## Transparent Words

 ARCHITECTURAL VOICE

## Transparent Words 13 - ARCHITECTURAL VOICE

## INTRODUCTION

This is a special edition of Transparent Words and I have the great pleasure of being able to publish a complete work by Mandy Pannett, THE CARVER'S MARK, together with other poems on a similar theme all of these poems are accompanied by pictures supporting the poems. There is little point in saying more as the poems and the pictures all do an excellent job of speaking for themselves.

Jim Bennett May 2010

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All the misericords in 'The Carver's Mark' are in St Laurence's Church, Ludlow. Thanks to the Clerk of Works for permission to take photographs in such a beautiful setting.

A special mention for author Rebecca Tope whose writing weekend in Ludlow inspired me to start writing the sequence.

Special thanks to Phil Gravett and Maureen Caliendo who took the photos. The photos complement the poems so well - I couldn't have done it without you.

Thanks also to the following writers for their suggestions and help Julia Bryant, Judith Cair, Andie Lewenstein, Penny Shepherd, Kate Pottinger, Susan Skinner, Kay Syrad.

Many of the poems first appeared on The Write Idea online forum. Lots of thanks for suggestions and support.

These poems are dedicated to the un-named
Master Carver
who has left us his mark.

## MISERICORDS



There are scratches in wood in these fantasy worlds: slips of the chisel, carvers' own signs.

Beasts come capering out of the Bestiaries, writhe beneath corbels - piglets on bagpipes, a bear
in a muzzle, griffins with souls in their grip. An owl, half blinded by glares of the sun
is menaced by bully-birds, eyeballs tweaked out. A pelican, weeping in blood like Medea,
murders her young while a unicorn is caressed by a virgin as hunters with arrows are poised.

Such are the marvels of travellers' tales - hearsay, the fabled unknown. But there's fear in the shadows
and devils in pews as maidens and sirens entice frail men, lead them like apes into hell.

Now listen - there's more than this terror, these myths there's gossip and chit-chat and talk of the weather,
blessings of fields and counting of sheep, Fools to be laughed at and Jack o' the Green.

Misericords offer a stage for the angels where men can forget, for an hour or so, that every last creature must die.


## TUTIVILLIUS

He perches on a different ledge, snoops around in other corners now.

A hidden-small misericord, his olden role was spy on priests and scribble lists of jangled prayers and syllables spat out like phlegm; to creep past pews and listen in to gossip and the idle chat, be patron-devil to the scribes and, ghost-like in a cold scriptorium, guide them into errors of the pen.

We have an illustration of him, carved in solid oak:
snub-nosed and squinty, catching voices
with his fist, slipping them inside
his gaping bag.
At weighing of the souls, at Day of Doom, men believed that Satan would be paid.

This is a different corner now other fears and demons twist our minds.

And Tutivillius where is he?
No landfill site could hold his sacks of careless texts and wild email -
But is he somewhere in the darkness
stuffing sacks with bits of novels, threads of Flash, rejected
scraps of verse?
Or maybe, keeping up with trends, he will entice you as a Facebook friend.

## FACES OF FOX



Body like an arrow, poised in tension, heart's-
own aim.
One who will not dance in daylight, fox-fur, fire-red, flame.

Medieval beast of chase you seek forgotten
woods.
Quicksilver servant of the gods
disguised as fox
in woman's
skin, you cry
I am Seductress -
come.


Chunked out in wood you are repellent, grisly-hued with scabs and scars, your few grey hairs offset by a heart-shaped hat.

Look at your lips no cupid's bow but thin as twists of lemon skin sucked in to hide the gaps along the gums.

Your breasts are dregs like dried-up dugs, tightcorseted, squeezed up against the droop.

Are you old Noah's wife worn out with scrubbing soggy arks? A village scold dunked in a stream? A laundry dame, your red hands raw?

Tagged with epithets that judge, they name you hag and termagant those ugly 'Gs.'


A Traveller from the Ship of Fools explores dry land ...
and finds the landscape biblical in stone and desert, locusts and dry heat.

Here a man will sell his birthright
for some lentil soup.
Elsewhere a preacher
conjures fish, transforms
the wedding wine.
Our Traveller consumes the loaves, spits out crusts, disregards the hungry-eyed ...
blocks his ears to a saint who shouts:
'Get a knife and cut your throat!
Beware of Gluttony'
With demons in a hot pursuit our Traveller escapes ...
to a feast that's for status - lobsters, oysters, an abundance
of turtles -
He belches and finds himself in a ward ...
with a lady of size who grins at a camera that's filming her guts as they're stapled to make her look thin.

This radical cure alarms our good friend ...
who's relieved when he hears
poor Man's not at fault - it's food that is really to blame.

Getting close to obese, he returns to the ship ...
where far below deck, chained up in the hold, are the starving and unwilling thin.

## WINTER SEASON


1.

Battlements like cut-out stencils on a sky of ice.
Here grey pigeons sit.

## 2.

Snow bees on the wire, starlings in an ordered line, fluster of black wings.
3.

Skyline of tall towers.
Lamplight gold on bin and brick.
Thin cats on alert.

## 4.

Icicles are teeth:
Sabre tooth and dinosaur,
Incisors of the beast.

## UPON A WHITSUN TIDE


white waves curling rise and fall upon an undertow of green -
the green of olive groves in Palestine -
so easy to imagine men
with sudden insight speaking
tongues - caught up like
holy doves or guests
of vision on a clear
and rare whit-tide


Keats throws open his casement window, lets in a light that is tinted in rose, leans out to a space
the pallor of water as ancient Phoenicians at lunch on the sand discover by accident how to make glass
which, in an instant of optical focus, reveals the night to be Tyrian Purple (sea-dye where creatures are netted to die)
whose colour resembles the clotting of blood overlaid with a star, a single bright star, like the one above Keats
as he closes the casement to shut out the dark, coughing up blood as if choking on roses and glass.

## WHITE BADGE



A small white badge.
The applause was good.
I waited there under the stag's
dead head, his antlers
criss-crossing the scroll
of achievement and knew
that at last
I should wear it:
my badge, my very own badge -
and could stand on the stair where the bully had stood, her small eyes
brightening
whenever she saw me, pulling me out of my place in the line, writing
my name in her book.
A small badge, white with enamel, chipped like a tooth or the gap where she hid my belongings ...

Dust in my nose as I hunted through raincoats, dust in my eyes.

A small badge, white with enamel.
The hole in my navy-blue jumper, the part where the pin went in, grew big.

## GRAFFITI OF SORTS



A tree that was felled in a last high wind, stretched out like Cormoran sinks into mud.

Half way along, where once it was high -
though close to the base some centuries ago -
are names
of two lovers
from an old sunset: casual scribbling, a date.


This is my home:
Walls that shake when winds are rough but keep us safe, a roof that guards us from the rain though clothes are damp and smell of grease. We eat hot loaves, stir bay leaves in the soup.

This is my home:
One poor girl who coughs and chokes and spits her blood on straw. But five strong boys who work the land the whole day long and sleep like lords till light calls up the birds.

This is my home:
We have two cows, one for the milk, one for the meat we soak in salt, a pond we share with four white ducks, some old hens who still lay eggs and hide them in the hay.

## This is my home:

A fire to cook on that will warm a bed as cold as stone till he crawls in and fills the room with snores and moans. But he is a good man and he works all hours to keep us well. This is my home.

## STRONGHOLDS


'Then Arthur made great dole when he understood that Sir Ector was not his father' (Le Morte d'Arthur. Book 1. Chapter VI)

Now this was New Year's Day and all the bells across the city pealed and sang We have a king but as a thrust beneath your feet you only felt the base line pity, pity. You are not our son, they said, and we must count the cost. We adopted you at birth, brought you up to be our child but tournaments come to an end, the loser's flag is folded up, Pretence has dared to joust with Truth and now, half wild, unhorsed in combat, stumbles in the mud.

Young boy, as you stood leaning on your sword which might have been an old man's frame as years between all slid away - and heard demands from every corner crowd upon you, dreams and visions hurled like spears did that begin the tumbling down for Camelot, your prize? Were its foundations flawed by those first lies?

## AFTER SUNDAY



Look at you, priest in the car park, offering palm leaves, bleached, to the men.
Where are you going, hound in the mist, rapid and thumping on snails?
Goose, you are flying too low; that river is flat, the colour of lead.
And who is the person of alcoves and edges who shouts like a placard at doors in the sky? Tower-tall heavy bells echo with footsteps, mottle in feathers and wind.

Mud in low fields is attentive and dark, waits with the shelduck for rain.


Harpies, owls and angels ...I carve till late by candle fire. A stag chiselled out along the grain demands the feel of a busy room, a steady hand for the curve, the sweep. Such things.

I leave my mark. A mandrake plant. Uprooted it's worth more than gold, mends a bone, makes women breed. Narcotic, it's the heart of witches' brew. I leave my mark.

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[^1]at the rear of the church three Norman pillars
diamond pattern on the stone
from the pillar top
a face stares to some distant sunrise
foliage spewing from its mouth
now they call him The Green Man
Jack o'the Green Robin Goodfellow
but in this Christian church
he is nature - not a god to rival
the One True God
here turned into a benign symbol of life
the personification of rebirth
seasons and the bounty
given by God to the world
but he belonged to an earlier time
to the world of elves and magic
Wicca and Yule
he was Garland
King of the May
the Lord of the Greenwood
wild fecund spirit from folk belief
birth and recreation
captured and gelded
a creature of the wood
soil air and sunlight
imprisoned in stone

## Christchurch Priory

## by Lesley Burt



Four centuries of monks, millers, farmers, fishers, watch masons and carpenters construct the Priory;
observe them chisel ornamental detail into vaulted ceilings too high for congregations to notice from the nave, and tracery to be outshone by the jewel colours of bible stories in glass; carve misericords to hide under monks' behinds.

Nowadays, visitors focus zoom lenses into the most distant reaches of cornices and finials; discuss the dedication of ancient artisans; touch the Portland stone, make the church their own.


## Richardson Complex , Buffalo Psychiatric Center by Lynn Ciesielski


you sleep naked on snow banks
desert dunes at night
dream long pauses
your jagged thoughts do not match master turns you to mosaic
feelings stick like mortar.
mind becomes motley stone wall you are beautiful like gothic art but stand stoic
the patina of the rooftops displays Easter colors
you too will rise from this death
that boxes you in
but now you remain lost in a metaphorical maze, you try to climb the stone barefoot these tunnels are vertical they trap you
life trains us on a forward path we never learn to climb it's a long way to heaven this castle encumbers
you see through windows
but someone barred them
they screen out butterflies and bats
intruders enter from inside

## The Comacini by Gabriel Griffin

They came with machines: wheels, pulleys, cranes; sets of rulers, chisels, planes; compasses and cutting tools and - second only to their craft - their pattern books.

The usual themes: a snake-twined tree, the Marys weeping, washing, hugging jars; Lazarus wound in shrouds of stone, apocalypse's seven-headed beast, acanthus leaves.

A team of able men, their craft had carved them ways through waning wars, paved pilgrim paths through snows, raised churches where more learned men
nailed on the retinas of ignorance hard images of faith, slashed through the tangled woods of sin with flashing phrase. They wrote God's words
in granite, sandstone, marble, wood; on
tympana, portals, spandrels, corbels, bosses, beams.
Well carved, well paid.

But for the capitals they were not paid. They claimed these as their right, to carve at will. (The abbots raised their brows but thought, consoled, who'd see them in the shade?)

And so to those there then and generations on, those craftsmen left a heritage of tales, of lore, the legends of their lands set out in stone for those who read - not words, words change, betray -
but figures to stay trembling in the brain: the gaping jaws of beasts from myth and wild hunts out of dreams; centaurs loosing arrows at a hind, dragons spitting flames, the fight between
a griffon and a crocodile; an angel, lions, a bull, an eagle taking flight; death masks spewing leaves that unwind in ceaseless spirals, shooting out new life.

No coins today could pay for this delight, this pagan world, this book in stone, a universe of fables past and gone. And though we've long since lost the key to understanding with
our rational minds, we hunt for hidden meanings, thumb through manuscripts, search symbol codes, illuminated tomes; only to find ourselves, set hard in stone - modern centaurs, chasing the elusive hind.

[^2]Shape shifter
After a Romanesque pulpit by Gabriel Griffin


And suddenly you're here, goathoofed, wind-running, loosing your lying arrows, mocking the panthers snarling, shape-
shifting into sweet prey, then slipping away like a serpent, a hare, into a tangle of leaves. Hidden
till you burst forth moonhorned, stone-winged, the bull you dare me to slay, to release the flow of words you won't say.

Angel then, severe; your wings hard in their frozen beat enfold me till my breath turns into smoke and you
rise, feathers flaming head lion-maned, mouth an eagle's beak and I choke.


## Bridekirk Font

by Martyn Halsall


The font speaks from its runic carving where stone is paper, letter: Richard made me and brought me in his carefulness to this place.

Richard is pictured, nine centuries ago, hair swirling with the energy of his hammering, more mason than sculptor; a wild wrap or sarong lashed round him. High above, conflicting dragons
tangle and tear on this border of earth and sky. Wild air is flecked with blood, each word of holiness being wrestled and contested. Richard remembers. He carves a loaf, a vine,
draws water at an angle on another panel.
A man rises from a river, a dove hovers above him, breaking open light. The sky speaks: This is my son, listen to him.

Richard listens; chisel clink, draught in rafters. West wind is rumouring rain, sharp edge of water. Outside old skylight light cracks over Skiddaw. Each hand on work-shined haft knows such day's ending.

Late task to finish, then mallet's cooling handle set down after chiselling runes marking this place. Rinsing of hands. Relish for stone made bread.

Side Entrance
by Martyn Halsall


Stone rainbow, though never given to shine or fade, overshadowed a dark millennium by the church wall's angle, just fletchered by a rogue wind during a moult of snow.

Carved seventy years after the Conquest, on a chiselling day, wind cutting at sack-clothed shoulders, lines of steel picking out arrowheads in a tweed of grooves.

Wearings. A blunting of patterns, weather erosions of sandstone back to sand, worn signpost to arrivals and departures; side entrance for the choirmasters,
flower arrangers, priests, the duty wardens, those coming early to unlock silver, or remove curled orders of service left after weddings or funerals.

Stone lightning, arched psalm to this borrowed ground; narrow way for those who pass through, looking upward.

## Staking a Claim

by Vivien Jones


The Harbour Wall at Whitehaven, Cumbria

In slate quarries, on pyramids, on harbour walls, where the stones squeeze the air, no need of mortar where the fit is kin to kin, a blade might enter between, pierce the perfect join as if to say, 'Only God is perfect',

But the incision, the mark of the mason, says, anonymously, modestly, 'I, too, took part.'

## St Mary Magdalene, Launceston, Cornwall by Stuart Nunn



Charles Causley knew this statue here and wrote a poem about it. He and the kids he taught here knew the tale and didn't doubt it.

If you throw a pebble on her back and there it lodges with the rest, your wish will definitely stay on track and all your children will be blessed.

But I, a temporary resident, have different stories in my past. For me there isn't any precedent for taking stuff like this on trust.

So should I treat her with respect, this ancient prostitute cum saint? Isn't that too much for her to expect, given that my belief's so faint?

Whatever - this granite will endure and the skill these carvings represent is more than folk-tales or religion's lure. The stone displays what faith once meant.

So come you children, tourist and local, see if your pebble safely catches.
The poet, old stonemasons and the folk'll ensure your desire and future matches.

## Bone Phillip's Confession by Stuart Nunn

Who'd have thought I'd live so long? Those cold nights up by Stumpy Post, it seemed my life could be measured out in empty coaches and wet underwear Here I lie at the Chancel door.

Those meagre robberies eked out my youth but brought little wealth and fewer stories for the White Hart snug. Two hold ups made a quart of ale and Trant's cheapest whore. Here I lie because I'm poor.

To skulk in hedgerows is no kind of life and only young bones can stand for it and then not long. The money's tainted and leaves you still beyond the pale.

The farther in the more you pay.
I'd no time for church folk and their ways. Behind the praying lurk gallows and whip, and smiles that say they'd deal with you if they'd the means. Well, let them try.

Here lie I as warm as they.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Jim Bennett lives near Liverpool in the UK and is the author of 63 books, including books for children, books of poetry and many technical titles on transport and examinations.
His poetry collections include; Drums at New Brighton (Lifestyle 1999), Down in Liverpool (CD) (Long Neck 2001), The Man Who Tried to Hug Clouds (Bluechrome 2004 reprinted 2006), Larkhill (Searle Publishing 2009)
He has won many awards for his writing and performance including 3 DADAFest awards. He is also managing editor of www. poetrykit.org one of the world's most successful internet sites for poets. Jim taught Creative Writing at the University of Liverpool and now tours throughout the year giving readings and performances of his work.

Lesley Burt is from Christchurch, Dorset. Her qualifications and career have been in teaching and social work. She retired in January 2009 from a post at Southampton Solent University as a lecturer in social work. Her poetry has appeared in various poetry magazines and online. She is currently leading a poetry group with the aims of producing poetry to celebrate Christchurch, and promote local interest and involvement in poetry.

Lynn Ciesielski is an eighteen year veteran Special Education Teacher from Buffalo, NY USA. She retired a little over a year and a half ago and now visits with her family, travels, volunteers, writes and performs poetry at local venues at least once a week. Lynn hosts a monthly reading series of her own which she started soon after she retired. She strives to bring together poets and listeners from various walks of life. A year ago she produced a spoken word compact disc entitled Through Fractal Eyes. Odell Northington, one of Buffalo's finer musicians and composers accompanies her on this CD. In less than a year, Ms. Ciesielski has been published forty-two times including Pulsar Poetry Webzine, Speed Poets Zine, Blue Collar Review, and here in this Transparent Words Special. Please visit her website at http://lynnciesielski.webs.com/

Gabriel Griffin, who lives on the island of San Giulio, Lake Orta, Italy, is the founder (2001) and organiser of Poetry on the Lake competition, festival and events on Lake Orta, (www.poetryonthelake.org \& www.isolasangiulio.it ), editor of annual anthologies and Poetry on the Lake Journal. She has been prized and placed in many competitions and published in magazines and anthologies from 1996-2010 (Scintilla, Peterloo, HQ, Poetry Life, Acorn, Still, White Adder, Leaf, Envoi et al.) Own collections: Campango and the Mouthbrooders, Transumanza (www.poetgabrielgriffin.com). Past activities include events and seminars on community communication for the Venice Biennale, exhibitions and cultural events in Milan, Venice and Umbria. She is the author of handbooks on video and articles on folklore and local history.

Martyn Halsall is married to a Church of England priest who is the Vicar of a rural parish in West Cumbria. After studying history and education in London he became a journalist for local and regional newspapers, later writing as a staff correspondent for The Guardian, and more recently working as a communications advisor. He holds post-graduate creative writing degrees from the Universities of Lancaster and Cumbria, writing his PhD thesis on 'poetic truth in times of exile'. His poetry has been published in various magazines in England, Ireland and America and in the pamphlet 'Signposts from the Interior' (Commonword). Martyn also reviews poetry for the Church Times and is poetry editor of Third Way magazine.

Mandy Pannett lives in West Sussex where she leads workshops on creative writing. A teacher for many years, she has worked with all ages and abilities. She has won prizes and been placed in competitions and her work has been included in anthologies and journals including Coffee House Poetry, Contemporary Review, Envoi, Fire, Images of Women, Ink Sweat and Tears, Junctures: The Journal of Thematic Dialogue, Osiris, Poetry Scotland, Sentinel Poetry Quarterly, Scintilla, Tears in the Fence, The Journal.

Recent work has been translated into German and Romanian as part of the Poetry tREnd translation project and she has also acted as selecting editor for 'South' and been a judge of national poetry competitions including the recent 'Build Africa' competition.

She has three poetry collections: Bee Purple, Frost Hollow (both Oversteps Books) and Allotments in the Orbital (Searle Publishing)

Anyone requiring further information regarding any of the poets of poems in this edition of Transparent Words please write to info@poetrykit.org where we will also be happy to receive your comments.


[^0]:    Contributors

[^1]:    the foliage face at
    St Mary the Virgin Kirkby Lonsdale Larger version on title page

[^2]:    note: the Comacini were expert builders, stonemasons and craftsmen, originally from Lombardy, who, in the 10th-12th centuries, were commissioned to erect churches all over Europe

