perform at the Northern College of Music in Manchester. The image I had as I wrote it was the sloping corner which lies just by The Red House, that is, right where Tangland Castle had once existed.

14 Cuckoo. Now I live in Manchester I never hear the cuckoo, and I miss it very much. What set this piece off was watching one of Ingmar Bergman's films on television. Somewhere there's a cuckoo calling which sounds like a cuckoo clock! I consider this poem one of my better pieces.

15 Fly-Past. Tatsfield suffered greatly in the fifties

from being so close to Biggin Hill, which at that time was still owned by the RAF. The noise pollution was exactly as described in the piece.

16 An Evening At The WI. I've always wanted this piece to have a clearer rhyming form, but this is the way it came out and I haven't been able to improve it. The incident was just as I have described. There were a lot of kids of my age there (early teens) but the only person other I can clearly remember was Iris Hilary. It would be good if anyone else recalled what happened.

17 Snow. I consider this a major piece in the collection because of what it represents. The specific slope described is the second half of where the old path crossed Ninehams Valley at Green Hill. It was the slope we climbed to come out of the Valley and at the top there was a stile which took you on into the field which contained Ivy Cottage Pond. With the advent of the golf course it is not so easy to find your way through, although I'm told that if you know where you are going the path is still easy to follow. Since first writing this I have discovered that the golf course has indeed been finished many years ago, and furthermore, the ancient footpath has never been cut or stopped. However, some years ago I myself did try to walk back to the village from the church while a some golfers were playing on that field. I could find no way through where the stile used to be and was forced to turn left and follow a new track which skirted the top end of Ninehams Valley and then brought me to the village side of the

old scouts' hut and through a gate onto Approach Road. As far as I could see, the path had been permanently cut.

18 Journey. Soon after the War, when my sister was born, my mother was ill in hospital with TB. At that time I was farmed out to grandparents, first to Lewisham and then to Tywyn, Merioneth. This was before the coming of antibiotics and for such a disease a great many sufferers either died or spent a very long time getting better. My mother was in hospital for three years, but lived on, minus one lung. For some reason my father chose not to tell me about my new sister until she was actually born – hence this piece, but my mother was horrified when she heard my side of the story.

19 A Tree Speaks. There really was a tree in Ship Wood when I was a child which some of us called 'Chair' because one of its lower branches was twisted in a funny shape and could be sat in fairly comfortably. It may indeed be still there, close to the path, as the poem says. But will any of the children of the village still know of it? I understand that with changes in social attitudes since the Second World War not many now play in that part of the village any more. I remember how in our days, apart from other people's own gardens, as children we went and played everywhere!

20 Mist. This was written as a class exercise at Peter Sansom's weekly writers' group at Holmfirth, West Yorkshire, which I attended for some years in

the late eighties. I seem to remember that Peter gave us the title and then we were supposed to get writing. His three rules on these occasions were, 'Don't stop, don't think, don't try to rhyme.' Some wonderful pieces were produced in this way by everybody and Peter is a marvelous teacher. He has taught me more than anyone else the business of writing poetry.

21 Untitled: Plane Crash. This is actually about a post-war airliner crash in the big field directly opposite Beech Farm on the Westerham-Croydon Road and therefore quite close to Halliloo Valley. There were a lot of pictures in the national press but I remember clearly the three-pronged propellor sticking out of the ground both from the media, and for real! That itself dates it as pretty early as it wasn't a jet. It was probably flying south from what was then Croydon Airport. Peter Sansom liked the idea of the eyes of the cars looking shocked as seen from the point of view of the crash itself.

22 Tank (2). Another piece which could have been stronger. I think the poem explains itself but the tank had been placed at the bottom of the valley near Beddlestead. To get there we had to take the path from off Lusted Hall Lane (then known simply as Lusted Lane) across the fields as if cutting through to Beech Farm. It was in one of the fields on this route that I found the Thames pick. This piece has been revised somewhat since it was first published in 2001.

23 Biddy Lanchester. She was a daughter of the famous engineering family but remained a radical thinker all her life. At one time she had been secretary to Eleanor Marx when both were living in Forest Hill. Her own daughter was the British and Hollywood actress Elsa Lanchester who married Charles Laughton. She owned the round house which stood next door to the Bromwich's main home in the village, Hillcott on Ham Hill. Ham Hill, of course, is the old field-name of the slope to the left of Johns Road as you go down the hill into Ninehams Valley. She was still in her sixties and a good friend of my mother when I knew her as a small boy in the War.

24 A Country Tale. The haystack in this story stood close to the sharp bend on Lusted Hall Lane where the Roman Road continues straight on as a rough track beneath the fir-trees. It is the same track which then comes out at Furze Corner. For obvious reasons I refuse to name the girl involved. My friend, Robin O'Neil, who went to Tatsfield School and to Oxted County and who lived near the manse not far from the top of Clacketts Lane, provided me a few years ago with a Russian translation of this piece.

25 Flint. Hopefully this piece explains itself. There are many interesting fossils you can find amongst the flints which can be found in abundance in the Tatsfield area as well as many other parts of the South-East. If you pick up a flint which seems to be almost a ball in shape the chances are very high that

this is a fossilised sponge. Break it open and it is likely to be hollow inside with just a small quantity of yellow dust which probably falls out. I have always understood that this dust is all that's left of the sponge's body which the flint, originally a jelly-like goo, formed around before setting hard in the chalk.

26 Maesmaur. This was written long before I had any inkling of the tale of the Welsh princes in Tatsfield. It refers to my double upbringing in two different communities. At Tatsfield School I was badly bullied, but in North Wales, where I thought I would be seen as an English outsider, I was welcomed by the other kids and I have felt at home in Wales ever since.

27 Hidden Gem. This is not what the 'toy' house on Paynesfield Road is known as, but it is the name of a famous church in Manchester which is equally lost behind other buildings. So I'm afraid I borrowed it for the title. This was another piece which I struggled with but eventually, Dorothy Nimmo, a friend of Peter Sansom and a lady who is sadly no longer with us, suggested the six-line form which seems to work. I understand that the medic, who was living at Paynesfield House and who had the little house made for his daughter, was Doctor Hoffman (his name also mentioned in Doris Geary's book).

28 Trees. I suspect that modern health and safety rules would have a lot to say about tree-climbing but for us who went anywhere (apart from other

peoples' own gardens) it was a wonderful pastime which provided us with plenty of exercise and adventure. The poem explains itself.

29 So Now You know. A piece of nonsense which took me some while to sort out for myself. Maybe somebody will remind me that I have still got it wrong. I have heard two versions of this division – the one I have outlined in the poem, the other saying that Of Kent means all the area known as the Weald (that is, inside the North and South Downs) while Kentish means what lies outside, which includes the Downs themselves and everything beyond.

30 Confession. As a child in the village I did have a tendency to be light-fingered, but I probably wasn't alone. In my case it started when my father returned from the War and no doubt there was some connection. The first thing I stole was the key to my grandparents' clock (trying to hold back time?) which I 'lost' in Ship Field and never found again. This is the confession.

31 Stardust. This concerns the beginning of the end of my family's connection with Tatsfield. My father had heart disease for the last two years of his life, but my mother went into Redhill Hospital in a very confused state having got into a muddle over various pills she needed to take. With proper care she lived on, up here in Manchester, for another fourteen months, keeping her wits about her till the very moment she died in 1988.

This all came to a head the moment Halley's Comet reappeared in the night sky about 1986.

32 Shepherd's Crown. This is an old local name for a fossilised sea-urchin, examples of which are extremely common in the clay-with-flints. They were also known as witch-stones.

33 Font. With the village pond now much smaller than it was when I was young I have no idea if this local tradition still exists – that you weren't an accepted Tatolian until you had fallen in the pond. I have never heard this being applied to the other three ponds in the village which sadly have all been filled in. David Thomas, who lived two doors away from me at Whitewood Cottages, suggested I add something about the green slime that covered anyone unfortunate enough to take a tumble. This I did, which explains why his name is mentioned.

BY PILGRIM COTTAGE DOOR

34 Apples. This piece has apparently left some readers confused but it is simply constructed from two separate stories I heard that belonged to Tangland Castle. First, someone mentioned that the lofts in the building were used for storing apples during the winter months. These were all of old English varieties which are now quite rare but, when first picked were impossible to eat – as the months unfolded however, as long as they were kept dry, they slowly matured so that they could be eaten at different times during the winter. The other story concerned a young woman who contracted glandular fever (the kissing disease!) and who spent long months slowly recovering in one of the rooms at the back of the building. When the two tales were put together there seemed to be a link.

35 Midnight Rover. There was a period in my early teens when two or more friends would arrange to meet up in the village in the middle of the night. Living at Whitewood Cottages and having the bedroom over the front door it was quite easy to open the window climb onto the flat roof outside and shin down the post to the ground. We never did any harm (not at this point anyway!), just enjoyed having the village to ourselves. One night it had been raining and it was difficult to climb back again, so I got caught and there was a huge row. I only thought of writing the poem when I discovered years later that my cousin John Bromwich, who was younger than me, had been doing the same thing.

His bedroom at Hillcott had a space underneath and he had built himself a trap-door in the floor to make his escape easier. Also, he had always gone out on his own which made him in my eyes much braver. And he was never caught.

36 Grasshopper. The traditional tale about John Gresham being lost in the grass as a baby and only found by someone following the call of a grasshopper always seemed a rather slim tale. It seemed to have a beginning but nothing more. So this poem was an experiment in making a version of my own. Also the story, if true, never happened in Tatsfield or Titsey for that matter, since the family had originally come from Norfolk. And it was only when the piece was finished that I realised I had invoked the Green Man.

37 Forge Field. This piece does not belong to Tatsfield but concerns a newish road of houses in Biggin Hill. However, I'm sure most people from the village will know it. When first written it only had two verses, but Dennis Travis, an older member of the Holmfirth group who often took it over if Peter Sansom was away, suggested I write the middle verse, hence the thanks at the beginning.

38 Lucifer's Lustrous Garden. The five or seven of the Tatsfield valleys were first carved out by the head-waters of the Ravensbourne river, which now only surfaces at Keston Ponds. To make this possible, the soil must have been still frozen at the end of the Ice Age, indeed there may have been

some minor glaciation involved as well. It's clear that as soon as the ice was gone the chalk and soil below it became porous once again and the streams sank from sight. No doubt a geologist with more knowledge than myself would put me right on this but the process was certainly something along these lines. On a good contour map the whole area looks something like a hand and that suggested the story in the poem. This is my slant on a folk myth with a strong Old Testament background.

39 Elsa Lay By Sithersay. The first title for this piece was 'Elsa lay in Titsey Wood' a story she alludes to in her autobiography, 'Elsa Lanchester, Herself'.
She made love in the wood, though she doesn't say with whom, and jokes about its name. As a result I didn't really like the title but couldn't find a way round it until I remembered something that Mr Mumford, our history teacher, told us at school in Oxted. It seems that there is no entry for Titsey in the Domesday Book, but there is a name Sithesey which has been taken to be a Norman scribe's error (such mistakes were common enough at the time when it came to Anglo-Saxon terms) for the apparently missing village. I spelt it with an r to make sure the pronunciation was the same as I'd heard it and it seemed to fit much better, especially with the internal rhyme with 'lay'. And, by including the story that Titsey Wood was first planted by Napoleonic prisoners of war, it was possible to give her love-making the supernatural powers that make it larger than life itself. That's my explanation

anyway.

40 Dogger. This is a sad story Tony Watson told me about a friend we both knew at Oxted County School. Why he was always called Dogger I don't know but it seemed to suit him perfectly. We often formed our own little trio within our class and frequently spent the dinner hours together playing consequences or hangman etc, especially if it was raining and we had to stay indoors. It took something like five goes to get this piece right but even then, when I read it to the writers' group in North Wales, there was a tendency for the listeners to burst out laughing when I got where he was killed by the hand-grenade he had found in the Outback. It was obviously a reaction to the shock, but it meant that the piece still failed. In the end, a visitor to the group suggested I put the swear-word in to pull the listener up sharp, and only then could I read it with success. There is a break in the rhyming scheme just before this happens as well. So to any readers who wish to complain about the way the poem is written I have to say that this has been thought about long and hard and it's staying as it is!

41 White Scar. This is a poem about Oxted Chalk-pits. These were one of the last things I and my mother looked at on a day out from Redhill Hospital just before I put her on the plane at Gatwick Airport, to fly her up to Manchester for her final months in the North-West.

42 Daisy Bank. Also known as Hunts Bank,

because it was owned by Mrs Hunt who lived in a cottage at the top (Maesmaur Road). It was somewhere I loved to play and also it lay on my route to school. However, most men find crying real tears difficult because at some point or other they have been 'stopped' by someone saying 'Boys don't cry!' when they were very young. I actually distinctly remember this happening to me at that place, hence the poem.

Daisy Bank now no longer exists as it was claimed by the owners of the house to its right (looking upwards!) who put a fence round it and as no one came to question this, after twelve years the bank legally became theirs. They did leave untouched the footpath which climbs the hill to its left though the space allowed at the top is extremely narrow.

43 Emblem. At some point near the end of her life my mother made reference to a yellow scabious plant which had been growing in the front garden at the Red House, Goatsfield Road. As the flowers are normally blue, she suggested that the yellow form was peculiar to Tatsfield, hence the form of the poem. However, the yellow form does occur in other places, although it is much rarer than the blue.

44 Roman Villa, Lullingstone. This comes from a day out to the villa with Ruth, our son Luke, and our friends Mathanan and Naheeda Maharasingam and their two sons, Ahimsan and Aiyarn (this family from Orpington). This place, as stated in the piece, was somewhere I used to visit on my bike when I often

took afternoon trips out somewhere in my teens.

45 Warning To Golfers. Short piece, written as a kind of old country saw, to warn those making golf courses of the evils of messing around with Nature!

46 Rondeau. I don't often try to write rondeaux but this one follows the rules precisely!

47 Secret River. As already mentioned in Lucifer's Lustrous Garden, the valleys in Tatsfield were probably carved out by post-glacial streams that flowed into the Ravensbourne River at Keston Ponds. While the water-table remains low in the chalk we forget that once they were there but should there be any major changes in climate the streams could once more appear and go cascading down the present dry valley bottoms.

48 Tanglands. This piece recently saw light in my booklet called 'Tangland Castle and the Spanish Lady's Love.' It represents most accurately the legend I had grown up with concerning the building on Goatsfield Road which now no longer exists.

49 Tatol. This figure, if he really existed, is someone we know nothing about, apart from his name. But his name conforms very closely with those surnames which we recognise as nick-names. As a class, they are generally directly descriptive or highly ironic. If we take the name Drinkwater, for example, the first bearer of this name would have been known in his village (and most English

surnames are male in origin) as either being remarkably abstemious or as a complete alcoholic. Or even as a reformed drinker who now really does only drink water (so therefore stands for both). Tatol apparently meant someone who was the life and soul of the party so could have also referred to a person who was deeply depressed. 'Oh, here comes Laughing Boy again with his face as long as a fiddle!' While staying over with friends at Hebden Bridge one day, I woke up with the story in my head which tells how Tatol arrived as the first man of the village and ends up with both angles on his particular nick-name. However, like Eileen Pearce, I believe the more likely origin of the name Tatsfield is from its position as a good look-out point across the whole of the Three Counties.

50 The Old Man Of The Weald. Those readers who are more familiar with the booklet 'By Pilgrim Cottage Door' will realise, if they have seen the recent version of this piece, that it has been slightly updated. The original inspiration for this poem was an illustration entitled 'The Green Man, 1939' from a book about the work of an artist called Hans Schleger. This was someone my father had worked with on occasions as an advertising executive and who was very well respected in the trade. The book is entitled 'Zero – Hans Schleger – a Life of Design' by Pat Schleger, and published by Lund Humphies, ISBN 0 85331 792 5. The picture is on page 10 and shows a man with a full head of hair, beard and mustache which are all made of green foliage. He wears a green shirt and behind him is more green in

the form of low hills.

51 Theft. It was while I was doing some supply teaching that I found myself looking at a book of poetry for teenagers and reading a piece by Carol Ann Duffy on stealing. I borrowed the form and the idea from her piece but used my own story. Tony Watson was living on the corner of Westmore Road and Redhouse Road then and the place where people were sledging (and therefore where I hid my booty!) was the then open space that existed between The Chestnuts and the end of Ship Wood.

52 Story North From South. This piece has also been revised since publication of 'By Pilgrim Cottage Door' mostly because the house, (which then became a well-known pub called the Seymour) outside which Charlie Peace carried out his dastardly act, has recently been demolished to make way for a block of modern flats. The poem was published recently in a celebration of poetry about Chorlton in South Manchester, specifically for the Chorlton Arts Festival, a regular local annual event.

53 Waiting For Guido. This really happened – I went out and waited outside Tatsfield Church at some point in my teens hoping to hear the ghostly sound of hooves passing along Church Lane and No, nothing did happen. As some readers will know, I did write an article for the Parish Magazine suggesting that this 'ghost' probably had little to do with the Gunpowder Plot but could perhaps date much further back to the time of Owain Lawgoch, the last

of the three Welsh princes who were squires of Tatsfield in the thirteen hundreds.

54 Church Wood. This also took several goes but the final form here was a collage of a verse from each. The idea came from a reference in Mr Bertie Hammond's collection of facts about Tatsfield and Titsey, put together in the 1920's. Ruby Roberts, who is a sometime member of I*D Books in North Wales, suggested the way to finish it off, hence the thanks.

55 Fragment. This came from a dream, but I have no idea what it means. It is part of the Tapestry because it was clearly set in Ship Wood. Linda Flower, who was a colleague when I was still teaching in Salford, a member of the English Dept and who specialised in teaching poetry, used this piece in some of her lessons, getting her pupils to try to guess which of the staff had written it. I was very touched when some of them wanted to talk to me about it.

56 At The Fork In The Road. A true story which really did happen, or rather, didn't! Instead, the young lady went out with Robin O'Neil. Now when I look back I realise that she probably used the fork in the road to say goodbye and see how I would react.

57 Barbara Allen. One of the first folk songs I learnt in my teens, and which Gilly (Roger Campbell Gillies of Sanderstead) also learnt on the recorder. Later, after we left Oxted County, together with other

friends, we planned to form a jazz band but it never happened. I struggled with the trumpet, fared much better with the trombone, eventually became a jug musician with Russell Quaye and then formed a band at Hull University called Humberjug. Gilly did manage to graduate to clarinet, married Meg and had a little daughter, but was killed driving a bread lorry in 1963.

58 Time-Slip (2). An earlier version of this was first published in 'By the Field with the Round Corner' but later I re-wrote the middle verse. I had planned (always a dangerous thing to do with poetry) to write a piece about someone driving home one evening along Lusted Hall Lane (the old Roman road) and suddenly being confronted by a column of ghost legionaries marching the other way. However, one of the others in the Holmfirth Group (Peter Freeman) beat me to it and wrote his own version. So when David Brown told me one day how you could see the Roman road going out across the fields from the air if there was a light fall of snow, the idea finally clicked into place. For those who don't know, David is, or has been in the past, a regular flier of light aircraft out of the present Biggin Hill Airport.

59 White Bear By Fickleshole. Again a piece I tried to write many times and eventually gave up. One evening though, I simply decided to follow the rhymes and not bother with the meaning. The result was what I would now call a 'sound poem', a piece simply written as an 'instrumental'. I can tell you,

however, that Ella was the Saxon pirate who carved out Sussex for himself and his mates who, starting at Selsey Bill, worked his way along the south coast, until he reached Pevensey (then known as Anderida) where he carried out only the second earliest massacre of its native Celtic inhabitants. A very nasty piece of work! The Roman road, which became Lusted Hall Lane, at one time ran through the ancient forest and ended up at that unlucky place.

60 Walking With Syllables. Small piece contrasting how much safer I've generally felt in the country than in the city. Why syllables? Because line by line the verses repeat the same number of syllables throughout. This is actually an old Welsh tradition much used by Dylan Thomas and others.

61 To My Sister Never Born. Complicated story, but briefly, after my mother had lost her left lung to TB she was told she shouldn't have any more children. Therefore when she fell pregnant for the third time the child had to be stopped. Both my sister Martha and myself independently 'worked out' that the lost sibling would have been a girl. This piece belongs to Whitewood Cottages.

62 Jug and Trousers. This piece comes from one of my earliest memories, when I must have been four or five years old. The tree chopped down was in the front garden of Pilgrim Cottage (now Treeview), and probably in the way. This was no doubt why my mother had it removed, but in the process turned it all into a game to help keep me amused.

63 The First Shot. This poem is the opposite of the story of Jack in 'By the Field with the Round Corner', as this time Barry Beevers and myself were the culprits. But hopefully we learnt our lesson straight away.

64 At Blue House Lane. Blue House Lane is of course where Oxted County School stands. You can still see Tatsfield Church from what was the top field, but once the church was surrounded by a heart shape of trees. The girl who has left, never to be seen again, is the same one in At the Fork in the Road. This piece was published, among others, in the Tatsfield Parish Magazine when Eileen Pearce was still the editor.

By The Sound Of Princely Hooves

65 Ebenezer Inn. Whitewood Cottages started life as council houses that have now been privately owned since the eighties. Many of their original features have probably been altered beyond recognition. Nevertheless, I 'm sure the story of Ebenezer Inn will make sense to most readers and so doesn't need any more comment. I will, however, say something about the rhyming scheme. In the poetry world, 'house' at the end of the line and another 'house' two lines later is a repeat. 'House' and then 'mouse' is a half-repeat, normally known as a full rhyme. 'House' and 'nice' is a half-rhyme, while 'house' and 'crouch' is generally accepted as assonance or a quarter-rhyme. Most of the rhymes

in this piece belong to the last category, and a few others are half-rhymes, and maybe others are even smaller rhymes than assonance, but rhymes of some sort they all are!

66 Thunder. Some people have commented that many of my poems don't seem to scan 'properly' but one of the problems with this is the huge variations in normal English speech patterns. Most of them scan for me which is why they are written the way they are. This piece however is deliberately more conversational so that it sounds more like someone speaking normally. If it works properly though it should be experienced as having a certain 'flow'. Other poems similar to this include 'Trees' and 'Biddy Lanchester'.

67 Owain Lawgoch. This is a fairly recent piece which I hope explains itself. It was inspired by reading the lines from Shakespeare's Macbeth which read: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / clean from my hand?"

68 Our Luki. Just like ourselves, our closest relatives amongst the mammals are extraordinarily varied in their intelligence, their personalities, in their skills and likes and dislikes. And no doubt the same can be said about most living creatures as well. Variability is probably a great aid to successful evolution.

69 In My Lifetime. This piece was written soon after the launch of By Pilgrim Cottage Door which I

think was in May, 2004. While on that visit I took a trip down Church Lane to the point where it joins the Westerham-Croydon Road. As stated, when I was a child you could clearly see the old Roman road down the slope from that point. However, as I have read in the national press, all over the country, and not just in Tatsfield, the old practices of coppicing seem to have gone by the board. Furthermore, the cattle which used the fields at that point were once allowed to eat their way very close to the main road. I was deeply shocked by how much the area had become overgrown. As a result of this, any sign of the ancient track-way had been completely obliterated. This is a loss to us all.

70 Uvedale. My wife Ruth's parents moved to Enfield, Middlesex over twenty years ago, though now sadly her father is no longer with us. Enfield happens to lie on the northern edge of the conurbation of London, directly opposite to Croydon on the 'transpontine' side. Anyone who comes to know both Tatsfield and Enfield Town, as I have, will be struck by the family name Uvedale historically turning up in both places. Time-wise it seems more than a coincidence that Dr John Uvedale turned up in Enfield after the family had sold Titsey Place to the Greshams, but there may of course be no connection whatsoever. I did contact a local Enfield historian on this matter but he wasn't very interested. Nevertheless, Uvedale is still a rare surname, but tracing its origins on the internet reveals connections with Yewdale in Lancashire, a lost place-name Overdale, or even a suggestion that

it first came over from Ireland.

71 Jam Jars. I have said elsewhere that my father spent most of the War in the Middle East, helping to make sure the Germans never got their hands on Palestine and the rest of the Levant. In the whole of his time there he saw one shot fired while my mother and I, back home in Tatsfield, were continuously in far greater danger throughout. The incident with the jam jars was probably my most threatening but I'm sure there were plenty of other similar stories in the village to be heard from that time.

72 How Nineham Got Its Name. This is just a piece of nonsense but someone has already told me they quite like it. In his 'The Origin of English Place Names', published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960, P H Reaney states that Ninehams is a variation on an Anglo-Saxon term 'innam' meaning 'a piece of land taken in or enclosed'. There seem to be variations of this all over the country but the form Ninehams is most common as a field-name in Surrey, with such forms as Inhams, Inholms, Innome, Innims, In Hams, Innams and Inghams also turning up in the county.

73 Skyfield. South Manchester, which is where we now live, is a city mostly on the flat (tho the North side is very different!) Often, when I make a return visit to Tatsfield I am struck by how much it seems on several levels. Level One, of course, is the Holmsdale Valley. Level Two the village itself, but the

highest level of all is 'Skyfield', the place stands above our heads! The poem does link up with ideas already expressed in several other pieces.

74 Climbing. By its nature this piece belongs as much to the village as it belongs to anywhere else I have lived.

75 Leith Hill. If you look in the right direction you can just see the summit of Leith Hill, as far as I know, as you pass by Beech Farm on the Westerham-Croydon Road, though I must say I've never noticed the brick tower. There was of course a film made about a Welsh hill that had the same problem. It was called, The Englishman Who Went Up A Hill And Came Down A Mountain, but I have known about Leith Hill's story for far longer than that, so it is definitely older.

76 Poem On Plain Paper. This piece repeats what was said in the notes for Jam Jars but it also refers to the long shadow of the Second World War which has hung over everybody in my family (and many others also) ever since it happened, right to the ends of their lives.

77 For Tatsfield Persons Only. As stated, originally written for the grandchildren of David and Rosemary Brown.

78 Ballad Of Thomas Hook. This is a true story recorded in Bertie Hammond's book of the 1920's concerning a love affair between a couple from

Limpsfield and Titsey. The girl's employer interfered and the young man set fire to one of his haystacks. As a result the culprit was transported to Australia for seven years. However, the young girl waited faithfully and eventually he returned and the story ended happily with the couple being married. Again I had problems putting this together and eventually one of Lorca's famous ballads gave me the key.

79 Beaconshaw. This also was only achieved after several serious attempts but I am very pleased with the final result. The taxi which took Burgess and Maclean to Oxted Station on the first leg of their journey was driven by Tony Watson's father, Frank. However, Bob David, in scrupulously reading through these notes, has pointed out that a different version of this story says that they drove directly in a hired car to Southampton where they left the vehicle and caught a boat to the Continent. I can only say that the version I have used came directly from Tony Watson and that possibly a reporter in the national press may have picked up the other version from a completely different source.

80 Pathway. This was a real incident which I and my family witnessed sometime in the late fifties. I happened at the bottom end of Westmore Green and, as described in the poem, much courtesy was shown on all sides. My French pen-friend, Francois Bloch, was staying with us from France and he was fascinated to observe how English people coped with a situation which would, he said, have been conducted in his country in a much more fiery

manner.

81 The True Story Of Charlie Muller. Again a real incident which I witnessed at Redland Tiles, Tatsfield. My uncle Alan Bromwich, then of Hillcott, John's Road, was also working there and took part.

82 Princes Of This Parish. This was the first piece written after hearing about the Medieval history of the village and the then squires as Welsh princes. It was chosen for publication in the Parish Magazine by the present editor, Bob David. The friend who originally told me this story was a fellow member of the I*D Writers' Group, Stuart Taylor, who, with his wife Carol, runs an organic farm near Mold in Flintshire. As a Welsh speaker he had picked it up on a programme on local television. I was completely shocked to be told something about Tatsfield which I had never heard before, and from such an unexpected quarter!

83 Temples Emporium. This was a large rambling wooden building which you could only get to by climbing over the top of Polesteeple Hill. It was one of those places which sold anything, an early fore-runner of the present day supermarkets. Once I started writing this piece, everything came in from the woods and fields all around. I don't know exactly when it was finally swept away, but the name is still retained in Temples Corner, not far from Biggin Hill's Main Road.

84 An Oxted Recital. I knew the story of the BBC

recording made between the Wars and it always seemed to come across as if it was done once and that was that! In fact the BBC made about forty separate recordings, many of which were broadcast on different occasions over the radio.

85 Queen of the Woods. Despite its position in the collection (stuck between two different musical stories) this piece is the last to be written and fitted into the Tapestry as a whole. A little while back I asked Bob David if he knew which was believed to be the oldest tree in the village. By email he suggested that no-one was sure but several candidates had been suggested. One of these was the walnut-tree in this poem. I'm going to suggest that whatever its age this is probably the ONLY walnut-tree in the area at all. I did have some difficulty finding the right name for this piece but if my guess is right 'Queen' seems to be the most appropriate title of all. Furthermore, the actual shape of the poem suggests to me a tiara with a clasp at either end!

86 My Grand-dad And His Musical Saw. The truth is that I never actually heard him play his saw but it was well-known in the family that he had done so often in his youth. Someone I know took a copy of this poem to Canada and read it at a local gathering and told me later that the people there had found it very moving, so she must have made a good job of it.

87 Family Photo (2). A early version of this first

appeared in 'By the field with the Round Corner', just the first verse. The final verse was only possible after I learnt of the Welsh Princes. When that pond was filled in we lost the last direct link with the Princes themselves, as it would appear that they probably used it to keep their carp in. No doubt the orchard, which stood next to it, was there also for their use.

88 Black Dagger. This was our own private name for the woods which lay between the bottom end of Paynesfield Road and Kemsley Road beneath it. Tim and Simon (Soz) Holland lived near the end of Paynesfield on the same side as Paynesfield House. They moved to Ottershaw in West Surrey and it was their tree-house I was climbing out of when I fell, but put my arms out and saved myself, at the end of the poem called Trees.

89 The Sanctuary Ring. The losing of this ring is mentioned in Doris Geary's 'Tales of Tatsfield'. She states that 'big Tom Dann' had noticed it had gone missing and had spoken of it to her. In the original version of this poem I had suggested that a particular vicar from the sixties may have had something to do with this because he had been very active in making changes to the church. This had included dedicating it to St Mary when previously it had been simply Tatsfield Church for centuries. Now it has a church name which is the most common in the country. Previously it was the only church in southern England which was not dedicated. Eileen Pearce had gently suggested that I look at this

situation again, which I did more recently. Therefore the piece was re-written and I believe ended up with a much better version.

90 At Nineham Head. This poem was deliberately left to the very end of the whole collection because it is the longest piece I have so far ever produced. It came from a workshop with I*D Writers' Group in North Wales, run by Beryl Baigent, hence the thanks at the beginning. Beryl is a Flintshire woman who has emigrated to Canada but who comes back every summer for a holiday and to look up family and friends. She is a very good poet who has had a lot of her work published, mostly in Canada. Her workshops are always interesting and different each time. In this case she conducted the work-shop as a guided fantasy. That means she got us to close our eyes and imagine a story of which she provided the elements in a generalised form. That is, we were asked to imagine we were standing somewhere very familiar to ourselves and then next to conjure water of some sort as being nearby. Then we were asked to think of putting our hands in the water and pulling something precious out of it and so on. In my case the place where I found myself standing was the field behind Clark's Farm at the very southern tip of Ninehams Valley, hence the title. The water was a spring which burst out of the soil and began to flow on down the valley, and so the story unfolded. This was a Friday evening and we were not expected to write anything down. I do remember how hypnotic Beryl's voice sounded, but nothing more happened with this piece until the Sunday when I had some

time to myself and then I started writing, getting most of it down in one go. For those who think it's too long I have made several attempts to cut it but as far as I can see everything in it is needed. And I can assure you that there are plenty of poems written by others that are much longer than this, so its length doesn't bother me at all.

There are two other poems I have written which are almost as long, the second longest being 'The Rime of the Savage Goldfish' which was published in a collection called 'No Earthly Reason?' produced by Crocus Books in 1989 for Commonword in Manchester, and the third longest was a love poem called 'Gwen' written about my school-days in Tywyn, Merioneth. These two pieces have also successfully resisted any cutting.

I hope these notes will help anyone interested in perusing 'A Tatsfield Tapestry' to understand the collection better, so good luck with your reading!

Mark Abraham, 14/8/09

