

# LANDINGS

Richard Skelton

CORBEL STONE PRESS

2 0 1 5

## ANGLEZARKE

A spur of eastern hills, 1,000 ft high projecting into the centre. The greater part a high moorland, 2,792 acres (167 of inland water). There is no village of Anglezarke, but a hamlet called White Coppice lies in the north-west, and another called Hempshaws in the south-east.

Adapted from *The Victoria History  
of the County of Lancaster*,  
VOLUME V, 1911.

Approaching this outcrop of trees,  
the atmosphere hits me forcibly. The  
pitiable nakedness of the boughs and  
branches. The sudden murmuring of  
the wind. *Colluding*. I want to make  
some kind of gesture. An offering. A  
mark of passing. And to leave it here.  
Tied to the land.

## THE COPSE AT THE BROW OF SCHOOL HOUSE LANE

How to begin writing this down? Shall it be a simple inventory?  
A list of parts. Names. Dates. Genealogies. Sound begetting  
sound. Endless melody.

If I were to say – a robin sings in the trees across the field from  
this coppice – would that be enough? Could you flesh things  
out from such a meagre outline? Or should I describe its song?  
Onomatopoeia. But the bird has long fallen silent before the  
words begin to form.

And what of the other sounds – the constant polyphony?

Distant hum of motorway traffic.  
Delicate rattle of leaf against branch.  
Everything in between.

I fill the page as best I can, replace the diary under a stone, and  
retrace my steps down the darkening lane.

But as I walk back under the eaves of those trees, I ask myself  
– could any film, recording or photograph tell you this? That  
whilst I dwelt within that wooded chamber, listening to those  
brief glimmers of song, I forgot about her, the river and its  
promise.

All that mattered was without weight or consequence. Nothing  
lingered or resonated beyond the instance of its own making.  
Everything listened.

## NOON HILL WOOD

I quickly leave the meadow behind and climb the narrow stile which grants access to the plantation. Pausing briefly on the threshold, I glance along the first row of trees, and then back at the field below. A moment of transition. Passing between worlds.

*Dark throat of woodland.*

Craw of pine, spruce and beech.

Gargling the water that runs

from Noon Hill Slack.

I last came here in the promise of the year. Sloshing up the small stream and the steep banks. In its higher reaches the trees gather closely together, and the light is dammed by their outstretched branches, occasionally flooding through the gloom in brilliant flashes. And here and there are clearings. Great pools of sky. Natural amphitheatres.

I originally came bearing musical instruments. Now I bring recordings made on those first, tentative forays. Gently bowed strings. Concertina drone. Bird clamour. The sound of leaves and water.

Bringing this time and that time together. Returning the music back to its birthing chambers.

Hearing it drift, thick, across

the dark earth. Taking root.

Brushing against leaf and moss.

Gathering in the shivering treetops.

And the wood listens to itself.

## SCAR TISSUE

A farmhouse. Long fallen into ruin. One of many that litter these moors like scar tissue. Each a fragile testament to a half-forgotten history. Tenaciously clinging to a wind-ravaged existence. Gradually succumbing.

Many of these places have names. This one is called *Old Rachel's*. A host of questions hover around that name like the wild moorland birds I disturbed the first day I came here.

From *the book*:

Partly standing in October 1936. A large open fireplace with ingle-nooks. A stone porch to front door with seats. Built lengthways into the side of the hill.

And then in pencil:

The barn, built on the end of the house, was a large one.

Followed by more typing:

Was occupied in 1841 by Roger Brown, who was churchwarden. Old Rachels and Abbots were inhabited until about 1910.

Accompanying these descriptions are two pathos-inducing photographs, presumably taken by the book's author, showing the farm in its first stages of decay. In all, a meagre epitaph for such a place as this, which, even now, in its degraded state, seems to act as a pivot about which the moor wheels.

Later research turns up another photograph, taken in the 1890s. The farm's last occupants, the Evans family, pose outside. A woman in white stands just outside the entrance, hands on hips, head slightly cocked, looking squarely into the camera. A girl crouches beneath the window cradling an infant, almost receding into the wall itself. She looks downwards, as if expressing her reticence to be involved in this depiction of rustic domesticity. And last but not least, all but hidden by a wall, a young man stands, arms folded. A century's passing has since transformed this building from family dwelling into desolate ruin, home only to occasional wild birds and the sound of the breeze through the Yarrow vale. A century of collapse, decay and gradual surrender.

And as I clamber over wood and stone, trying to trace its perimeter – to distinguish it from the moor which threatens to engulf it – I dislodge bits here and there, unintentionally becoming complicit in the process of decay. And how to stop the rot? How to salvage something from time's passage? How long before the map makers decide to erase this structure completely? Before it becomes a nameless ruin? And then a mere pile of stones. Mossed over. Forgotten. How long until they lift its name from their charts and from our collective memory?

The only thing I can do is fill the place with music.

To pour sound between wood and stone.  
Into each fissure and fault-line.  
Like rain on an April morning.

But sound, too, falls into decay and eventual silence. Perhaps a fitting medium for such a commemorative gesture?

And just like the dissolution of this once well-delineated structure,  
the sounds of my bowed steel strings spill outwards. They  
cannot be contained. Fixed. Charted. They ripple across the  
moor. Losing shape and form. Accruing ghostly, shimmering  
overtones. Mingling with the sound of larks high above me,  
and the shrill dissent of curlews from across the river banks.  
An elegy born from stones, dirt and grasses.

## LINES OF FLIGHT

I watch a solitary crow follow the  
Yarrow upstream. Tracing its own  
river in the sky. Higher, much higher,  
gulls wheel and meander, bicker and  
squabble.

Could I know the landscape without  
ever seeing it? Linn its ghost,  
mirrored in these intangible paths –  
these lines of flight?

## A MANDATE

Following the Yarrow downstream. It occurs to me that I'm drawn as much to the river as to the ruins that prostrate themselves along its banks. From its headwater at Hordern Stoops it traces a pathway between Hempshaws and Stoops, Simms and Old Rachel's, Wilkinson Bullough and Brown Hill. Pulling them into a mesh of connections. Setting them in opposition. Binding them together.

But more than proximity and geometry, the Yarrow and these ruins are bound up in a darker history. Between 1868 and 1877 the river was dammed further down the valley, forming a new reservoir to help meet the increased demands for drinking water by the swelling populations of nearby towns and villages. In doing so, two farms – Turners and Alance – were submerged; the latter perhaps reconfigured into the bridge which now bears its name. The Yarrow Reservoir wasn't the first of its kind in this area – three others (the *Anglezarke*, *Upper* and *Lower Rivington Reservoirs*) were built by the Liverpool Corporation between 1850 and 1857. It seems as though the flooding of valleys to create artificial lakes was something of an epidemic in the mid-19th century, but in comparison to some regions where entire villages were inundated, the inhabitants of Anglezarke and Rivington emerged relatively unscathed.

So why did most of the farmsteads in the surrounding area become vacated over the next 30 years? The answer may lie with the Liverpool Corporation, and its mandate to provide clear drinking water for its city's inhabitants. At the turn of the 20th century it attempted to acquire the watershed land surrounding its reservoirs with the reputed intention of demolishing all buildings in the vicinity, including Rivington village. A clear indication of the metropolitan mindset. The

homes of the rural few were expendable. They constituted a contamination threat to the purity of an entire city's water supply.

William Hesketh Lever, owner of the Rivington estate, had other ideas however. Something of a philanthropist, he wished to bequeath it to the people in the form of a public park. On the 8th of August, 1902, an *Act of Parliament* was passed, which, amongst other things, granted Liverpool Corporation the right to "acquire certain lands for the protection of their Rivington water supply". The Rivington estate was duly sold to the Corporation, but not without condition. *Lever Park* was enshrined in the legislature "for the use and enjoyment of the inhabitants of the county borough of Bolton and generally of the public for ever". Moreover, the village of Rivington was spared, but this protection sadly didn't extend to the adjoining lands of Anglezarke, then owned by a Mr Percival Sumner Mayhew. The Corporation acquired the Anglezarke water-catchment in 1904, and although clause 19.3 of the *Liverpool Corporation Act* made provision for Mayhew's exclusive right to shoot (grouse and pheasant) on Anglezarke's moors, no mention was made of the tenant farmers – of their right to tenure.

As Gladys Sellers noted, in her essay *The History Of Anglezarke Moorland Farms*, tenants' leases were annually renewable. Evictions weren't necessary. Who could withstand the will of a corporation? Within three brief years the remaining farms on watershed land were vacated. Did the corporation demolish the buildings shortly thereafter, I wonder? A safeguard against their future habitation? Or were they simply left to dereliction and decay?



## RUNNING A LINE

From *the book*:

He stated that the stones which formed Brown Hill  
were removed to make or repair one of the reservoirs. The  
contractors running a line and bogeys to carry stones.

It's a compelling image. Running a line. A physical connection  
between two places. An act of transference.

As with Hollinshead Hall, so with Brown Hill. And how  
many others, I wonder? Clearly there's a practical, logistical  
motive behind the impulse to dismantle these buildings and  
reuse their raw materials elsewhere. But there's an unintended  
resonance which is felt, still, all these years later. A sensation  
that these once discretely proportioned dwellings have  
become transfigured, extended – incorporated into a sprawling  
lattice of earth, air, water and stone; filaments in a weave of  
interconnecting threads.

*The landscape is a catalogue of movements. An inventory of  
pathways, visible and intuited. A table of the elements, endlessly  
reconfigured:*

Hovering along the kill paths of kestrels as they bisect the  
Yarrow valley. Trembling in the haze of the red road that runs  
at dusk from Simms to Wilkinson Bullough. Straining in the  
summoning call that tightens over Grange Brow and Folds  
Pasture. Gathering in the shivering tree tops of Noon Hill  
Wood and Holts Flat.

And yet, could it be that my efforts to collude in this hidden  
geometry – this phantasmagoria – are rooted, not in nature,

but in the charts, plans and inventories of civil engineers? When I move stones from one ruin to another, am I unwittingly following the edicts of Town Hall? Carrying out the will of corporate government? I wonder what happened to those forgotten pragmatists who shaped the modern topography of Rivington and Anglezarke – Hawksley, Cubitt and Rendel? Their legacy is writ large in clay, pitch and stone, but their names are lost – buried beneath the very waters they convened to create.

And what about Thomas Duncan, architect of the Yarrow reservoir, who died before its completion? Was he sensible to the rippling consequences of flooding this valley? Was there a moiety of tact and consideration given to the naming of these new structures? *Turner's Embankment* and *Alance Bridge*. Each a deference to what had gone before? A gesture that stressed continuity and perpetuity, rather than disruption and transience? Or perhaps something which originally evolved out of public sentiment had by then become formula and procedure? No need to think of a new name, just take what's already there.

But should I be so eager to censure the likes of Duncan, and his successor, Joseph Jackson? Aren't they simply part of the continual process of transformation? Agents of change? Architects of progress? And haven't I benefited from their endeavours? Aren't I unwittingly complicit in all this? After all, the fresh, clean tap water that I have always taken for granted flows directly from this river – from this reservoir. And although I've done my share of manual labour, I've never worked the fields, herded sheep or operated a loom. Am I qualified to comment? Is my sympathy little more than patronage?

Would my sanctimony on behalf of those who once lived here be welcome? Regardless, I feel a debt of gratitude is owed; their homes were sacrificed for my future benefit – for my convenience.

But more than anything, it's the here-and-now – these remnants – to which I feel connected. Despite my desire to view them as part of a continuum, it's difficult to ignore the feelings associated with abandonment and decay. And given my personal history, it's all too easy to view this landscape through the prism of bereavement. To discover loss wherever I look. To conjure sorrow from dereliction, pathos from crumbling stones and rotting wood.

But then again, perhaps I should embrace such emotions? Does the burden of grief bestow certain rights? By becoming death's witness, does one also make a kind of transition – an Orphic journey – and become attuned to certain voices? Over these last few years I've slowly made my passage through this landscape. Limned the edges of its streams and rivers, followed the contours of its hills, the eaves of its woods. And to what purpose? With whom am I colluding? Who are my guides? What name did this place have before records began?

Looking out over this expanse of impounded river water, I try to imagine the former valley. What must it have been like, over a century ago, in the shadow of the industrial north? (The legacy of the enclosures – landless tenants scratching a living. The repeal of the Corn Laws and the constant threat of poverty. The dawn of cheap mass-manufacturing and the ensuing decline of cottage industries.) The census records from 1841 tell the story all too plainly. Families were large

and many shared dwellings with each other. Children were put to work as soon as they were able. The Marsden's of Wilkinson Bullough had five children, three of whom worked as weavers, including Ralph, who was just seven years old. Nearby, at the old farm of Simms, Charles and Jane Holt also had five offspring, including Alice, whom the census records describe as a "winder", aged ten years (possibly at the nearby Lister Mill).

And when children couldn't be employed at home, they were often packed off to live with another family. I think again of SP. Born in 1865. Boarder at the age of six. Serving girl at sixteen. Living on the high moor with someone else's family. The river and the old hay meadow. What imaginings of a future life? Dreams of escape to the nearby cities of Liverpool or Manchester? Spires and columns on the dim horizon. If only the dry-plate system had been perfected earlier, then there might have been a photograph. A face for a name. But there are no chemical memories here.

## SOUNDS OF THE MOOR

In some oblique fashion this music has come to work its way into the moor itself. Played over and over again at various times and places, it mediates my experience of this landscape. Conjures it. Summons it. *Suffuses it.*

Bowed, plucked and chafed steel strings. The sound of stones gently rubbed together. Soft soil sprinkled on resonant wooden bodies. Grasses and leaves intertwined around neck and fretboard. Bone and wood plectra. Sound folded on sound. A collusion of place and instrument.

## HOLLOW

False plane.  
Hollow.  
What caused  
your loss of heart?

The dull  
incessant roar.  
Duress.  
Commutated metal.

Sing  
the air's engines.  
Lichen  
memory.

The sum  
of all knowledge.  
Withered.  
Forgetting.

## CAGED

Blood and the facial disc.  
Noiseless. Unmoved.  
A bright crest of optic nerve.  
Against my dull eye and the hovering dark.

Keep watch the bruised horizon?  
Watcher? You? Of fur, quill and bone?  
Amongst the stone and fenced remnants.  
Along the banks and the black fields.

Tiny palpitations. Filaments of life.  
Hidden dramas of shade against shade.  
And my senses are wretched. Caged.  
Whilst you cage the sky.

## A FITTING GESTURE

I think back to my early attempts with sound. And even then. Sound made tangible. Physical. Not a disturbance of the air, but a viscous, healing liquid.

To pour sound between wood and stone.  
Into each fissure and fault-line.  
Like rain on an April morning.

But it strikes me that the most apt and fitting gesture is one which requires no premeditation. One which I've made many times, instinctually. To touch. To hold. To feel. I remember a quote from Paul Eluard, describing his wife Gala: "Her body is the shape of my hands."

It strikes me that the only way to know this place is through touch. To place myself inside it. Incorporate myself into its compressed landscape. To reside, for a while, within its shattered rooms. Its deserted chambers. To allow my arms and hands to become extensions of its oblique geometries. Gently plug holes and fissures with my own body. To feel it. Observe the impression left upon my skin by its obdurate contours. To bear its scars, clinging like kisses.

## HORDERN STOOPS

A kestrel limns the vast banks  
of mist that coil around the  
lower slopes of Will Narr.  
Arrow. Rough hill. *Faierlokke*.  
The rowans are bearing fruit.  
Raspberry canes in the old  
garden. Migration differentials.  
The curlews are long gone, but  
swallows fatten themselves over  
the old hay meadow. I can hear  
voices by the masts of Winter  
Hill. Families of shadows on  
the moor. Bitumen. She died of  
drowning. A small, shallow dell.

fallen

flutter

flown

swell

leaf

last

wing

whir

fur

blood

clot

scar

wire

bark

gape

sky

hand

veil

wool

clay

stream

back

brick

wound

feather

tide

river

down

## FIRMAMENT

She was with me. We were walking down the old pathway. It was quiet and I heard her shallow intake of breath. She was looking up and I looked up. I saw nothing, and then I saw them. Hundreds, it seemed, high, high up in the firmament. They seemed to multiply before our eyes. The sky, sick with them. Metal. Burning. I felt her hand grip my arm, trembling, and tasted blood in my mouth.

## PARIAH

Breathe quietly. Become motionless. Lose your identity to the mass of stones and nettles. Finally it will come. Bird totem of these outcast ruins. Pariah, whose hated shape is written in the biotic memory of all small things. (I remember watching a bored, solitary crow harry the falcon across the fields. The victim screeched its protest as the black bird forced it, weary, to ground.) And here it comes, gliding the bank of the narrow stream. *Tinnunculus*. Pivoting, effortless, as it suspends the moor on ferrous wires.

Suddenly, Great Hill and Ratten Clough make sense. The quiver of its wings and the arrow of my blood. Its bristling senses spark across the moor, making a late-September fire out of the dim embers of summer.

And long after its presence has been extinguished by the encroaching dark, I remain, looking for a trace – a flint for the memory – amongst the heaped, broken stones:

- Coil of barbed wire and string
- Fragment of moss-fastened vertebrae
- Thistle seed head and stalk
- Bone of small animal
- Mottled feather
- Curved section of roof tile

Matter for the construction of song. Ingredients for the medicine bag. Thing-poems of the moors. Vesch. Synecdoche. Sense map. Connective tissue.

## GONE

The grey bird is gone. Its cry no longer frames the captive landscape. The curlews, gone. Their birthing halls deserted. The watcher, *aderyn corff*, is absent. Blended into nothing. Swifts, vanished. (In May, as I inched along Sheep House Lane in a violent gale, a swift rose up beside me, sails switching, seeming to share for a moment in my private struggle. Its arrow, I thought, had been blunted. Its scythe notched by the stony weather. But then it lurched forward, effortless, through a fissure of its own making, leaving me stranded, seasick, head reeling.)

And here by the path on Hoar Stones Brow, I find a large, black feather. *Crow rudder*. The only testimony – on this blank morning – that the air bore something on its back. Lifted high on its shoulders. Singing.

## AUTUMN

A century's passing and the listening  
rattle. Crows bicker in the trees  
overhead. Rhymed leaves. Dew grass.  
Wing skirr. Engine. Siren. Machinic  
murmur. Threads across the river.  
Collective memory. Left to nettles  
and to barbed wire.

## MIMESIS

There is a purpose here.  
Following the bend  
of this small nameless  
stream, my steps invoke  
the path of the Yarrow,  
miles away, as it tumbles  
down from Will Narr.  
*Mimesis*. The knots  
of my hands and the  
knuckles of ash above.  
Joints. Junctures. Cross-  
ings. An arboreal sweep  
of collarbone. And  
beyond the blood river.  
A musculature of hill  
and meadow.

## ABSENCE

### I. SOMETHING UNRESOLVED

It has been a long time since I last ventured there. I resolved not to return unless I could trace a path from my door to one of the seventeen thresholds that grant access to the moor. I wanted to connect – with footfall – the place where I resided and the place where I wished to be.

As days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, I devised more elaborate and self-defeating ways of investing this process with meaning. If I were to walk there, then I would do so only across fields, along hedgerows, streams and ditches. I would avoid tarmac and concrete, marking out instead a natural corridor – a map of the green verges that criss-cross the intervening landscape. The distance was perhaps only 5 miles as the crow flies, but how tortuous was the route that involved no roads? Did such a route even exist?

In the weeks leading up to this resolution, my encounters with the landscape had become increasingly elaborate, demanding, oblique.

I kept a vigil for as long as I could in the field above Old Rachel's. I lay motionless in the long grass from where I could see nothing but sky. In the absence of visual stimuli I resorted to cataloguing sounds.

Whisper of grasses against my ear.

Clack of stonechats, perhaps twenty feet away.

Needle-song of a lark, high in the sky above me.

Engine noise of a car climbing the hill past Moses Cocker's.

Roar of the M61, softened to a murmur by the distance.

After several hours I observed a kestrel glide above me. It lingered, hovering for a few seconds – perhaps trying to comprehend this foreign shape beneath it – before moving on, following the blazing scent maps of mice, voles and other small things.

Towards the end of my days there, I felt compelled to spend a night on the moor. I stood in the tall grass and sedge above the ruins of Stoops farm, watching my dim shadow lengthen as the moon rose behind me, high above Winter Hill.

A night of exhilaration, of boredom and terror, in which the merest of sounds took on other forms – grew large in the expanse of darkness. After several hours the sheep gradually stopped calling to each other from across the river banks, and a brittle quiet descended. More than anything, I wanted to walk down to the water's edge. *To see the black river in the moonlight.* But a mixture of fear and reason kept me locked along the safe paths high above.

As morning approached I watched a faint blush spread along Redmonds Edge to Spitlers Edge. When the sun finally rose above Will Narr there was an audible reflection in the valley, a cacophony of song, a rejoicing.

But what was the purpose of encounters such as these? Each felt like a test which I was bound to fail, or a show in which there was no revelation, no dénouement. If I was searching for an epiphany, a conclusion, then it was too subtle for my senses to apprehend.

Over the half-decade during which I visited Anglezarke, I

felt increasingly lured to the yellow-brown precincts of Holts Flat and Sam Pasture, the green-black chambers of Noon Hill Wood, the pale seats above Will Narr and Great Hill. In the late spring of 2008 the cottage at Dean Wood House, overlooking the Yarrow Reservoir, became available to rent. I made tentative enquiries, but the asking price was more than double what I could afford. With so few dwellings in Anglezarke, it seemed that my desire to reside within that landscape – to simply dwell there – would never be fulfilled. This event, which seemed relatively insignificant at the time, in retrospect became a kind of turning point. If I couldn't live there, I would forever be a visitor. An interloper.

In this light, it strikes me that there was something desperate in those last gestures, those final offerings. An attempt to cling to a place in spite of circumstance. Acts of devotion. Of love. If I had continued with them, where would they have taken me? And to what end?

The previous summer I remember searching for the ruins of Calico Hall on the high moor above White Coppice. I veered off the path between Coppice Stile House and Grimes, and came across another ruin unnamed on contemporary maps. The building (called Heapey Moor farm, I learned later) had all but collapsed, but in the remnants of a small outhouse I found a collection of waterproof matting carefully folded under a large stone. The roof of the storehouse had been fixed with a large black plastic bag, which, now tattered, shivered pathetically in the wind. *A makeshift dwelling.*

The shock of this discovery brought with it a flurry of ambivalent emotions. I immediately felt a trespasser. I had crossed a

private threshold. As moments passed I wondered at the circumstances that would drive an individual to seek habitation up here, in a derelict building exposed to the elements? What measure of courage, of tenacity, would be required to share this landscape with the wild voices of night, with the cold, the wind and the rain? But what gifts, also, would morning bring? Could I endure up here, I asked myself, if put to the test?

Looking around I noticed that parts of the building had been hastily rebuilt as a bulwark against the wind. These small measures, it seemed to me, born out of expediency and necessity, were more than anyone had done for any of these ruins in over a century. They constituted a restoration from derelict to dwelling. Heapey Moor farm had become – even if only for the briefest period – a home again. For all the gestures that I had made over the previous few years, these simple ones, made by an anonymous vagrant, were more restorative, more fitting and profound.

Reflecting on these events now, years later, I wonder if my wayward moorland path was heading in a similar direction? I think again of the etymology of the word. *Anglez-arke*. *Anlaf's erg*. A pasture with shepherd's hut or bothy – a temporary dwelling, long deserted. *Auðnar-hús*. A vacancy.

The muted language of the landscape. Was there a tacit invitation written in the lines of its hills, its streams and broken walls?

Can you not feel it? Winter, calling each in, blithely  
gathering? Marking your place amongst us. Hill and bone.  
Skin and heather.

What if I were to submit to such a call? Perhaps I sensed something darker; an undertow, a pull, whose touch made me recoil. *The river and its promise*. It demanded too much, and I was not yet ready. My elaborate, self-sabotaging plans to bridge the distance between us through footfall could simply have been a plea for deferment, for respite.

During those months of irresolution, which I filled by compiling the text that later became the first edition of *Landings*, a chapter of my life slowly, gently, came to an end, and a new one opened. In due course I visited other landscapes, other countries. And yet the lure of Anglezarke remained. It spoke across vast distances. Through memory and maps, through books and documents in the public record.

## 2. RELICS

Recently my writings have been scattered with Lancashire dialect quotations, with lexical remnants and traces from Gaelic, Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon. Where before I collected fragments found on my visits to the moor, I now gather words that were once used to call upon the landscape. Words that in many cases have long fallen out of use; folk-names, archaisms, forgotten idioms.

A pertinent example is *ark*, given its incidental connection with *Anglezarke*. Although not dead, the word seems to have become denuded – reserved now for use in a very specific, biblical context. But in previous centuries it had more life, particularly as part of a compound phrase:

*Ark*, sb. a press to keep clothes in; a large chest for holding

meal or flour. About Oldham and Hollinwood *ark* is a repository. The country “badger” (q.v.) or provision-dealer will say *malt-ark*, *flour-ark*, *meal-ark*, and so on. A.S. *arc*, *earc*, a coffer, chest, vessel. <sup>1</sup>

Compound words such as these remind me of the literary device known as *kenning*, a poetic trope found in Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse:

Him se yldesta    ondswarode,  
werodes wisa,    word-hord onlēac <sup>2</sup>

Here the act of speaking is likened to *unlocking a word-board*, a metaphorical vessel for language. The sense of *ark* as an “everyday store” is relevant here too. A vocabulary is a living language. Constantly in use. By contrast the *word-ark* that exists in the pages of old lexicons is a treasury. An ossuary. A box of relics.

*Brog* (N. Lanc.), sb. a branch, a bough, a broken branch. Cf. Welsh *brigyn*, a top branch, a twig; *brigau*, the tops of trees. <sup>3</sup>

But if language is constantly evolving, ever changing, why exhume these remnants, these vestigial forms? Surely their usefulness has long passed? Haven't they been superseded, made obsolete? Perhaps there is a glimpse of something behind the words – a hint at a way of looking at the world that is now also lost, an attention to the form of things and a care, a generosity, in the bestowing of names. *Brog* is not simply a *branch*, but a *broken branch*. *Lum* is not just a *pool*, but a *deep pool*. And even where there are synonyms in the contemporary lexicon, isn't there something to be said for diversity, for fecundity?

Each word has its own feel on the tongue, its own sound, an inherent poetry. Moreover, each word tells us something subtly different about its referent, and our attitudes towards it.

*Glisk*, v. to glitter, shine, sparkle, glisten.

*Low*, sb. a flame. Icel. *log*, a flame.

*Eawl-leet* (pron. of owl-light), sb. twilight.

*Shude*, sb. the husk of grain, chaff.<sup>4</sup>

Dictionaries and glossaries are vital in preserving these archaisms for posterity, but despite the dignity conferred in being written down, the words themselves are at risk of becoming little more than curiosities. Quaint folkisms of a bygone era. *Ark. A press to keep clothes in.* But what if I were to clothe myself in these forgotten words? To incorporate them into fresh, living writing? Could I lift them from behind the museum glass of old books? Breathe life into them? Moreover, could these old forms vivify and invigorate contemporary language, by virtue of their difference, their strangeness?

### 3. CUSTODY

In recent months, a document came to my attention which cast new light on the moor and its future. It made me remember that I had, rather naïvely, called the moor a wilderness.<sup>5</sup> Nothing could be further from the truth. As part of the West Pennine Moors it has been managed since the 1970s by a partnership that now comprises seven local authorities, regional agencies, the water provider United Utilities and several special interest groups, including those representing wildlife conservancy, community interests and recreational users. The document in question is a ten-year vision for the area, published in 2010,

which cites the *European Landscape Convention* as a pivotal covenant that formally recognises “landscapes as law”, seeking to establish and implement policies aimed at landscape protection, management and planning.

The document’s scope is far too diverse and complex for me to summarise here, but amongst the objectives outlined are those to enhance biodiversity, reduce erosion and flooding, conserve and restore moorland landscape (including blanket bog, fringe woodland, grassland, meadow and pasture), control invasive and non-native species, promote sustainable farming and land management, implement a holistic approach to water catchment and improve public access (whilst also minimising the impact caused by tourism and recreation).

Buried amongst the plethora of lists and tables is the proposal to “conserve and enhance key historic landscape features, particularly those associated with the agricultural and industrial landscape. For example: drystone walls, hedgerows, derelict farm buildings, mill ponds and lodges”.

At some point during the recent past, ruins such as those that I encountered on Anglezarke Moor have come to represent “heritage”, rather than the contaminative problems associated with human habitation. It seems that their dereliction has become a key to their salvation. It is also rather fitting to note that amongst the parties charged with their custodianship is United Utilities – a water company and successor to the Liverpool Corporation.

I think back to my early encounters with the shattered remnants of Old Rachel’s farm, on the southern banks of the fledgling

## River Yarrow:

And as I clamber over wood and stone, trying to trace its perimeter – to distinguish it from the moor which threatens to engulf it – I dislodge bits here and there, unintentionally becoming complicit in the process of decay. And how to stop the rot? How to salvage something from time's passage? How long before the map makers decide to erase this structure completely? Before it becomes a nameless ruin? And then a mere pile of stones. Mossed over. Forgotten. How long until they lift its name from their charts and from our collective memory?

In 2006 the European Landscape Convention was ratified by the UK, and the covenant became binding the following year. It's strange to think that, whilst I was obsessing over the fate of these ruined buildings, legislation was being put into place which might afford them some form of protection.

The West Pennine Moors Management Plan (2010-2020) features on its cover a photograph of Drinkwaters – a ruin on the lower slopes of Great Hill, on the northern borders of Anglezarke. Of all the views in the West Pennine Moors – hills and water, heather and bracken – this seems to me a poignant choice. It can't help but feel emblematic. *This is what we want to save.*

Should I take comfort, then, in such measures? The plan mentions “creating a good working relationship with tourist boards in order to ensure promotion of WPM heritage”. In this context, what exactly does “conserve and enhance” mean? How can derelict piles of masonry and timber be transformed into

a visitor attraction? Perhaps there will be an audit? Another anonymous archivist might compile a book of records with the purpose of recommending which ruins are worth remembering, worth conserving, and which can be forgotten.

In the meantime, the thankless custodians of these ruins are not a committee, but a flock. At night they huddle behind broken walls, making their ovine dwellings amongst the tumbled stones, nourishing the plants which grow there with their excrement.

Perhaps it is fitting that these once-proud dwellings should eke out the rest of their existence in this manner? The business of farming still goes on throughout the Pennines, and although many of the people have departed, these animals still remain. A marker for something. An oblique form of testimony.

Richard Skelton  
The Burren, 2011

1,3,4 Quoted from *A Glossary of the Lancashire Dialect* by John H. Nodal and George Milner, 1875.

2 Quoted from *Beowulf* by A. J. Wyatt (Edition), 1894.

5 For “wilderness”, see pg. 33. In Britain it is thought that humans began to significantly transform their environment, from ‘wild’ to ‘cultivated’, in the Neolithic period.

## ABYSS

I remember, in those first days, sitting on the high banks of the fledgling river. Staring out at the expanse of moor that seemed to stretch into infinity.

*Aire leagte air saoghail dhorcha.*

It seemed as if the earth  
had tipped on its axis.  
That the moor swung  
teetering beneath me.  
That if I didn't cling  
to the grass banks,  
I would fall  
into an abyss.

## ANGLEZARKE

The name remained long after Anlaf. Long after his people had disappeared. It became a refrain. A melody sung in endless variation by each generation, century after century, over the course of a millennium.

But did endurance, longevity, perpetuity, bestow a kind of truth? Did it come, at last, to work its way into the moor, and the moor into it?

×	○	×
an	glez	arke

Could I reconstruct the landscape from its stress pattern? From the rhythm, the cadence, of its utterance? Could I transcribe its syllabic, its phonemic, music into pure vibration?

æŋ	gəlz	ark
----	------	-----

And what of its myriad permutations? Is there a clue within each subtle voicing, which, when gathered together, provides a key with which to sound the landscape?

## PROXIMITY

*Bentyn*, s. the touch, contact; the sense of the touch or feeling – though *ennaghtyn* is rather used in this sense, v. to touch, to belong to; to reach or join to.

In the absence of proximity I am drawn ever inward. To spacial memory. Place cells. Cognitive maps.

I visit the moor's simulacrum, transposed and mapped in cellular miniature. But this terrain is shifting. It reveals itself unbidden. Offers brief glimpses. Strange knots of sensory and emotional tissue.

A hawthorn tree by a broken wall on Burnt Edge.

A sheep skull lying in the long grass by Brown Hill.

A wooden fence in the pale fields above Calf Hey.

These things are so real, so vivid, that they quicken the heart. But if I concentrate – if I focus too intently – they dissipate. The landscape is somehow veiled. Beyond reach. Its meadows are swathed in fog. Its ground, treacherous.

*Asblins*, s. a spirit, ghost, apparition, glorious vision. *Eisbt hee'm yn asblins bannee e laue yesh*. Pargys Caillit.

*Asblish, aislys*, s. a vision, a dream, a divine revelation in a dream, s. a winding sheet, i.e. *aaish-leine* or *leine-vaaish*, a death shirt.

MINIATURE

*But the landscape is here in miniature.*

Phials of soil. Brook water. Alluvium from the river.  
Bark and fragments of bone, shrouded in muslin.  
A small box of feathers. A trove of leaves and seeds.  
Husks. Shells. Sheddings.

*Each a vessel for memories.*

This small pebble. *Godstone*.  
Is between Hempshaws and Simms  
on the path where the stonechat is calling.  
December 23rd, 2007.

*Ütic, ütic*. Flint knap. A minute cacophony. Multiple tiny  
reverberations. Colliding with the sound of my footsteps on  
the rough ground. Chack. Scuff. Churr.

And as I touch this stone the bird is calling still.  
*Claghan-ny-gleiee. Remember us. Speak of us.*

*Arrange them on the map.*

*Place them according to where each was found.*

*So as not to forget.*

## TESTIMONIES

Listening to these many hours of recordings, I find that I'm increasingly drawn to the inert space that borders the music. The near silence between notes. The edge-song of the moor itself. And interspersed with the sounds of bowed strings and concertina drone are recordings of transit, of movement across the moor. The circuit between Old Rachel's, Hempshaws and Simms, crossing the river twice. The old drove road that runs from White Coppice up to the high plateau of Heapey Moor. The low ridge that connects Noon Hill, Winter Hill, Hordern Stoops and Great Hill.

These are documents of time spent, not tied to a place, but adrift within it, constantly roaming, never dwelling. They are records of footfall, the oblique narrative of grass, sedge and heather trodden underfoot. Of exertion, of breath, of endeavour.

Half a decade later, I find these muted, awkward testimonies more moving, more expressive, than any of my musical compositions. They remind me that I took an elliptical path through the moor's quiet places. Moreover, they remind me that there are other pathways of which there is no trace. Pathways that overarch the landscape. The flight of birds, of insects. Transits of the sun and moon. The earthbound trajectory of leaves, blown from trees in the autumn. Pollen grains in the spring. And most of all, there are the pathways of the river, with all its hidden tributaries, its countless runnels, its myriad subterranean passages.

What would a map of all these paths look like? Could such a map exist?

## THE RIVER BENEATH

There is a river  
beneath the Yarrow.  
This *other* is a dark  
cascade. A black  
and ceaseless torrent.  
It is the lure  
which all rivers  
follow. And a line  
that you can  
never cross.

FEATHER

And  
    the moor  
                    rests  
on a kestrel's feather.

*Brid – air-bride.*

Thou thing that holds gravity.

*I bore you on my shoulders. I carried you.*

MERE

The reservoir is a mere dub in the river. The water  
slacks, momentarily. Is skimmed for human consumption.  
But

        it  
                pushes  
                        on-  
                                wards,  
                                        re-  
                                        doubling  
                                        as it joins  
                                the black water,  
*dubb glaisi, du glais,*  
a swift arrow to the sea.

BOND

As the instrument has partaken  
of the landscape – its body  
bequeathed to soil, and later  
exhumed –  
so, a bond is made.

A pairing of movements. Of gestures.

*The second finger hovers over the third fret.  
The swift downwards stroke of the bow.  
Kill note.*

*The string stopped with a feather touch.  
A piercing cry.*

And on the moor's edge  
the red-brown bird takes up again.  
Bridges the air above the Yarrow.  
Its hunger momentarily sated.

*I have laid me down  
Beside yon valley stream, that up the ascent  
Scarce sends the sound of waters now, and watch'd  
The beck roll glittering in the noon-tide sun,  
And listened to its ceaseless murmuring.*

Quoted from *Joan of Arc* by Robert Southey, 1796.