

Just a few of Bert Biscoe's Poems

A valedictory utterance by the Master of Ceremonies of Gorsedh Kernow's annual concert – 1st September 2018

There's fifty thousand Cornish minutes
Between now and GK nineteen
Each second renders more infinite
The spaces of ticks in between

Shall I compere thee to an interval
To Bro Goth and Newquay Town Band
As September promises a winterful
Of Trelawny land to land

May Davey spur Dyer upon violin
And Grenaways sing away this Gorsedh night
May Spowart Rob of the multiple sin
Bid Oll an gwella to onen hag oll in sight!

Hed a Breven! Hed a Breven!
Knead thee till the crowd d'shout for 'More!'
Shout for 'More!'
And stamp a geht Redeemer's foot
Upon the chapel floor -
Upon God's tiled floor!

Heyl to the Homeland
Is but a mile or four -
Hed a Breven, evermore,
drive safely, deliver strongly
and don't forget to shut the door!

A shadow departs

Bert Biscoe

(To mark the departure of Clarice Mortensen in January 2014)

A Cossack child rode a black horse
Through Methody streets
Ahead of Truro Parades – her dancing feet
Sought the stage, her mind
Made stories of Viking raids, of rescue
From dark chains of absent priests –

Atlantic wisdoms and knowledge of knots
Turned in her childhood bowl;
Rudiments of navigation and bargains
Struck quayside for carriage of cargo –
Hers the soul he swore-by, hers the palm
He spat and clasped – and hers the hand

In columns, born in copperplate and turned
By ocean's dance and lamplight
To be as much a mark as voices left
In winter's branch and broken walls –
The path un-haunted lies, a metaphor'd
Vein across the hill, drenched again

By tears - our endless storm! We look
Each lengthened morning, each evening,
For a frail ship determined as ever a skipper
Must be to find her port, discharge and turn
To be gone on the tide, to dance as operas
Of gull and gods, of salt and sugar, collide –
How quiet, how undisturbed, this lane.

Boy Bassett and his Monument

Bert Biscoe

CHANGE-OVER-DAY

Bert Biscoe

Who'd be a vole,
Summer time,
Down St Buryan way,
On change-over-day?

That's the day they Christians d'call
Saturday - day of Saturn - he with the rings -
Roman patron of slaves - that's they
Who d'creep out of their hovels and Cornish Units
To clean caravans and chalets over Hayle and Carbis Bay –
Though, they never seen no Romans,
Cos Romans never come here for a holiday,
Nor to scout out second homes fer no mafia hideaway
Cos the A30 ain't much cop fer no high-speed getaway) -

Ess! Being a vole,
Change-Over-Day,
Shortens your life
Down St Buryan way!

The odds of skittering across
The black-tar ground between hedges
Without getting your pads scorched by bitumen
Sweating in the noon-day sun -
Why, they're only slightly longer -
 (In gambling *long and short* is very confusing!) -
Only slightly longer.....
Than if you dive between the wheels of a departing, lurching Peugeot
And fetch out behind its rocking caravan - unsquashed!

A vole?
Change-Over-Day?
Down St Buryan way?
No way, Jose! No way!

Now! The swallow flits in without warning,
Its slipstream parts the grass,
It turns tighter than its tail so you only think you've seen 'un
But, sure as talons is talons,
That swallow's been seen by the buzzard
And down he swoops, old Billy Buzzard,
Black as a cloud,
Showing off to his fledgling kid,
Circling like stacked-out 747s over St Columb Airport –

And, dear Vole, if that Peugeot don't get 'ee
on Change-Over-Day, down St Buryan way,
then surely you'll be prey
to a proud and feathery old buzzard Dad - odds on!

Being a vole
On Change-Over-Day
Shortens your life
Down St Buryan way!

And while odds are on offer - short or long! -
If you ain't a vole-burger pegged out on Highway 61 –
Porthcurno side of Boskenna –
Or, your dignity stripped,
With most, if not all, of your flesh, flayed and swallowed,
If you ain't dangling from the beak
 Of old Boeing Billy, the jetliner buzzard of Buryan, by midday,
 That Cornish sun, St Senara's Star, blazing down
And bidding farewell, adieu, see-ee'gen, dew genes
To all they drenched-and-happy checked-out-by-Ten-AM souls,
And seducing the dry-and-stressed
To get in under they en-suite showers before ee'd rain,
Then, my little Vole, my rodent pal, you
Are bound to be caught by Granfer
Proud as a coachman perched up on his TVO, green 'nd gold
ATCO Major – the old man's tractor!

What a machine!
Just big enough to spread your legs round the bonnet
And flop your varicose toes down on they aching pedals
Without disturbing the sciatica –
There he goes! Old Granfer! One hundred and twenty years
Of tilling this ground, scything the corn, crying neck after neck
Till all the cows he've ever sold down market
Have come home! There he goes, sweeping round the campsite,
Round and round, in and out the frame-tent suburbs,
Slicing French Cricket's six-hit tennis balls,
Mutilating Alcock & Brown's crashed and mangled kites,
Snipping the odd guy-rope
In hope of catching some young newly-weds or livers-in-sin
At home in the day-time and 'at it!'

His legs'll be bowed as a blow-hole.
He'll be wrapped and muffled against the wind,
The hotter the day, the thicker the muffling!
His blades'll be razors,
His field'll be his watercolour board,
And his mission?

To scythe down the sins of the grass, to render
Rough and ready sward something akin to velvet –
Green velvet!

He'll have your tail or a careless leg,
Or, if you're half-way-out, or half-way-in
of a Tesco's bag of left-behinds, after you've
Sunk your Bugs Bunny incisors
Into putrified corners of a grease-lagged burger,
When you're licking your lips from the hunt,
Then! He'll whizz and screech past -
Dreamin' of acres mown for victory, for harvest, for pride,
For the sake of it, for 'Set Aside' and, best of all, for no reason at all!
He's been out there, round and round,
Since *his* Dad was the one who disappeared
Down market on Tuesdays, to come home quite contented,
Milk-cow sold and nothing to show in corduroy breeches!
Ess! That old bugger'll have your whiskers;
Before you know it, you're naked, de-frocked -
And a lay-rodent's sermon to preach tomorrow!

And I ask again! Who'd be a vole
Down St Buryan way
With life cut shorter than a big-house lawn
On Change-Over-Day?

By six the fields are crammed!
They've cruised from pitch to pitch,
Four-by-fours and roof-racked Fords,
They've calculated wind-direction against distance from '*facilities*' –
'I don't want to sleep with my toes in the air' –
All they tractors, power-steering, diesel-belching
All the way from Chelsea - and the know-alls
Flipping up their frame-tents,
Stacking up the charcoal - igniting
And talking in loud, cultured tones
About the '*sweetness of country air*'
And the '*need to make the polluter pay*' -
Granfer pitches up on the Atco,
Sent round by Mother with the leather bag -
"Staying all week, are'ee? Aw! Just tonight!
Tenner, boy!" And the kids get the kites up.

They kites! Bleddy contraptions!
Not your Icarus Sun Cruisers dripping myth,
Nor your dangling diamonds - these kites
Re-enact the bombardment of Guernica -
Stuka-banshee wails meld

With max-manouverability – live effects –
Pterodactyls sporting laryngitis
Cackle over who's poo's whitest,
Who's chicks scrawniest,
This is get-away-from-it-all ptero-terror-dactyl –
Makes ya wanna say: *'Don't come back till...
Change Over Day'*.

Remember! To be a vole,
Change-Over-Day,
Shortens your life
Down St Buryan way!

And there it is. Change-Over-Day.
A weird religious festival,
A strangely Cornish feast
For a patron saint of visitors -
*...."and he shall be blessed with no name
who has stripped away the smile
and laid bare the outstretched hand..."*
You might intone from a pulpit,
It's a text, O Whiskerless Priest,
A text to your whiskerless sermon!
Tis a pagan ritual, Change Over Day,
It turns good souls –
Makes 'em rush out into streets
To lay palm-fronds on rough stones
To ease the bunions of weary pilgrims,
To polish up the brown signs,
To touch up the red roses!

Invented by Q and Sylvanus Trevail,
Visitor One come one glorious day –
Come on the train,
Paintbrush, straw hat, tubes of paint,
Snuffbox full of life-after-mining powder,
Diversification-after-farming, harbour-trips-
after-fishing – all snuffed up the nose –
The long ponderous moment...the SNEEZE!
Visitor One told Visitor Two
And then they invented the motor car –
Well! That was Dick Trevithick,
Who should've known better but couldn't see –
'Twas Henry Ford discovered how to make cars make money!
All they empty houses, skivvies and waiters
And towns snowed under by gulls –
Dick couldn't see the pillow over the face
Of life and love, and language – for the clouds of steam I s'pose!

Now, tis Change-Over-Day!
The mighty St Buryan vole
Ain't got no place to hide,
No quiet place to feed his soul!

The Fittest Survive!
A bit of fun, you understand,
A little entertainment for a rainy day,
For visitors! At twilight, the crows
Gone hunting, out of earshot,
The Vole, the Swallow and the Buzzard
D'meet up behind the shower block
To come to a little arrangement - tomorrow,
When *they're* all discovering tailbacks,
Soft pale flesh, yellow sand everywhere,
In the food, in the book, in the car –
Rising with the sun to trudge the dew,
The early-morning queue for a pee,
'We're going fishing!' Declare these three,
The Vole, the Swallow, the Buzzard.

'You may think it strange, rodents and birds
Gone fishing! What we mean is,
Like a lot of fishing species
We're going to find a rocky place far away,
Far, far away from every-every-where.
We'll have a flask, half of yesterday's pasty,
Maybe a bit of old Mother's saffron cake,
And we're going to sit, hour after hour,
We, vole, swallow and buzzard, will watch
The tide come in, the tide go out, come in, go out –
Till we've had enough. Then, we'll stand up,
Stretch our claws and paws and snouts and beaks,
Pack up all our bits - leave a crust
For the mermaid, in case she's peckish later –
We'll grunt quietly to each other,
Without sadness, without joy: and we'll say,
Each to the other: *"Nothin' doin' today Billy."*
"Never mind, Boy. Never mind!"

And that's how, if you're a vole
Down St Buryan Way
On Change Over Day,
You stop your life getting shorter,
And with a bit of luck
You stop the lamb and the dying duck
Going to slaughter in a thunderstorm –

All the animals, all the birds,
Spiders and beetles and curly worms
On Change Over Day.....
They go Fishing; t'stay outta the way!
'Now you know!'

Milwaukee Anthem 2014

Bert Biscoe

So, you may be the man
The one I need to know
The one who will, if he can,
Guide me to the show!

O shall we gather
Together
Here beside the water

I've slept above the ocean,
Walked along moving ground,
Moved faster'n natural motion,
Tested the speed of sound –

I've fallen from the sky
And lost myself in town,
To speak my word, though shy,
To tie sweet longing down –

Ode on the retirement of Dr McGovern

Bert Biscoe

Tis said, down there by Grylls' old arch,
When the creaking of ghost ships d'wind up the wind
And make they Penrose's howl across to Loe Bar,
And when they choppers is spluttering in moisty air
And rooks cackling over the chimbleys of the old jail;
When cattle and sheep from the far beyond
Whisper from rusted pens as the auctioneer calls their price –

When Fitzsimmons's knuckles d'punch the air
Down below, where old pugilists d'slug it out for eternity –
Ess! And there, between the hedges of summer lanes
And across Predannick moors, in the throats of Gunwalloe's fishermen,
Down the shafts of Godolphin's fortune
Between the sobs for his home-sweet-home Duchess,
The old widower d' prise her fingers apart which d'cover his eyes
And peeks out between pages of Queen Anne's great Union Act
(He'll never tell what became of Kernow in that there Union!) –

Oh! Can you hear their cries arise to still the clouds
Across Helston skies -
And Hark! The roar of St Keverne men on the march for Bodmin:
They'll pick up Flamanck and get on the road for London –
Freedom and rebellion hand in hand and Body's breathless tax unpaid –
Hung, drawn and quartered but never defeated –
Never as long as St Keverne men draw breath outalong!
You know – all they roads is paved with Porthoustock stone
So St Keverne men can march up England and find their own way home!

All these and plenty more d'stand in line across Eternity Square,
Not Michaelangelo nor Ludwig von Beethoven, nor Barbara Hepworth,
Nor Coleridge – No! Not even Jan Stone –
They d' twirl and high-step and laugh with Spring on the rise
In and out the houses, all around the town –

Sometimes, in the deepest parts of the everyday they d'lean over the counter,
Grasp a glass and down a half (no more, no less!) of Spingo –
And all around, from Lizardh 'nd Wendron, all awver the Meneage,
Bonython and Trelowarren – they call out across the widest street,
Across the deep Atlantic from Lloyds down Lizard to New-found-land –

Even the sprite, the spriggan, the knocker and Lanyon's little fairies –
They all d'gasp – in the park, on the pew, down Port'leven, awver Cadgwith,
Along the railway to Nancegollan!
Why!

Even the ghost of Mr Johns isself, lookin' up from some flower in a hedge,
Liftin' his Latin pencil from his evolution notebook – Even he!
They seen some pile come and go, and this 'ere school,
Helston's pride and joy, do feed the minds of Helston Girl and Helston Boy,
D' pack a brev few off up the line
T' strut round Cambridge and bike through Oxford,
T' wield a stethoscope, scald a testube,
To score a fillum and heal the two legged donkey by talkin' backwards!

Ess! Ee've been a golden age – now ee's done!
Ee's goin' up Trurra to stir some cauldron, to magic talk t'raise a roof –
Not a Trurra stone will be un-turned!
Down here in Helston they'll speak in tongues
And say to any taxman, revolutionary, botanist, poet or inventor –
There goes *our* Headmaster, don't ee just love'un,
There goes the one, the only Doctor Patrick McGov'un!

South Crofty Revived

Bert Biscoe

Ah! We'll sit beside the aching Bal
To hold our heart between its knees –
Still hands, uncalloused now
Stir melancholy's slow reprise –

It suits the eye to always choose
To stare at slowly moving ground
Beneath soft sandalled shuffled soles
Where nail'd steps once rang their sound,

And, pressed beneath the spirit,
Prone as mermaids conjured, to weep!
It suits despondent pity to bless
The labours passed of they who sleep –

It is for plough-wrought brow
And tremulous mournful voices
To ignore the sounds of Crofty now
A-brim with modern 'total' noises –

Knockers speak tomorrow's tongue
Of element and indium, conductor tin,
Of sun and rain, all weather reversed,
And young the ancient to again begin –

Too soon by far to lament the end
And wise the Cap'n who shines his shoe,
Who takes the call to once more descend
As lode and price come right to hue –

Wheels turn and rock gives up its ore,
What is lost will find itself the prize
As fortune seeks to reward good hope
And damn the fool for self-deceiving lies.

Teamwork!

Heave ho my bonny granite lads, -
We're blasted in one go from Kernow -
Heave ho, heave ho, this invisible line,
Together lads, one and all, and pull
Our mystery load from shore to mine -
It's the toil, lads, the toil,
And never the clever to drag,
But there's art and science and love of god
In the shift of thing to situation -

We have brought ancient stones to moorland,
We have drawn great guns to field,
We've hove sweet ships to bollards tied,
And beast to fire new-killed -

Our backs have been in it for all of time,
Our minds upon destination,
No master had ever cause to groan -
Our grip of hands and feet in turf to bring
Burdens and trophies home is keen,
For we were born under Cornish chisel
To heave ho, heave ho for ever, my lads,
Forever, where calls go up for a team.



Poem by Bert Biscoe.
Sculpture by David Wynne.
Carved from Mabe granite by Will and Rex Pascoe and men, S & J Andrew, Antron Hill, Mabe, Penryn 1958

Tom Berryman

Bert Biscoe

Tonight the city street
Don't scrape this pair of feet
Nobody shout-out above the crowd
Nobody sneak-a-peek beneath his shroud

One more son of the mud
One more voice of the town
Swirls of fog around the spires
Silent chuckle, Silent Town –

Barmen hang their heavy heads
And priests turn down sorry beds
The buzzard scours a Trennick field
On the table a bitten apple peeled –

Crowds and streets await the wheel
Young Widows brave the hard bell's peal
A curlew cracks the river's glass
Stand aside, let spirits pass.....

'Twill all come round, Boy! Never Fear!'

Mr Pezzak of Mousehole makes small talk in a chance meeting of Bards up t'Turra!

'Ah! 'Tis a legal crime! Brazen theft!
Old Pezzak grips my arm. 'Council houses
In a village silenced by profiteers
Changing hands for half a million!'

'Places built by Granfer & Son
To get more kids past the age of one!
And the Christmas lights, up all year!'

'Some busy-body took on to clear
A century's cobwebs, to interfere
And change the peace of the Lifeboat
Room, where solemn crews

Peer out through dust from eternity –
Naw need! Naw need 't all, but peace,
'Ee's different if 'ee's bought with money –
Specially money nawb'dy sees,

Money on wires in lieu of fees,
And council houses empty stood
And trees, wands in the easterlies,
Swayed like fools in a stadium wood

That speak no sighs nor twilight lullabies
When lovers stroll between their rings –
Only a lark, for old time's sake,
Hangs from a cloud over heather's brake

And sings – sings of revival, of rescue,
Of witness and thanksgiving –
Sings in the slipstream of storms
'*For those in peril...'*, *Abide with Me'*

And '*Cym Rhonda*', until, udders dry,
The milkin' 'erds groan lower bass
To root the choir in this people's place!'

'A legal crime, I say! The theft of decency,
A tyranny of paint – quaint names
Slated and silvered by each front door,

Messages, declarations of possession,

The crunch of invading espadrilles
Along odourless harbour walls – and curses
Of ghosts, of gansey'd hosts, lugger crews
Of cousins and uncles, of Penders

And Tregenzas, of Pentreaths, all away,
Keigwin, Carvosso, Trewavas, old Dolly,
Madron, Brockman, Blewett, Greenhaugh,
Smith, Torrie, Wallis – all away

To nurse a vacuum in metro hearts,
To speak in drawls and twangs
Of material things, of gardens needing rain...
But never, never the exile's pain –

Never village parted for lack of a house
And love left to curl and trickle
Through a grille of an un-cleared drain –
Who's left now to share in the seine

When mackerel and hunger, mark my words,
Cause the fleet to fill brown sails,
With dawn on its heels and lanyard prayers
In eager throats from the harbour rails?

Places built by Granfer & Son
To get more kids past the age of one!
And the Christmas lights, up all year!

And '*Cym Rhonda*', until, udders dry,
The milkin' 'erds groan lower bass
To root the choir in this people's place!

But, hope, Boy! Hope on the ailing tongue,
The travellin' quack's elixir,
Easter drunk for resurrection, Kingdom come!
'Twill all come round, Boy! Never fear!'