

VESTIGES | THE PAST IN THE PEAKS

THE  
PAST  
IN THE  
PEAKS

# VESTIGES

EDITED BY MELANIE GILES

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**VESTIGES**  
*the past in the Peaks*

edited by Melanie Giles  
illustrated by Rose Ferraby

*featuring*

<i>James Caruth</i>	<i>John McAuliffe</i>
<i>Abigail Flint</i>	<i>Richard Skelton</i>
<i>Vona Groake</i>	<i>Christine Roseeta Walker</i>
<i>Rebecca Hurst</i>	<i>John Wedgwood Clarke</i>

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Designed by Rose Ferraby and Luke Thompson

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## PREFACE

*Vestiges* takes its name from antiquarian Thomas Bateman's first publication on the archaeology of the Peak District. Literally translated as traces or remnants of something that is disappearing, we took the records of his excavations of barrows and burials as a starting point for a collaboration between the Universities of Manchester (Dr Melanie Giles) and Sheffield (Dr Robert Johnston) with the Peak District National Park's archaeologist (Anna Badcock).

Our artist was Rose Ferraby, who produced visionary landscape collages of the Dark Peak and the White Peak: images that assemble fragments of form and colour, to create an impression of the distinct geology, topography, monuments and burials from the country's first National Park: celebrating its 70th anniversary in 2021. It also marks the 200th anniversary of Bateman's birth, which will be further celebrated in an exhibition at Sheffield Museum Trust's Weston Park.

Our poet was Abigail Flint, who not only authored a suite of responses spanning her own creative engagement with the Peak's past but helped collect and curate a suite of contemporary poets' work. This brought together established poets and new writers from the region, through workshops which introduced them to the archaeology and history of the Peak Park. Students at the University of Sheffield assembled 'barrow biographies' which formed the starting point for some of these poems. Some poets chose to give voice to Bateman and his discoveries, or the complex personal life behind his antiquarian endeavours. Others focused on encounters with this archaeology in the present, the meaning of working and walking (or swimming!) in the Peak District, and its role in the politics of open access, rights to roam and wellbeing. From the poems in this volume, we hope the Peak Park emerges not just as a rich landscape for leisure and pleasure but as a site of politics, the making of collective history and ongoing inspiration.

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**PART ONE**





MARVELLOUS TO SAY...

*found poem by Melanie Giles*

A conspicuous object:  
a mass of solid earth,  
somewhere on the road  
from Ashbourne to Buxton.  
Made of layers of moss and grass  
both of which retained  
their colour and texture.

The number of these alternations  
was twelve, and upon the lowest one  
(the undisturbed surface of the ground),  
lay many pieces of wood:  
hazlesticks, retaining their glossy bark;  
fungi; made instruments of flint;  
charcoal; one coarse sherd of urn;

and – *mirabile dictu* – beetles,  
whose elytrae still shone  
with metallic lustre.

The imperishability of antiquities  
rivalled by substances  
of the most fragile  
and evanescent nature.

YOUR MARY-ANN

*Christine Roseeta Walker*

22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 1847

My dearest Thomas, last night I heard a nightingale calling in the oak tree – you know, the old scarlet by the limestone steps. I ran over to the window. The night was a silvery blue, moonlight bathing the dales, mesmerised by the heavy mist that so greedily robbed me of your visage. The chilling cry of the bird pierced the window as did my heart with a cruel sense of foreboding. Immediately, I saw your face, pale, eyes sapphire flashing before me like a double-edged sword... The forbidden forever forbidden. Our love severed so severely.

Are you happy sweet, clever Thomas? For the nightingale sings of a heart untethered, forlorn, unreciprocated – longingly lonely for its first love – for our skin on skin and lips to do what lovers' lips thus do. In bed, I could think of nothing except that long, now ghostly gallery where you first pulled me into your arms. I can but close my eyes and let the memories transport me back to you... But then, I am interrupted by that same scene – that wretched view of you walking down the altar, a white nightingale pressed to your muted heart.

We were the darlings of Rowsley, the two brown-haired – the stench of the barrows, the rat bones, the mire, the horse teeth, the black heavens and still we knew love. At Lomberdale, I washed the dirt from your feet and dried them with my hair, whilst you polished your dead – whilst you bring them back to life like Ezekiel. But without you, I am like the dead – a thousand times more broken than your vestiges – left to be forgotten forever, entombed at Haddon with no archivist to find me. If you ought to marry, since your art demands nothing less, take heed, for the nightingale never lies.

I must go on to Belvoir and you to Middleton – back to your borrowed barrows to a life that will fulfil the master yearnings in you. And when you are married, fat and perhaps tired of all that digging and refining, remember, we could have had a love that would outlive that of Mary and her Percy and of Tristan and his Isuelt. We should have turned our backs on the dales when we saw our chances, but like Lot's wife you pointed your face to the peak and planted your feet so deep they bled blue with boils... and yet as I must fade from your heart, in mine, I will remain your

Mary-Ann.

MARKED  
(Excavation at Liff's Lowe)

*Melanie Giles*

The labour knits them close.  
Fingers rubbed raw  
From the gritstone, bruises  
Blooming on their shins.

Bending, unbuttoned,  
To haul cist-stones from dank cavities,  
Scattering a haul of bones:  
Its final occupants - toads and voles.

Deeper, the dead lie,  
Blemished and mouldering,  
Joints burnished  
With age and pain.

And in amongst the boar tusks  
And calcined flints,  
Three stabs of garnet: a cache  
Of ochre pebbles.

In jest, they daub each other  
With the 'primitive rouge',  
Leaving stains that proved  
'difficult to remove'.

The things of the dead  
Cherished again in their hands:  
Leaving them painted  
And blushing with new wounds.



**PART TWO**





## CAIRN

*James Caruth*

Darkness weighs like stone.

Within this hill, dry bones  
where a rat scratches.  
Sour air trembles to the hurry  
of a tiny heart, the insistence

of claws that disturb  
a blue-green cup,  
captured light  
that only the dead know.

COW LOW BOWL (650-700 AD)

Abigail Flint

Low bowl, sky bowl  
dish that ran away with the moon  
underground, understone  
puddled mud above thirsty old bones  
that took the sky to bed  
in cloth and ash, iron and brass

Sure bowl, palm bowl  
cupped by a hand  
that tipped sky to cold lips  
cold as a tod-fox tooth  
blue as a calm sea, tender  
as tilted hips that swallowed the moon

Whole bowl, restless bowl  
holds the horizon between soil  
and where air *fell to dust*  
this blue is a window  
between death and another death  
*brought to light by the spade*



VESTIGES

*James Caruth*

*The dead surround the living* — John Berger

Hoofprints, heel-marks, circle  
a copse of sycamore and beech,  
the burial cairn's small swelling.  
A landscape shaped  
by those who came before.

Inherited bones. The migrant dead.  
What brought them here to clear  
a settlement, lay boundaries,  
mark out a tenure.

What's left, buried in shallow scrapes,  
beds lined with stone,  
layer upon layer, a memory  
lifted on the blade of a trowel.

The past refuses to be silent.  
If I put an ear to the ground will I hear  
the dead in quiet abandonment.  
So, I keep them close;  
measure, weigh, photograph,

a record of origin so I might learn  
the movement of the seasons,  
an interpretation of weather,  
the shape of clouds, the taste of a breeze,  
before a herding of beasts to lower pasture.

An offering for a good harvest, accepted  
or refused, cyclical rhythms to which  
all hearts are tuned. They lie in darkness,  
this liminal space where tree roots inch.

I scrape away the significance  
of bone pins, a garnet necklace,  
seeds for the journey and deeper still  
arrowheads, axes, swords,  
tokens of an old violence.



## VEST/ANT/DER

Richard Skelton

### i. *A Revenant Thought*

light  
impossible  
at  
the  
ashes  
of  
imbodiment

### ii. *The Findings*

no west of consciousness found  
no roots at the sacerdotal tumulus  
to inclose those ideas  
and make them heavy enough  
to last

### iii. *Ceremony*

now open:  
the museum of the end barrow  
the museum of the little stones  
the museum of the perfect host  
the museum of the nation of death  
the museum of morbid rains  
the museum of foreboding  
the museum of the burned list  
the museum of the omnipotent state  
the museum of revealed religion  
'we can throw but little light'

## BARROW BURIAL

*James Caruth*

They lie buried in the eye line of the sun,  
no names, no place of origin,  
relics of what's lost, scattered  
along a blistered hillside,  
traces seeded in the black earth.

Bones curled like a child asleep,  
ashes sifted in a red clay pot,  
the patient decoration of a fingernail  
about its turned lip. Around their heads  
and feet, axes worked smooth as silk,  
bracelets of shale, a bronze torc,  
the litter of burins, scrapes and blades.

They've lain in this cramped cist  
roofed with nettles and ragwort.  
What magic was read in a scribbled ridgeline,  
what myth in a grove of blackthorn.  
The distance between what's known and lost,  
leaves me bereft, unbalanced  
by the thought of the dead under my feet.

What element of them has seeped  
down generations, to flow in my veins.  
We connect in thin threads of northern starlight;  
in the blurred glow of garnet, gold, silver, jet,  
or the lustre of a blue glass bead.

Overhead, I watch the tail-lights of a plane  
on a slow descent into Manchester.



FLINTS

*Abigail Flint*

shimmer in the glass cists of the museum. Spear-tips  
 slender leaves on a forest of wires. Cores and flakes  
 clenched mid-air, itching for the precise hands  
 that struck and shaped, worked and knapped.  
 Strange to see my name assembled in ciphers of stone  
 collected by a man who opened barrows like books.  
 Cold stones that punctuated the lives of others  
 bits and pieces scattered among ashes, notched  
 arrowheads pressed like full-stops into eye-sockets.  
 Daggers, splendid as exclamation marks, in rat bones.  
 A worn adze bracketing a pelvis. *Rude instruments*  
 offered to shade by the *hand of affection*.  
 I see no indifference in the rippled silk of percussion  
 in the kiss of retouch on the closed lips of an edge.

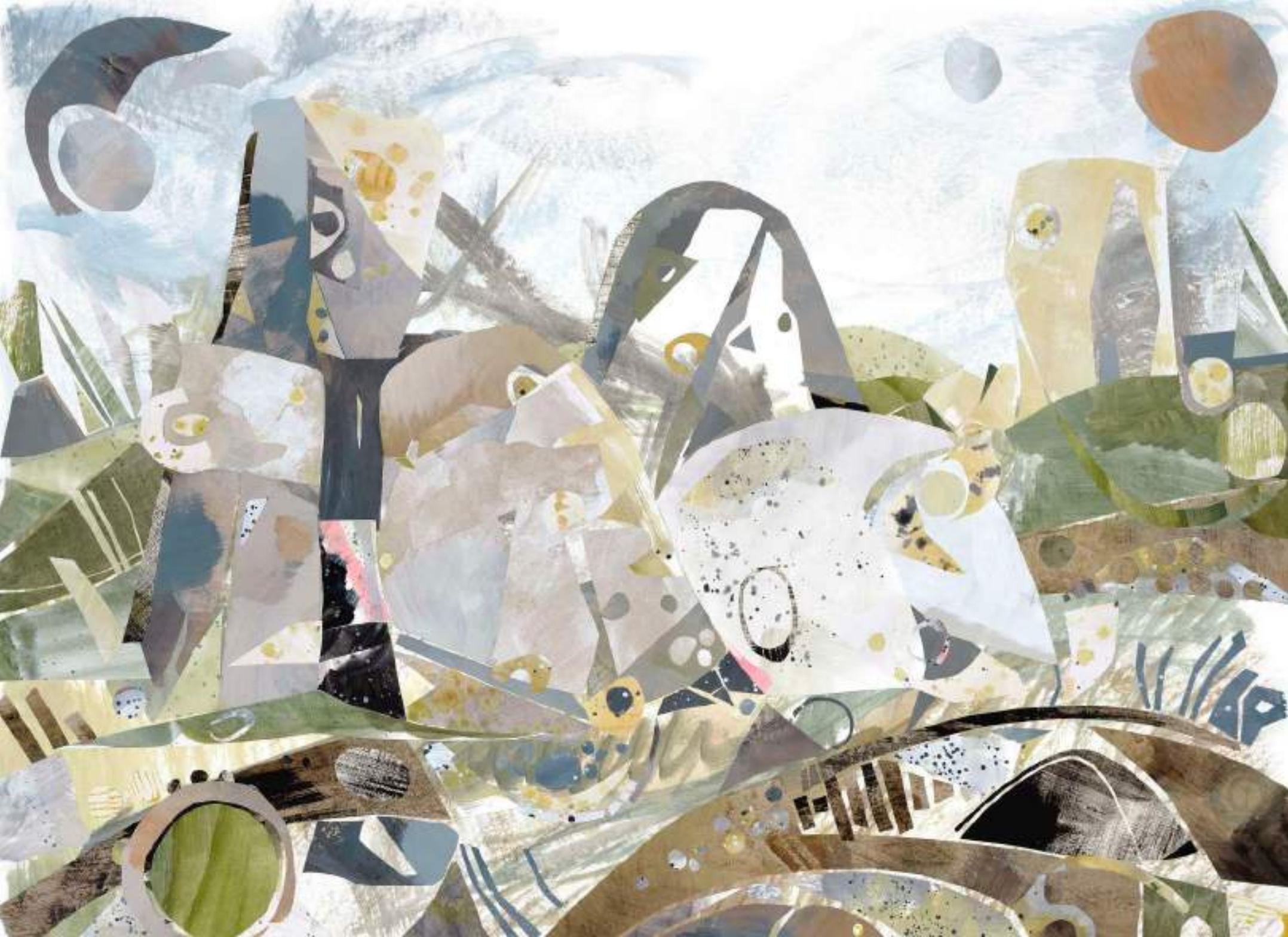
RUIN

*Melanie Giles*

They brought the ruined men  
 To Longshaw, hoping the bright air  
 Might heal them.  
 Dressed their broken limbs  
 With lint and cotton; enamel basins  
 Blooming with iodine.

And when supplies ran out,  
 Climbed the peaks to harvest moss  
 By the handful; astringent, antiseptic,  
 Sopping fistfuls of old healer,  
 To soak and sooth  
 Cratored cavities of flesh.

Like the rust-red wad  
 Of *Sphagnum palustre*  
 Found on the chest of a burial in Fife:  
 Bronze dagger still clutched  
 In the hand, drawing out  
 The rot, absorbing the stain.



**PART THREE**



Rebecca Hurst

It's two years since I've been to the hills. And so, unable to get to the hills I put myself in the way of them and wait. Winter, spring — tethered to the valley floor I watch them hunch down. Slowly, when I can, I hobble along the rutted track that falls due east from the Saxon church on the ridge; points the way (if I could go) to Kinder Scout's flat, notched crown. I tell them, *I'm waiting*. They shrug. Indifference is trout-brown, ash-green. Summer comes. Language rushes through me like rain-water through gritstone. This gap in the wall is as far as I can go today. Tomorrow. I stand in the shade of a hornbeam to sketch the summit. The rough line bumps against the edge of the page so I turn and let it wander verso from right to left. On the wall my fingertips read the fine grain, sickle-sharp; old news that I carry with me on the walk home. Somedays wind carries word of the hills; smoke from moorland fires that pricks the air. Somedays the rivers Goyt and Etherow — which at their confluence swirl back against each other — exchange gossip; clamour; as I stand on the bank and listen to their talk of fitful rain, drought, cloudbursts and diversions during which they probe loose soil, slate tiles, red brick, barrow bones and bling, porcelain chips, a blue glass bead. All the news from the hills these past thousand years. Today I linger, listen to them speak of their work making, reshaping. We've had a night of heavy rain. The silty waters roar in spate. Trout-brown, ash-green — a process like any other — they carry the hills to the sea.





## THE WALL

Vona Groarke

A breeze-block wall, ugliest thing you ever saw,  
the day has yet to dawn that would brighten it  
or the moon to rise to grace it. That wall needs  
another wall, of fuchsia, maybe, or cotoneaster,  
something giddy and chatty and blithe  
to fill in all that gloom and drag  
with flighty schemes for what a wall might be.

That wall needs to not be a wall,  
to set aside the fact of itself  
and then to become a whole other wall  
dreaming itself up the back of the mountain  
sinking bits of itself in ditches  
as if they were gobbets of monkish gold,  
or shedding all straight lines and angles  
as if it could be a stream.

Leaving the remains of it, the underside,  
the seething absence  
(look closer – worms and silt, all that)  
where last I saw it  
end-stopped and awfully sure of itself  
nothing much now,  
even less than when  
it pegged its tuneless certainty  
to the limit of what's mine.

Nothing much? Try nothing at all  
but grass clumping where an edge used be  
and swaying into the white space  
either side.

## THE ORIGINS AND PROGRESS OF WRITING

John Wedgwood Clarke

Somehow I deleted, or failed to save to iCloud,  
you swimming in the Dove above the stepping stones  
under a canopy of willows,  
pale as a flint axe in the dark shallow water  
icy from limestone springs;

you, almost a ghost in the Dove  
as I played back to myself  
the miniature image of you, intensified,  
already history, as the wind lifted, rushing,  
and you squelched towards me through the mess of paw-prints.

## FOLK SONG

John McAuliffe

In the underworld it was best to be prepared.  
Someone made an effort (like a mourner now who looks for the right word):  
women were turned to the right, the men were braced on their left side,  
each settled on a fern-cot and wrapped in hide,  
high hopes buried with a dog's jaw, a bracelet, daggers  
and, near the young men's pelvises, decorated beakers.

The curlew's quick call seems to come from nowhere,  
mid-air, and new life hurries out after the scent of water,  
threading the structures that still sound over  
the blank foreheads of a walking son and daughter,  
unminuted contributions brought to light,  
as the head turns. Days in the sun which don't last,

or find their level in a gesture, in *I'm a free man on Sunday*  
or in a gait, sloping up, hoping that it is *I'll lie*  
*where the bracken is deep* or *The heather*  
*has oft been my bed* that will remember

my hours in the song-crossed blue, alive in the hall of the elements,  
four winds peppered with rain, birdsong, a glance  
at what matters, and crowds of us marching up-hill  
where microgliders gravely spiral out of sight, as they will.





ARBOR LOW AT SUNSET

Abigail Flint

Your perfect circle, ring within a ring  
crowned with harebells. Starting  
where you cut through to its bones – your spade  
charmed where your father’s failed –  
I walk the vallum, counting  
*one, two, three (excavations)*  
stop to pick up a faded sweet-wrapper  
*forty-one... forty-three (stones)*  
descend to a cutting and rise again  
to an open plateau of enclosed manors  
*one hundred and sixty (years since your death)*  
a bull calls urgently to a field of cows in fading light  
*two hundred and seventy (yards)*  
a loose lace slows me, shows me  
recumbent stones where grounded larks  
share a last single note of day  
as the sun draws down the dark, thick  
*three hundred and thirteen strides*  
You see Thomas, I feel it too  
the pull of earth, of closing the loop.

## NOTES BY THE POETS

- 11 MARVELLOUS TO SAY. This poem has been rephrased from Thomas Bateman's entry on the excavations at Gorsey Close, Tissington, from *Vestiges*, 1845, 81.
- 20 COW LOW BOWL. Words in italics taken from Bateman's (1848) account of the excavation of Cow Low.
- 23 VEST/ANT/DER. Poems assembled from Thomas Bateman, *Vestiges of the Antiquities of Derbyshire, and the Sepulchral Usages of Its Inhabitants from the Most Remote Ages to the Reformation*, 1848
- 33 THE ORIGINS AND PROGRESS OF WRITING: Notes on the title. Below the engraving of 'an enamelled [Celtic] ornament from Middleton Moor', Bateman writes in *Vestiges* (25), 'There is a good engraving of it in Astle's *Origins of Writing*', Plate 4, a.' In fact, the title of Astle's text is the *Origins and Progress of Writing*. I was drawn to the engraving by the watery, eddying design of the brooch Bateman indicates he felt his illustrator had inadequately depicted. I have in mind the image of the Lift Low polished flint axe from the *Vestiges* presentation.