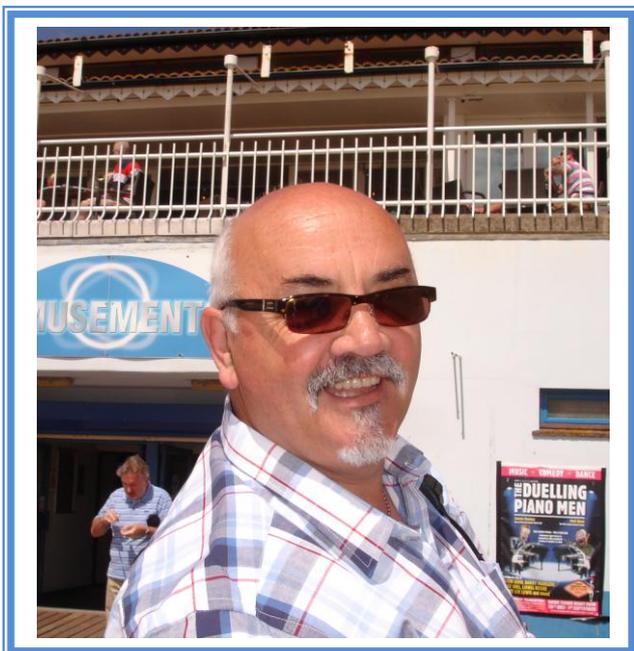


A Challenging Year

By Jim Bennett & Lesley Burt

Ideas from Life – Poetry Exploring the Commonplace and the Unusual

November 2011 – November 2012



Jim in Bournemouth 8th Aug 2011



Lesley in Liverpool 18th Sep 2011

About the Project

Jim and I enjoy a ‘poetry challenge’ and find collaborative projects increase our poetic productivity. Jim’s original idea was to take turns in setting one another a challenge. When I asked him to give a kind of objective for the project, this is what he said:

“This will be a nice little or slightly longer collection of poems for the celebration of life and art.”

The challenges were usually a theme or topic, but occasionally a poetic form, or sometimes arose from other projects that one or other of us were involved in. We continued for a little more than a year. Sometimes setting the challenges alternated between us, and at other times one of us would set two or three in a row.

The collection contains original drafts. The relevant poet may have redrafted some of them subsequently. Some of the poems have been published. This document is intended to be simply a record of the project for ourselves.

Lesley Burt

Response to the Morning (set by Jim Bennett)

**Morning at 60
by By Jim Bennett**

morning creeps into
shadows trapped in the hedge
makes neon from
a dripping web

bird songs roll over each other
populating the air
with memories

I suppose it is like
any other morning
like the one you saw this morning

but in this one three fish still swim
in Tom's tank
Charley demands a walk
60 is the new 40
and winter is still
a lifetime away

**On Samhain
by Lesley Burt**

Under grizzled clouds
leaves pile on pavements
for children to kick
as they dawdle to school.

The green man wears brown,
gathers firewood and conkers,
breathes fog into dull streets,
roasts chestnuts in braziers;

says the time is right
to hunker down
for long starry nights,
icy moons, winter solstice, but ...

... when sun bursts the sky
and lights up maples,
like red lanterns, he remembers
summer; longs for spring.

From words found on a scrap of paper (Set by Jim Bennett)

by **Jim Bennett**

Mary has a monkey
that follows her around
when she watches TV
it sits without a sound
but when she get the bus
to go shopping into town
it hides inside her head
where its chattering gets her down
it makes her forget
the next thing she means to buy
she cant concentrate
spends time starrng at the sky
eventually when she gets home
she turns the tv on
and then the chattering just stops
like it never had begun

the doctors say she is alright
no need to be off work
she could be a anything she wants
perhaps some sort of clerk
but Mary knows her monkey waits
to chatter once again
and can't describe the awfull sounds
that living in her brain
her benefits have stopped now
life crumpling apart
but all she dreads is the moment
when the chattering will start

Choir Practice
by **Lesley Burt**

I read ups, downs, durations,
of crochets and quavers;
instructions – *steadily*;
moderato e tranquillo –
but do not tune in.

I fear those notes
that require lines
above the stave;
cover among
surrounding sopranos.

But as soon as our voices
attach words to melodies,
I become part of the song,
and of Christmases
past, present, yet to come.

From an old newspaper (Set by Jim Bennett)

The day before the world changed by Jim Bennett

the paper from years ago
lay in a draw
the news about imports
and how Liverpool FC was doing
in a sepia aged edge
the date 10th September 2001
weather bright and breezy
like the rest of the news
on the day before
the world changed

GOTCHA! by Lesley Burt

We first diminish them
to the species: 'Argies',
so that killing them seems
more sport than murder.

Then, forces on a submarine
injure and drown
three-hundred-and-twenty-three
human beings.

The General Belgrano sinks
at the hands of my country:
a whole boatload of deaths
celebrated in the infamous headline.

**Poem from the (poster for) collection of photos displayed in the Walker Art Gallery in
Liverpool (set by Lesley Burt)**

by Jim Bennett

the exhibition is of photographs
black and white images
of children playing in a city

a poster shows a boy holding
a card mounting frame behind him
factory walls and bricked up doors

the pictures reveal a landscape
pock marked by poverty
and post war devastation

the 1950's were in black and white
but these were taken the 70's
and that was in colour

after the Beatles after the Stones
but there is no music here
just the laughter of children

in monotone like the poster boy
holding the frame
dead of an overdose a few years later

**Freeze-framed
by Lesley Burt**

Your dad squints into
the box Brownie and says: *stand still*.
You are in front of knee-high stumps,
bent over the cricket bat
waiting for your mum
to bowl underarm.

You wear a smile beneath
a hair-ribbon and Kirby-grip;
the breeze holds the hem of your dress;
your brother cups his hands,
poised to run as soon as
you thwack the tennis-ball.

There you all are in black and white,
thinking of nothing further ahead
than a flask of tea and ham sandwiches.

From something left inside a book (Set By Lesley Burt)

By Jim Bennett

I try not to think about
library books
who last borrowed them
where they may have had them
but now and then something intrudes
makes me think about it
here in Ulysses
Joyces words underlined in pencil
and a page marked
by a bus ticket
I imagine the lender
struggling with hidden meaning
on the bus into town

**Gardening Book
By Lesley Burt**

Earlier, he must have written :

SOW

Carrots – in pellets

Lettuce Cabbage. (All year Round.) March.

Potatoes, Early.

Late Feb.

“ *Late*

End of March.

Peas, Thomas Laxton.

Mid March;

and, later, keeping the list intact,
torn the notepaper into three
to mark pages: two-fifty-nine,
three-twelve, three-seventy-eight.

The bookmarks, undisturbed
during fifty years, discoloured
and left their shapes as stains
on the pages.

From an overheard piece of conversation (Set By Lesley Burt)

By Jim Bennett

the words you speak
change shape before my eyes
a conjuror you transform them
truth as pliable as wet clay
turns into whatever suits you

words become porous
as you redefine them
tell me that this is what
they really mean
I am left dumbstruck

overawed by you
you may as well
have made your words
turn into pots
you are bloody magic

The Eavesdropper
By Jim Bennett

I am cast in the role of eaves dropper
watch words as they traipse
across the computer screen
signed off with familiar names

“I sense this could be tighter,
miss out maybe 4 lines...”
Bob’s axe falls on my poem

“An exemplary animal –
psychological metaphor”
SK rescues me from depression
examones the metaphor
of a monkey mind

.Bob questions it in a mail
SK is back with a revelation
quote in Tamil and
from Swami Vivekananda
who compared the human mind
to a crazed monkey

it goes on back and forth
examining a few lines
I wrote in my notebook
over a cup of tea in Rubin’s
one Monday when I was trying
to find a poem to to answer
a challenge I set for Lesley

Elizabeth Maunganidze
By Lesley Burt

The receptionist wrinkles her forehead
and tries: *Mrs Mmmm*. The patient smiles;
sounds it out for her: *Mah-oon-ga-nid-zay*.
Moor-garn-izzy, says the receptionist.

The patient smiles, repeats her name,
writes it out for her to copy.
When the nurse calls: *Mrs Main-gangy*,
the patient stands up, smiles, repeats her name.

The consultant looks up from her desk;
Good morning, Mrs. Er. Let's have a look.
Examines her. *See the receptionist*
to make an X-ray appointment.

The receptionist wrinkles her forehead.
Says: *Right. Let's look for a date and time*.
I'll call you Elizabeth. OK?
The patient sighs.

A Note to Someone (Set By Jim Bennett)

Dear... (By Jim Bennett)

thank you for your newsletter
you must be under the impression
that I like to read poems

nothing could be further from the truth
I really love to read *some* poems
but the ones you send me

are not amongst them
please stop sending me poems
remove me from your mailing list

I attach below three of my recent poems
for your consideration
I am sure you will enjoy them

A Thankless Note (By Lesley Burt)

You hand it to me, say it is very special;
hint it is for my bookshelf; but because
you have not checked, I hope not D.H.L.,
Shelley, Heaney, Shakespeare or Dylan Thomas,
whose 'Collected' works are there. But maybe
a Bennett, Cooper, Davies, Bell or Nunn,
a Keaton, Supper, SKIyer or Nardone?
One of those could sit alongside Cope and Cohen.
Excited now, I rip, unwrap in haste,
turn the book over to expose the cover;
and, disappointed, realise that your taste
is not like mine and that you have never
recognised rhyming 'moon' with 'June' as wrong;
or you would not present me Patience Strong.

Someone doing something odd (Set By Jim Bennett)

Looking the Other Way By Lesley Burt

The man with a woolly hat
holds his spectacles at arm's length;
turns them to peer at Saxon Square
through lenses' convex surfaces;
then at his Daily Mail.

Perhaps buildings around him
warp like horseshoes on an anvil.
Refracted light on the oily blur
of fingerprints might create
small rainbows.

Maybe the print shrinks,
so that headlines matter less, or
expands them to greater significance;
letters and words might distort
into interesting shapes.

Quite soon, he places his glasses
back in the ridge they have worn
on the bridge of his nose;
an alternative view of the world
makes his eyes water.

By Jim Bennett

the man
standing on the pavement
by the shop window
writes in his notebook
for the umpteenth time
since I have been watching
he closes it
unpropels his pencil
secures them in his pocket
with the button down flap
and a tap of the hand

he looks round
and after a few minutes
takes out his notebook
and pencil
starts writing again

fascinated with the absurdity
of his actions
I take out my notebook
and pencil
and jot this down
perhaps sometime I will turn it
into a poem
or maybe not

A Dying Plant (Set By Jim Bennett)

Plant poem By Jim Bennett

I do not feel bad sitting here
out of the disinfected air
you have to breath
your eyes and ears are closed
your mind somewhere else

beside the bench
a planter used
to stub out cigarettes
where a bush grows
the leaves
edges turning brown
bend down to the soil

I admire tenacity
the ability to hang on
against the odds
no matter how desperate

Almost Thanksgiving By Lesley Burt

Autumn mist hangs over
bare branches; encrusts webs
savvy spiders abandoned
on wilting herbs
and dying geraniums.

Among brown leaves
clinging to the passion-flower,
one huge yellow fruit tempts
a squirrel, who shakes it off,
sniffs, leaves it to rot.

Found in a Newspaper (Set By Jim Bennett)

The Swinging 60s **By Lesley Burt**

Created by a few
upper-middle-class show-offs
dicking around Carnaby Street
and the King's Road,

while ordinary people
were keeping budgerigars,
fishing in canals, playing bingo,
eating at Berni Inns.

And listening to Cliff.

The swinging 60s was largely the creation of a handful of upper-middle-class show-offs dicking around Carnaby Street and the King's Road, while the majority of ordinary people were busy keeping budgerigars, fishing in canals, playing bingo and eating at Berni Inns. They were also listening to Cliff and – I dare say – Johnny Mathis, Liberace, Nana Maskouri and Enge.
By Lesley Burt
Humperdinck.
(by Sam Leith, The Guardian, G2, page 22, 21/11/11)

Found poem (from advert. in the Daily Mail) **By Jim Bennett**

computer in mind
laptop thin and light
ultra portable
fast start
ready to go in
three seconds

ready when you are
(even when you are not)

Associated with an Item on your Supermarket Shopping List (Set By Lesley Burt)

**Internet shopping for one
By Jim Bennett**

APPLES GOLDEN DELICIOUS tick
I could never get these
you hated France
but never did explain
why

CHICKEN TIKA no thank you
stinks like yoiur breath
after you eat it
PEPSI DIET TWELVE tick
I always had to get fat Coke
because you preferred it

I hardly noticed
but there in the shopping
more than anywhere
the subtle changes made
to accommodate you

demands made on my life
with subtle suggestions
“do we have to have that one?”
“I prefer those if you don’t mind”

well yes I did mind
and finally the aggregate
of small differences
outweighed the benefits
and I am back
internet shopping for one
and loving it

**Bananas
By Lesley Burt**

In Jamaica, they
curve around the stem
with cupped hands;
shelter in the shade
of giant leaves
beneath John Crow
circling hot sky.

Here in my trolley,
they are the colour
of sunshine among
swede, onions, potatoes;
bunched together
as if to warm
themselves.

Arising From Page 26 of 'Framed & Juxtaposed' and 'Larkhill' (Set By Lesley Burt)

**the secret of my poetry
By Jim Bennett**

every year you buy me a two days to the page diary
and this was the secret that helped me write poetry
long ago I realised that every page had 16 lines
perfect for a title then a space followed by a sonnet
sometimes when lines I wrote stretched too far I had to fin
Ish and cut the word in two editors liked that said it was in
teresting other times out of control lines start to rhyme
and because that is what you like most of the time
I dedicate them to you with thanks for this two day View
these sonnets published as quick as I could write
filled up my diary pages through the days and nights but no
w each page has only thirteen lines so I wonder how they ca

**Recovering
By Lesley Burt**

Midsummer sky,
peach, grey, peacock blue,

the moon's thin crescent
brighter every second
evening darkened,

made life good
after all.

Instructions on how to do something or get somewhere (Set By Lesley Burt)

By Jim Bennett

in the event of fire
shout "fire"
in the event of a really big fire
shout "It's a really big fire"
in the event of a life threatening fire
shout "run for your lives"
then when everyone has gone
exit the building in an orderly fashion
do not return to collect any property
unless it is a mint Batman No1 magazine
or unless you have a death wish

How To Knit a Sonnet By Lesley Burt

The size will be fourteen pentameters,
mainly iambs, but use the odd trochee.
Your yarn must never irritate the readers ;
should hold its shape imaginatively.
Select your words for image, colour, sound;
phrase them to conjure people, places, times.
You may decide your pattern should resound
with full, and slant, internal, and end rhymes.

This is how you maintain an even tension:
click your keyboard; rest; walk; clean the kitchen; bake;
frown your brow; pace; cut-and-paste; and groan
because your fingers, head and heart all ache.
If you knit, knot, compose yourself a sonnet,
expect to work an entire lifetime on it

and require more than fourteen lines to write it.

Creatures (Set By Jim Bennett)

Bats

By Jim Bennett

with night the bats
their skin tight leather wings
black against the dark sky
fly in a world of shadows

their ghost wings beat
a tattoo that salutes
the passing of the world
into the province of night

in the dark leaves
float to the ground
where they will mulch down
into the hungry soil

Elephant in Delhi

By Lesley Burt

An elephant walks by;
its skin wrinkles each time
it raises a knee, and shakes
when feet hit tarmac.

All around, rickshaws rev,
lorries, buses, race
to fill every space;
horns blast, drivers shout;

brown fumes and dust,
heated by mid-morning sun,
hang over beggars
and sacred cattle on the street.

The elephant saunters on,
magnificent in face paint,
while a family sways, calm,
high on its shoulders.

Flossie Spider

By Lesley Burt

She secures her web
with sticky guy ropes
between sage bush
and conservatory; squats
outside our window.

Over weeks we see her
cling on in gales
that flap her
like a symbol on a flag;
watch her repair damage;

I check her larder as if
she were a sick neighbour.
She spends a November day
eating a large,
unidentifiable, insect.

Next day she
and her web are gone.

Exploring Change (Set By Jim Bennett)

One Week Away **By Lesley Burt**

My aunt and uncle
have Contemporary Furniture,
green and orange wallpaper.
It all feels 'right' at once and,
after just one night, familiar.

Their friends have babies
similar to my small cousin;
everyone talks about parties, films;
watches television rather than
listen to the wireless.

As soon as I get home,
I notice our knives and forks
look less shiny; feel heavier;
in my absence, the Utility chairs
and beige walls became dowdy.

on the day Bill Buffet retired **By Jim Bennett**

the council gave him his broom
still the same one as the day he started
twenty seven years before
but now completely silver plated
and along its handle a heartfelt testament
to his years of dedicated work
signed by the Mayor

a young reporter
looking for his angle
asked about the broom

yes Bill said still the same broom
of course the head
had to be changed every few years
as the bristles wore out
and the handle a couple of times
when it broke
but it is still the one I was given
still the same

Dickens (Set By Jim Bennett)

By Jim Bennett

the man who invented spectacles that let the wearer see ghosts

found that eventually the only people who bought them
were the recently bereaved and some very weird people
he stopped selling them after a while because of the complaints
not that you might think that people were scared
it was actually quite the opposite people laughed and thought
ghosts quite charming and amusing but after a few minutes
they knew everything they would ever want to know about them

rather than being the howling things of horror literature
the blood dripping white sheeted terror in the night
these ghosts were quite boring people who still tried
to go about their business sitting in the corner of a shop
walking between the market and a great house where they worked
standing on street corners lost in a new geography
they were everywhere and not in the least bit scary

mostly they were shadows of possibilities that waited to happen
going about a day that had not occurred because they had died
the wearer of glasses could talk to the ghost and hear the ghost in turn
but they had little to say because they had forgotten the lives
they reflected instead they made up names and stories
with twists and turns and a myriad of odd sounding names
but melodrama always high melodrama

one man returned every few months for new *spectacles*
eventually the inventor had to tell him there were only four pair left
the man bought all of them without hesitation
intrigued the inventor asked the man who was not weird or bereaved
what he found so interesting in the ghosts "Their stories" he said
"But they are known to be lies" the inventor replied
"All literature is a lie" said the man the inventor chuckled

the man went on "I need to find the ghost who was telling me a tale
about his great expectations another talked about a very bleak house
then there is the Pickwick Club and the life of poor Oliver Twist
and Little Nell but mostly I want to find the ghosts of Christmas
the one who says he is Christmas Past has a singular story to tell."
the inventor laughed "What will you do with these stories?"
"Why write them down of course," said the man "write them all down."

Second Chance?

By Lesley Burt

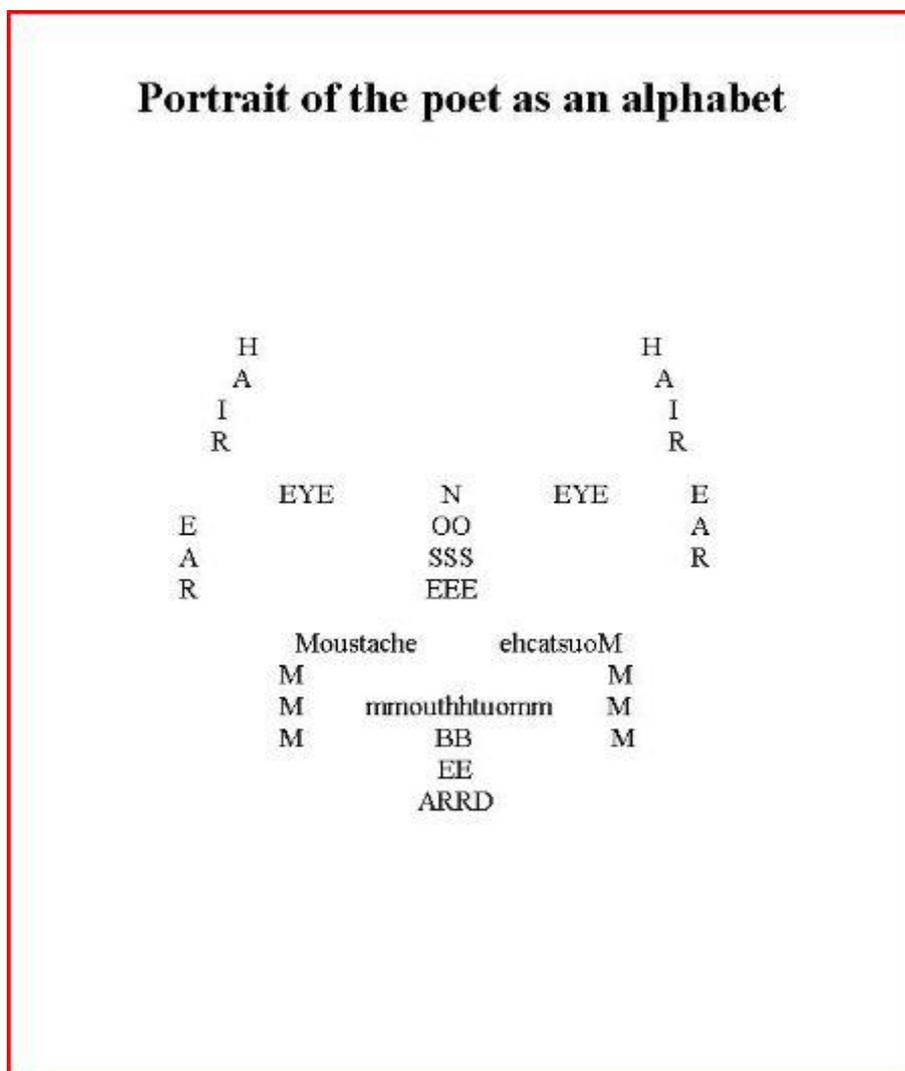
One spirited man reviews
choices; learns to regret
time spent stashing money;
gains pleasure in
repentance and charity.
Regardless:

Ignorance joins a gang;
bunks off school
to sells drugs to children.
Want grows while
multinational tsunamis
swamp food, shelter and hope.

Thousands contribute millions
to *Band Aid*, *Comic Relief*,
Children in Need, *Help the Aged*.
Meanwhile, Want grows global
and Ignorance breeds
generations.

A Portrait (Set By Lesley Burt)

Portrait of the Poet as an Alphabet By Jim Bennett



Off To Bed By Lesley Burt

My mother drew,
in Indian ink, a picture
of how she imagined us,
years before we were born:
my brother in pyjamas
padded out by a nappy;

me in pigtails, hair ribbons
and nightgown; older,
already responsible:
holding my doll's hand
to help her 'walk';
my other arm around him.

A Cinquain (Set By Lesley Burt)

**Christmas Carol
By Lesley Burt**

Song,
traditional, harmonious,
soars, inspires, haunts;
combines voices, communities, through
millennia.

People or Traffic Passing by Rubens & Café Soho (By Lesley Burt)

Outside the window at Ruben's By Jim Bennett

We Are sitting in the coffee shop
Looking out on Telegraph Road
Where passers-by Hurry by on their way
To shop in the last days before Christmas

A man stops and drops his bags
Leans against the bus stop
Then slides slowly to pavement
A few people step round him

Then someone stops
Realises that the man has a problem
Starts to arrange his still body
Into the shape needed to recover

While I watched this
I realised later that I had continued
To drink my tea
And made no effort to help

But watched this play out
On the street outside
And wondered not about the man
But about his shopping

Outside the Window at Café Soho By Lesley Burt

A chow chow flops down
on the pavement;
stretches thick front paws
out in front, as if to admire
their brown-bear qualities;
lolls his dark tongue
from the side of his mouth
and watches; calm

in the eye of a hurricane
of tinsel, fairy lights,
trees, holly; and shoppers
fretting about gifts,
festive food;
and the year to come.

Something Torn, Cracked or Broken (Set By Lesley Burt)

By Jim Bennett

The ceramic Micky Mouse ear
lies on the dressing table
Micky Mouse one ear less
stands beside it
this was one of the presents
we bought ourselves
to remember Disneyland
and for all the years between
it stood arms raised
waving to the room
white gloved jazz hands
red ringmasters coat
and ears that look round
(like cannon balls
from every direction
when you see him in cartoons)
but here only round from the front

and the one like a black button
fallen from an overcoat
and left to lie
forgotten at his feet

Recycling

By Lesley Burt

The guys collect green boxes
from each front path; in the truck,
sort contents: paper, tins, glass.

They drop next-door's Times
quite gently in the skip alongside
our Guardian,

but relish the music of bottles
smashed one by one so that they burst
into sparkling fragments.

Afterwards, we sweep up
the sharp trail
of green, brown, clear, confetti.

Something to do with a song (Set By Jim Bennett)

Album Sleeves

By Lesley Burt

When Roy used to visit with LPs,
he would carry *Please Please Me*
and *A Hard Day's Night*, hidden
between *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*
and something by Buffy Sainte Marie.

He would stack the Dansette ,
dance around our living room,
sing every word of every Beatles' song;
never learned Dylan's lyrics
but enjoyed the kudos of cool.

Glen

By Jim Bennett

his mind like a sponge
is drying slowly now
it is difficult to squeeze out
a name, a memory
the substance of his life

he mouths the words
to "Witchita Lineman"
and "Galveston"
but "Rinestone Cowboy"
is reduced to the chorus
repeated and repeated

the doctors say music and songs
are the last memories to go
so important to us
they hang round to the end

Title must be a well-known cliché, saying or proverb (Set By Lesley Burt)

She Will Never Darken My Door!
By Lesley Burt

Mavis screams the sentence; *she*
has particular venom: high-pitched,
long-drawn-out, spittle bubbles
on her teeth and quivering lower lip;

then she punches the window,
risking sliced knuckles; *my*
pitched lower, but at high volume
to emphasise *your* door is sullied.

Twenty-odd years later, she needs time
to recall words, and to form them
with trembling lips and tongue;
cannot balance without a stick.

Since the stroke, she can still stoke
the washing machine but is too shaky
to use the iron; she hugs and thanks me
for each neat pile I return to her.

my challenge poem
By Jim Bennett

I have always wanted to
dip a flat pan into a flowing river
pick up the sand and sift it
looking for the glint of gold

I have done it at a mine museum
searching in a water trough
through sand
seeded with iron pyrite

most places I think of
are exhausted panned out
but there are some
where it is still possible

in Alaska where spring waters
wash gold down from the hills
there are many places
but there is no place like Nome

A Game (Set By Lesley Burt)

Ken has Two Stripes By Lesley Burt

We settle round the board,
Bacardi-and-Cokes at hand;
group plastic armies for *Risk -
game of global domination.*

Ken explains the rules;
repeats them because
I am a lance-jack's new wife;
a newcomer to the game.

Ken smiles encouragement
while I conquer his wife;
less widely when I defeat
my husband. I win.

He packs pieces in the neat box,
as if the sergeant-major were here;
refills glasses; shakes his head
over 'beginner's luck'.

School Playground c. 1950 By Lesley Burt

Children circle, arms linked:
*Anybody with brown shoes
wanna play 'Cowboys
and Indians'...anybody
with brown shoes ...*
until a dozen have joined.

One particular friend,
wrongly dressed, approaches;
the chant changes:
*Anybody with brown shoes
or red sandals wanna play
'Cowboys and Indians'...*

Those of us who wear
black shoes or brown sandals
watch them and form
smaller groups, to play
'It', marbles, dibstones, or
'What's the Time, Mister Wolf?'

Games By Jim Bennett

dice roll
cards turn
roulette wheel revolves
a footballer kicks
towards the net
all games you hate

but none were a subtle
as the games
you play

Item of Clothing (Set By Lesley Burt)

Sins of the Mother By Lesley Burt

It was not so much
the Start-rites that,
for feet so long
yet very narrow,
were available only
in one un-cool style.

It was the socks:
not white like
Everyone Else's,
but navy to save me
from washing
seven pairs weekly.

And the homemade
gym bag with
special humiliation:
your name,
inked large on a label
to identify its owner.

A Hat By Lesley Bur)

This indefinite
article appears
in By Jim Bennett's
Facebook status

By Jim Bennett

Eyes bulging he sits back against the door
One end of his tie held tight in left hand
While his right hand does other things
You can follow the tie to where it is looped
round his throat then on up
to where it is tied to the door handle

in other places it was a belt and a coat hook
but the belt had scared and led to questions
this was simpler and left no marks
the veins in his neck are pulsing then stop
his eye glaze he is losing consciousness
as the lack of oxygen feeds his orgasm

he passes out in a blaze of moisture
and now his hand drops the end of the tie
in his stupor his lungs fight for air
and blood flows back into his brain

Pantoum about the Cinderella story (Set By Lesley Burt)

By Jim Bennett

my heel is horrendously bloody
since I sliced it off with a knife
and I am far from what you'd call ugly
so I could be the prince's new wife

since I sliced my heel off with a knife
I am at a loss as what else I can do
so I could be the prince's new wife
but my foot still won't fit in the shoe

I am at a loss as what else I can do
to marry the man in my dream
but my foot still won't fit in the shoe
and no one is quite what they seem

to marry the man in my dream
I would do anything as you can see
and no one is quite what they seem
I am sick of what's said about me

I would do anything as you can see
and I am far from what you'd call ugly
I am sick of what's said about me
and my heel is horrendously bloody

Starry Night
By Lesley Burt

Diamante shoes twinkle like Venus
in the chandeliers' wavering light;
men gather; ogle; women speculate;
their laughter gusts through open windows.

In the chandeliers' wavering light,
waiters serve champagne, couples waltz;
their laughter gusts through open windows
while someone flees down the marble staircase.

Waiters serve champagne, couples waltz;
in the street, footmen chatter, horses snort,
while someone flees down the marble staircase:
midnight strokes her naked shoulders.

In the street, footmen chatter, horses snort
as a girl scurries, barefoot, into shadows;
midnight strokes her naked shoulders,
and the golden moon smiles over silver trees.

As a girl scurries, barefoot, into shadows,
men gather; ogle; women speculate
and the golden moon smiles over silver trees.
One diamante shoe twinkles like Venus.

A Refrigerator (Set By Jim Bennett)

Once By Jim Bennett

eyes met once
and she embedded herself in
my photograph of Washington

she is there now laughing
from the picture
printed out and stuck with magnets
on my fridge

the unknown woman
forever young
forever laughing
for whatever forever means

The Fridge By Lesley Burt

Monet's garden;
bagpipes;
Presley's guitar;
Hockney's Yorkshire;
Yorrick's skull;
words (some impolite)
formed higgledy-piggledy,
multicoloured, uppercase;
cling side-by-side to its door.

Begins with movie title – then title changed (Set By Lesley Burt)

things I noticed today

By Jim Bennett

when people say it is autumn
it is because they have seen a golden leaf fall
shatter like light among other leaves on a wet pathway

when people say that the best poets are overlooked
it is to justify why they themselves are overlooked

when people see snow falling and it is dark
at four in the afternoon
they say it is winter and Christmas must be close

when people say that the best poetry is unpublished
it is because they themselves are unpublished
probably never read submission guidelines
or know anything of the magazine they submit too
if they bother to submit anywhere because they know
the best poetry remains unpublished

when people say they never read poetry in case it affects their style
it is because they do not understand anything about style
and their poetry would probably benefit from being affected

when people see a daffodil its stem long green ready to flower
and the trees start to bud they say it is spring

when people say that a poem must rhyme or it is not a poem
they would not understand that when the sun finally shines
and the man has finished walking past the Portobello market stalls
in Notting Hill that summer has arrived and somewhere
ark lamps take the place of the wind and snow machines
and Bill Withers stops singing “Ain’t No Sunshine”
and it is all pretence a slight of hand
and we are fooled into believing whatever we want

The Twain
By Lesley Burt

Late, at an ornate marble entrance,
a doorman in silk jacket, elaborate turban,
escorts us through shining glass doors
to an entrance lounge whose floor
is glossy as a lake in sunshine.

Staff bring garlands of marigolds
to place round our necks; then tea.
We sip, and gaze at gilt and pillars.
Then porters carry cases into dimness,
up threadbare stairs to a dingy room.

A mouse sprints across a landing;
fellow travellers squeal and skip dinner,
so we are the only diners hearing
traditional music on sitar and tabla,
savouring exotic sounds and flavours.

Something makes us look up to see
the two musicians smiling across
empty tables, while they play
'Strangers in the Night'
to make us feel at home.

A Shop (Set By Jim Bennett)

A Bigger Picture By Lesley Burt

In the gift shop:
fridge magnets, erasers,
bags, books, notelets.
I select postcards;

hope they capture
the shapes and colours
that gave me goose-bumps,
a lump in the throat.

But they are images
of the images the artist
examines, responds to,
then beams, direct

from thought to canvas,
with such bright clarity
they light the whole gallery
with fields, hills, trees.

Charity Shops By Jim Bennett

today we tour the charity shops of Heswall
wander from Aged to Oxfam
from Roy Castle to Heart foundation
(of course I do not go into Barnardos
I have never forgiven them)
this trip is for books for the discarded
tree pap bought for other peoples lives
but which were read or more often not
and then discarded sent as a donation
we pass the clothes rails
and here in help the aged
three shelves which could be an art work
bric-a-brac the still wrapped bathroom gifts
the broken the unwanted the unused
the inconsequential
a small brown pot a shell encased box
a broken ornament of a fairy child
a desk tidy with parts missing
a frame with places for pictures of family
and friends all spaces blank
with a note saying "your picture here"
things that mark out
map style and comfort life
but when they end up here as junk
mean nothing to anyone else
unless you are looking for an art work

An impromptu conversation (Set By Jim Bennett)

beans

by Jim Bennett & Lesley Burt

I know this might seem very unlikely,
but I've become a Nigerian Prince
I got the announcement by email this morning
I have been busily planning things since
there's oil in the ground and there's diamonds
the carpet industry and fabrics all add
to the millions being made from tourists
and the exchequer I am told isn't bad
in fact I can say with assurance
as the email went on to say
that I have inherited close to 6 billion
and it's a figure that's growing each day
but I need to get out to my kingdom
they'll send a plane whenever I say
I just need to pay fifty five pounds
for there are flight dues and taxes to pay
and even though I have all of these billions
I need to make good on my claim
so I hope you can lend me some money
as you have such a nice sounding name
if you are feeling a little distrusting
may I say I'll repay you in Gold
worth at least several million
that's the value this morning I'm told
so you have nothing to lose by this effort
and in fact you'll have something to show
I will give you a bean that is magic
you can sit back and just watch it grow

*Oh wow, let me look in my purse now,
and I'll see if I have a few quid!
What if I send a bit extra?
Can I put in an advance bid
for a ride in your personal plane,
and maybe in the Rolls Royce?
Can I go shopping in Prada?
Will I have an infinite choice?
Oh no! the bloody thing's empty!
I'll have to give it a miss.
You're on your own with this sunshine.
You lucky chap - oh, what bliss!*

No beans for you then not even the tin
They're mine I'll keep them locked up
No drinking Champaign from a slipper
Or mead from a golden cup

You'll not get a lift in my roller
Or lounge about in my plane
No free holidays down in Nigeria
Or sunning yourself in Spain
You won't get a special present
Or remembered at birthday time
you would think that me making you rich
was some sort of scam or a crime
well I have it written in the email
that wealth is mine to be had
you can't even loan me a morsel
well you're just horrid and sad

*well, what a very vindictive lout,
I think it's just absurd
that you should speak to me this way
with many an angry word!
Well, see if I care! The Lottery
will only cost a pound -
much less than fifty-five of them.
And I found one on the ground!
So if I fancy Nigeria
(which I kind of think won't happen)
I'll go on my own, avoid you,
unless I catch you nappin';
in which case I'll rob you while you sleep,
after eating all those beans;
then you'll really discover
what vindictive really means!*

lout! How dare you I'm a prince
or will be when its settled
perhaps you'd like to reconsider
I'm tired of being heckled
it seems everyone is disbelieving
no one trusts my luck
but I have it here in my email
saved for when I write my book
you will feel silly when I name you
and read what I have to say
I may give it to you as a gift
on another Mothers Day

*OK Prince James. Let's think a while
and get the matter settled.
So calm down, prince, calm down!
No need to get so nettled!
Look, tell you what, I'll ask my friends
to let me have some cash.
I'll tell them we are about to be rich,
and they could be in for a stash!*

A Landscape (Set By Lesley Burt)

Landscape 1

By Jim Bennett

in the art gallery there is a landscape
not unlike this one
framed in the train window
distant gray hills
chessboard fields hiding
feudal England
under the tram track plough lines
a patchwork each
a different shape and colour
a Doomsday kingdom
a ghost of a lost and conquered land

Landscape 2

By Jim Bennett

the landscape changes
as the train moves
things in the distance
move more slowly than
those things close by
which pass in a blur
I say
that which is furthest
stays in view longest
that which is closer
passes in an instant
you laugh and say
maybe I should go far away
then I will be in your life longer
I say
maybe that will help
then you say
it is all just relativity
and that is all it is

Not Over There

By Lesley Burt

So, I might climb
to Corfe Castle; watch trains
puff fat trails between hedges
flattened by distance;

stand at a forest edge;
admire sunlight melting
through beech leaves,
onto bracken and fallen branches;

photograph a view
from several angles so that
I can look at it again,
share it with friends.

If only I were Hockney,
I would paint my response:
show you that I belong
in the landscape.

Maps (Set By Jim Bennett)

Directions

By Jim Bennett

from Poole it is easy to find me
keep as close to the central meridian
longitude two degrees west as you can
go north for two hundred and thirty six miles

(be careful as you go off road
on Salisbury Plain where the soldiers train
to fight and kill in complex and interesting ways)

when your mile counter says
You've gone far enough turn west
go on until noon is four minutes late
according to your watch

at that point there are contour lines
and you will see them
as the road ahead rises gently

ten miles further and the lines grow closer
the gradient steeper until you reach the top
and when you do turn south south east
travel on seven minutes of a degree

and there you will find me
waiting to meet you when you arrive
or it may work if you put my postcode in your sat nav

Relief Map

By Lesley Burt

Gunung Agung: a name on a mound;
a molehill rising from furrows
at the eastern end of the Bali map.

The mountain shows itself,
to me on Sanur Beach, for minutes only,
then disappears in mist so completely
that I wonder if I dreamed it.

I set off to see the real thing;
the brown furrows turn out to be
lush foothills, stacked with
emerald rice terraces.

At one thousand metres, a printed name:
'Pura Besakih'; locals tell tourists
it is the Mother Temple; I imagine
the dark holiness of Gothic cathedrals.

But the walls are open to sky, debris
from offerings of fruit and flowers;
tropical rainfall; hustlers
selling souvenirs and umbrellas.

Train Journey (Set By Jim Bennett)

on the train to Southport by Jim Bennett

as the train pulled out of the station
I proved that God existed
I thought he might have popped on
at the next stop to say hi
well you got me or something
instead there was nothing then
he takes it away from me
becomes His omnipresent self and
does that disappearing act again
it is easy to prove that God
must exist in one of two scenarios but it
depends upon
Infinity
because that is where God hangs out

infinity is a funny thing after all it goes on for a long time
for ever in fact
and if it does then in a universe were anything is
infinite then the universe is also infinite
so if the universe is infinite then the possibilities within it
are also infinite

somewhere everything you can imagine
is happening those monkeys are pounding away
producing libraries of crap
and Shakespeare and every other
book you can imagine

so they will have produced this poem and I can sue them for
plagiarism an infinite number of times
and win an infinite amount of cash
in an infinite number of courts

but getting back to God and it is a bit like this
in this infinite universe then
God exists somewhere because everything imaginable
can happen in infinity
if He can be imagined then He therefore exists
a bit like Descartes ontological argument
but just a little less silly
then he is a spirit and a force and a old man in a beard
a saviour on a cross and a baby
in a manger
and everywhere it is Christmas and sometimes it is every day
and sometimes not

but one of this Gods properties in being infinite and therefore
He must be everywhere in an infinite universe.
if you say god does not exist
that does not make it true or likely
it is just another possibility and in infinity it will also be true
but it is not non existence more an absence
because that is what you imagine

however if the universe is not infinite
but is part of an infinite number of other universes
popping into and out of existence like bubbles
and god exists in an infinite number of those universes
or outside of them if such a concept can exist
and if infinity exists outside of those universes then it does
but then the number of universes will not be infinite
unless there are enfolding dimensions hiding all of this field
in infinite shapes we can see only as numbers

He must therefore exist in ours
and if he is not in our Universe then our Universe is finite
and part of an infinite number of finite universes
and where there is infinity
and those infinite possibilities,
then there too is God
and in every possibility He is an infinite God
in an infinite place
so it is really confusing and my head hurts
and the third bottle of wine was the one that did it

anyway then god hid himself
in a confusion of science and maths
that was a good trick
because then you are just left with belief and no facts
no wounded hands
to do the Thomas thing
no evidence other than a thought experiment
or whatever it is
and God is tucked away with Schrödinger's Cat
and may be there or not alive or dead
but anyway as long as $1+1=2$
then God exists I know that for a fact
I got that much from Descartes

Night Train
By Lesley Burt

We speed through a tunnel
of blackness so dense
that windows reveal nothing
beyond *No Smoking* stickers
and garish reflections
of passengers in red seats.

Outside, dark blocks loom
behind occasional flurries
of orange street lights.
Pairs of ruby and emerald
dragon eyes send in signals
from the silence.

Only shudder and sway
tells me I am travelling.
I must simply trust steel lines
and an unseen driver.

Something out of its usual element (Set By Lesley Burt)

The Mercy of the Elements

By Lesley Burt

1

Her Last

A cliché to distance fear;
thoughts about pain, pallor,
endings; yet, each time
I pass the hospital doors,
they conjure memories
of a bed, closed curtains,
monitor screens, and us:
with my mother,
while she breathes it.

2

Earthworm

It squirms on tarmac,
starts to dry into bacon rind.
I do not want to touch
its damp pink belly
or the dark crust; dawdle past.
Overcome by guilt, turn back,
find a stick, flick the creature
onto moist earth; watch it
work its way into cover;
feel elated, as if I have
saved the whole world
from catastrophe.

3

Seaweed

It writhes like a belly dancer,
moved by currents and ripples
from swimmers and paddling feet;
then, abandoned by the tide,
dries in heaps on the shoreline
while flies fuss over its death.

4

Sunset

A disc of red fire slides into sea
like a slab of pig iron;
I wait for steam-train hiss
and vast geyser; instead,
slow darkness muffles the beach
until the moon paints
a silver line on the horizon.

Reflection

By Jim Bennett

he walks along
avoiding shadows

which he thinks
will take him to another world

not realising it is reflections
that did that

he glanced into a shop window
smiled back at himself

from a world
illuminated by two suns

on his feet the road he walked
strapped on tied with cords

he walked the same rubber road
his feet staying still

his tiny road moving
across the new world

as he tried to make
some sense of it

Alphabet (Set By Jim Bennett)

/ælfəbet su:p/
/baɪlezlɪbɜ:t/

/nɒt mɪə fɑ:st fu:d
jʊ hæv tʊ ɪmˈplɔɪ
gɑ:lɪk pres naɪf
lɑ:dʒ sɔ:spən

plezə laɪz fɜ:st ɪn
preˈpərəɪʃən pi:lɪŋ
ʃɒpɪŋ pɑʊndɪŋ
wi:pɪŋ əʊvə ʌɪjənz

lʌmps ɪn lɪkwɪd bʌbəl
laɪk kɒnsənənts klʌstəd
ɪn pu:ld vɑʊəlz
stri:mz əv dɪfθərɪz

ðə su:p ʃɒd bɪ
pɔ:d spu:nd
seɪvəd swɒləʊd
ðen ət lɑ:st daɪdʒestəd/

eye & eye **By Jim Bennett**

it's there again
eye type & & appears
Instead of &

some editors like it
& say it is an interesting
point of style

others though ^*!
ask what eye can do
with a semi colon

Picnic (Set By Lesley Burt)

Picnic in Bavaria

By Jim Bennett

nothing left in the graves just bones
to tell the tale of death and numbers
you can believe them or deny them
but you cannot forget them
you will remember them as I do
even if you are living a hundred
or three hundred years or more from now

the shower room doors were only opened
when the screaming stopped
and birdsong could be heard again
the naked bodies dragged out
dropped into pits the floors hosed clean
ready for a new group to enter

and then there was the special action
women and children put into pits
mothers crying for their children
and for themselves terrified
wetting themselves filling their pants
as petrol is poured on them
and they are set alight screaming
as skin blisters and melts away
and death is too long in coming

here in the meadow
we lay out the sheets and baskets
light the disposable barbeque
settle down for our picnic
and while we sort
the contents of the basket
I am left to wonder what secrets
lie hidden here below the ground

First Anniversary By Lesley Burt

We speed through the Teutoburger Wald,
feeling as cool as 'get away people'
in the National Benzole TV advert.

Sunlight melts thick layers of new leaves
into bright pools among wavering shade;
dappled pathways run and hide among trees,

but grassy clearings invite us to stop:
haul Wurst sandwiches, cake and Apfelsaft
up the slope; eat, kiss, mull over our year.

Clouds drift in. Green-and-gold shivers,
disappears into dull olive; we hurry
back to the car, zoom home, make love;

give no thought to later anniversaries
when this becomes just a few snapshots
that one of us has forgotten.

Something Lost (Set By Jim Bennett)

lost **by Jim Bennett**

he walks along
avoiding shadows

which he thinks
will take him to another world

not realising it is reflections
that did that

he glanced into a shop window
smiled back at himself

from a world
illuminated by two suns

on his feet the road he walked
strapped on tied with cords

he walked the same rubber road
his feet staying still

Lost **By Lesley Burt**

A gift from Grandma's jewellery box:
a Victorian ring, once more in fashion,
with two garnets and four seed pearls
nestled deep in wide yellow gold.

In the cinema, I turn and twist it,
enjoy its sparkle whenever
the screen throws light over rows of heads,
billows of cigarette smoke.

In the interval, I visit the 'Ladies';
when the credits roll, realise
I left the ring beside the tap;
run back with my fingers crossed.

Making Something (Set By Jim Bennett)

making ships by Jim Bennett

he had worked in ship building
seen warships rise from metal hulk
to fighting vessel
named them as he recalled
displacement size and power
of guns and all the facts and figures
important in a war

and as he did his fingers worked
at folding pages from
yesterday's Echo
gently joined edge to edge
make a seam between
his index finger and thumb
pressing the folded paper to a knife edge
until a flat shape emerged

then with magic teasing
he eased out the shape
of a ship

I placed our vessel on the water
and we watched as the small ship
driven by wind and current
set off across the lake

Making a Kite By Lesley Burt

For once, he is home from the pub
by three, and in a good mood;
as soon as he swallows
the last roast potato,
this must be done.

So we hunt the garden for
bamboo sticks, in kitchen cupboards
for shelf paper; find a roll –
waxed, orange-and-white squares –
that meets his approval.

He cuts slots in two sticks
with his Stanley knife
to make a cross; cuts and pins paper,
screws in a couple of eyelets
to attach string and a tail.

No time for shoes: in the car, and off.
It does not fly. He adds
one of the children's slippers
on the tail. Another. Then all four.
We go home; he snores in a chair.

Cycling (Set By Lesley Burt)

To Know How By Lesley Burt

Tar on Darwin Avenue
gets sticky in summer;
it is impregnated
with chips of flint that rip
bony knees and soft hands.

My father holds my saddle
and runs; I meander; at some point
he lets go; when I notice, I fall off;
we repeat until, at last –
scraped, bruised – I balance.

My friend asks,
Why do you stop at the corner?
I tell her I don't know how to turn.
She laughs. I say,
You can't even ride a bike.

She says, *No. But if I could,
I would definitely be able
to cycle round that corner.*

Cycling By Jim Bennett

after sliding between
the alleyway walls
where shoulder impact
kept me upright
and bursting out
the other end to serpentine
across the road
bounce off pavement
wander over tarmac
and hit the other pavement edge
with a jolt and then
all balance gone
with steering just a memory
to make balletic contact
with Mrs Lyons'
thicket and heavy hedge

that was the first cycling summer
where turning pedals
became a first true love
only pushed down the true love list
by family friends and poetry

A Mistake (Set By Lesley Burt)

Meeting Gaz By Jim Bennett

it was talk of guitars
and going off to London with the band
that seem familiar

memory pulled something
from his face his voice
I was a roadie for the The Alarm he said

I know the Welsh punk band
Gareth Jones he said *I did How2*
the unconnected started to connect

then a picture formed of Gaz Top
singing guitar in hand
and later on Children's TV

hand up in a native American greeting
by this point I had already said
I liked Fred Dinenage

Gareth nodded said nice things about Fred
I tried hard to remember the name
of a song Gaz had sung years ago

but I missed the chance to say
how much I liked it
Don't Get Me Wrong

that was it
I wish I had remembered
things like that matter sometimes

Sway Tower By Lesley Burt

A monument to himself,
walls two feet thick,
thirteen storeys high,
to show the New Forest
in panorama at his feet.

Its angles stretch
above oaks and beeches
a century later;
a tribute to the material
although, some said,

he received help
through a medium
even though Wren
was unfamiliar with concrete.

Some call it Peterson's Folly.

Colour in Title (Set By Lesley Burt)

Vincent Chooses Red By Lesley Burt

He repeats Hiroshige's composition:
juxtapositions; perspectives where
people assume smaller significance
than trees' architecture and blossom.

Branches retain spikes and angles,
though less ethereal now, with textured bark;
and feet might stamp across his green,
made substantial instead of translucent.

The original sky is a soft flush
of russet sunset lingering
over a milky horizon. Vincent
dismisses constraint, paints an eruption
in colours of blood and fire
that hold off the descent of darkness.

Mending or Repair (Set By Lesley Burt)

A Gift from Cornwall By Lesley Burt

I remember liking him, on the shelf
above the books; made in brown clay,
heavy as stone, and as rough to touch,
except for smooth hair and moustache.

His head was small, neck narrow,
while his gown, or habit, flared
into weight that held the figure stable;
until one of us dropped him.

The neck snapped although head and torso
were intact. Glue held him together;
but I always saw the join,
though others did not seem to notice.

A Sestina (Set By Jim Bennett)

Funeral Sestina

By Lesley Burt

Ruby and royal-blue glass taints sunlight
that clings like haloes around lacquered hair.
the vicar clears his throat for the first note
of Praise My Soul; the lonely example
set by his nasal baritone is a challenge
to mourners who falter a phrase behind him.

As unsynchronised murmurs of 'Praise Him!'
drift from front pews, sudden sunlight
pierces dust with dazzling shafts: a challenge
to moist eyes. Ladies squint under tidy hair,
glance at the coffin's unwelcome example
of mortality; attempt the final note.

In the back row, no-one sings a single note.
My neighbour is silent throughout the hymn.
Perhaps, like me, he suffers from an example
of choirs in childhood. I remember sunlight
filtering through school windows onto braided hair,
and the music teacher's challenge.

To be in the Infants' Choir, the challenge
is to sing loudly and in tune on every note,
seated cross-legged, with scrubbed nails and brushed hair.
One teacher plays piano; beside him,
the other has notebook and pen. Sun highlights
my clean hands. I am a good example.

Teacher moves along each row, an example
of dramatic tiptoeing. Mingled sounds challenge:
our voices, his squeaky shoes. Sun is a spotlight
that follows as he bends, listens, makes a note
and nods; or winces and moves on. I watch him
approach with a whiff and shine of Brylcreemed hair.

He stands over me; I scrape fingers through my hair,
feel music rise in my throat (a first example
of joy in harmony), look up at him;
but he walks on. I have failed the challenge,
cannot join the choir. My mental note
is indelible: *do not sing*. Now sun lights

heads, hair and stained glass saints. I challenge
my neighbour's goldfish-mouth example; sing a note
for him, the vicar, childhood and sunlight.

Africa, a Sestina
By Jim Bennett

its dry because there has been no rain
and where in other places the water slide
brings down hillsides mud and death
here the cloudless sky hurts eyes that search
for signs of change to stop the growing
desert that is eating up the land

this territory was the village land
for many years before the failing rain
stopped soil bringing out the growing
buds to feed and started it on its way to slide
into the dust that leaves animals to search
and scratch before they starve to death

here is the slow dry brittle death
that stretches out across parched land
and like a ghoul makes finger search
in shadows where life waits for rain
here it squeezes every drop of life to slide
to where desert is the only thing growing

left here to too long the growing
famine wraps young and old in death
and starving thin stick bodies slide
babies into holes scratched in the dying land
despite the sacrifice and prayer no rain
nothing left to find nowhere left to search

the last of the people and animals search
with fear for another day a growing
nightmare with no promises of rain
thirst and hunger only eased by death
as eyes survey the distant desert land
and feet dig in for purchase slip and slide

they follow as others far ahead slide
down horizon to where the search
and fight for life goes on into a land
where water flows and grass is growing
where aid comes in vans and death
is kept at bay until the rain until the rain

rain feeds the growing things on land
before the slide to drought would search
an end to death and desert precious rain

The end of a story (Set By Lesley Burt)

getting on (a found poem - an overheard conversation)

By Jim Bennett

“a tissue you need a tissue
when are you going to look
after yourself and get this
sort of thing sorted out
it’s ridiculous snorting yourself
and no tissue
there I have said my piece
here’s a tissue let’s get on”

When We Get Home At Last

By Lesley Burt

The focus of the shaky snap,
taken as we began to roll north
out of Penn Station,
turns out to be a tall white board;
its upper-case sign:

**THE
SPORTS
AUTHORITY**

Behind it, a trail of traffic
and the famous skyline,
blurred with smoke, all overlaid
with vague images of our heads
reflected in the train window.

Journey in a Motorcycle Combination (Set By Jim Bennett)

Motorbike & Sidecar By Lesley Burt

We settle ourselves: my brother
in small rear seat; dog, picnic,
and me, in the front,
knees almost touching nose;
and my mother rides pillion.

My father kicks the starter; once more;
curses softly; tries again. We yell,
Have you switched the petrol on?
He laughs, leans down to the lever,
kicks, and the engine roars.

We shout under railway bridges
to hear echoes; tour the New Forest
and find a spot with trees to climb,
bushes to pee behind,
and a grassy patch to play and eat.

My parents unroll an old blanket
while we explore; then cricket,
with underarm bowling, hard hits,
and much hunting for tennis balls
among bracken and brambles.

Thunder. Kids and dog dive inside;
parents soak on saddles,
he in gabardine mac, she in headscarf;
we gather sodden bat, stumps, ball;
go home, reeking of wet fur.

motorcycle sidecar is memorable because
By Jim Bennett

1 it was close to the ground
and every car that passed
appeared about to crush us

2 I had an eye shade
with see through red visor
I would pull it down and look out
at a red world

3 of the sound of the wind
through the loose flapping side window
putting out my hand and feeling it
push against my palm

4 the wooden walls and floor creaked
as it sped along
like it was about to fall apart

5 the smell of leather and wood
rich like a new car
even though the sidecar was old

6 it was claustrophobic
although I did not know it at the time
it was the smallest place I could imagine

7 it was a space ship
the cockpit of a plane
a submersible exploration vehicle

8 you never knew where you where
or where you were going
so it was a good preparation for life

9 the warm sun
coming through the canopy
would stay with me all my life

10 the riders hands and feet perform magic
on the silver rods
and only inches from my face

Arising from a theme in a well-known poem (Set By Lesley Burt)

Eternal Lines (*Sonnet 18 – Shakespeare*)

By Lesley Burt

The percussive growl from a light aircraft,
high overhead, backs the melodies
of blackbirds and finches;

jasmine is flowering on the trellis,
so that late afternoon's bright warmth
spreads its scent across the garden;

sky is unbroken blue; and the breeze
is satin soft on skin; we sip wine
that tastes apple-crisp; smile; touch hands.

Before I can think beyond *perfect*
that moment has become past tense;
but I can share these words with you.

the curator (*Ozymandias – Shelley*)

By Jim Bennett

on his desk is a stone
rounded and smooth
small and inconsequential

it was the same as all the rocks
that blunt his spade
as he worked in his garden

but when he had told the child
all he could about it
her eyes had widened

she held it out to him
you should have it she said
for the museum

he took a card and wrote
stone; formed in proterzoic period
atoms forged in stars

shaped by the Moon
in the oceans of the Earth
two thousand million years old

One of the Seven Deadly Sins (Set By Lesley Burt)

The Fijian By Lesley Burt

We sometimes sit with his wife, my man;
drink tea; talk about life at home, and here
with the British Army of the Rhine.

Sometimes, relaxed, he wears a sulu;
then I must avoid more than a glance
at his demerara-brown chest,
muscular calves, long toes, strong hands.

But I gaze at his mouth's movement; his eyes,
inherited from his Chinese mother
(who, he says, punished her naughty son
by hanging him upside-down on a hook),

watch mine try not to meet them. We never
speak of this, or touch: I sin by daydream;
conjure his image in the bedroom.

a trip into the country By Jim Bennett

we came to see fields yellow in the sun
follow footpaths over styles along field edges
walk the lanes shaped by passing years and use

but we saw none of those instead we are here
and this is a clearway built for lorries
that as they pass disturb the air into a sucking wind

there is a posy of rotting flowers at the roadside
a rain-soaked ink-run poster printed off a computer
tied with two strands of string to the lamp post

there is a picture but it is lost in a plastic cover
stained and distorted behind condensation
we look at the small offering and try to imagine

what might have happened here
small pieces of glass flash like stars in the gutter
we pretend that rain runs down our faces

The Moon and Love – without Cliché (Set By Jim Bennett)

the moon in June By Jim Bennett

the moon shows where the sun is
separates night and day
and parts of day from day
as it quarters the sky
with invisible separators

it captures sunlight
reflects it to Earth
turns its hidden face
towards the universe
in an improbable geo-synchronicity

it follows planets across the sky
and spotlights our garden
as we check plants hanging baskets
pluck weeds from tubs
feel the breeze

that is what it was like in June
when every poetic sense tells me
I should never have mentioned
the month

Mandeville After Dark By Lesley Burt

Jamaican cats prowl outdoors, sleep through
tropical days, feed on nocturnal creatures,
scream their moonlit courtships.

Here, when dogs bark they mean business:
teeth bared at the gate, white in headlights
until neighbours yell and wave visitors in.

Decades ago, when our street-lamps were off
well before midnight, we used to see
a universe as full of stars as this, at home.

We say, how fast those years have passed;
and this warm sky is such a size that
the long-haul return flight will now seem

just a stroll together in space and time
to our different place, on the same planet.

From notes left by guests at Christchurch Poetry Jamboree Sep 2012(Set By Lesley Burt)

Christchurch, Dorset

By Jim Bennett

some time ago long it was between
but who can dwell with the passing of time
unless clock face and bells interrupt the service
and people leave gloves left lying on the chair
this was Christchurch not the dome but Priory
well into Druit park green man and canvas
the grass slicked back like hair into the soil
wood chips from carvings done with axe
and steam driver rips at concrete this is how
the town becomes

here the cinema an arts centre for the others
the poets sing and writers dance across pages
what are you doing in the summer sunlight
it is winter and spring follows before the autumn
leaves fall from the writers grasp and left lying
in the pram a baby silent as the graveyard
its bench chair stretching across the millennium

roads black with tyres the world bent into a curve
towards the car park mattered with people rushing
each with their eyes set inward their mouths set
to their distant friends ear a brush blur of movement
the water distorting the reflections as it always did
and never for this is flow from where the sky
bleeds into a distant stream one last time

entertainers come go pass this way that
leave laughter hanging in unremembered jokes
“did you see” “do you recall” “remember when”
no not really only eyes to record now the rest
a flickering screen with black white forgotten
wars recalled on a cenotaph a shop selling flowers
across a pavement to encourage death
and mothers who wait for their day to see if they are
remembered with each passing year
the face of town

Ask not for whom the bell tolls ...

By Lesley Burt

Poetry Jamboree, Red House Museum Garden Sep 2012

Virginia creeper glows over buildings;
treetops, edged with autumn, waver in wind,
and Priory bells peal across Christchurch.

Poets wait in the marquee; rise to read
during each hush between weddings.

Fifty years ago, I was married there, too;
family and friends clustered around us,

posed for photos, threw confetti,
clutched skirts lifted by a gusty breeze.

It was the last day this was my home town:
all captured in monochrome for my album.
These couples are making their own memories.

I shiver in the willow's shadow; listen
to syllables of humour and pathos; watch
a leaf spin space, until a cobweb captures it.

Faces (Set By Jim Bennett)

Reading With Sonny By Lesley Burt

He watches for clues, so knows at once
he should stop bending pages;
follows the build-up to a punch-line –
the loud moo or miaow, the peek-a-boo –
and laughs in the right places.

Soon he will learn to read between lines:
the roll of eyes that betrays deadpan,
the slightly-too-long blink of eyelids,
a not-quite-imperceptible curl of lip
when someone dismisses his opinion.

And he will develop his own version
of nonverbal subterfuge: maybe laugh
to mask anxiety; or swagger while
wearing the sucking-a-lemon expression
of a thwarted adolescent.

There is little to see here by Jim Bennett

just his face
a slight uplift to the mouth
a few lines around his eyes
and forehead
a greyness to his skin
his blue eyes
that said so much
silent behind closed lids
his hair - too tidy
he could have looked like this
but never did

Flies (Set By Jim Bennett)

the bluebottle by Jim Bennett

died immediately on impact
the crunch against the window
unmistakable
he stood newspaper in hand
the single wrist flick
had broken its trajectory
and sent it to a splattering death

it had buzzed around the room
for hours
around the food on the table
around his head
wearing down his patience
until he snapped
grabbed his newspaper
rolled it into a baton
and lunged
a single swipe
and it was silent

though unsettled by this
act of brutality
I thought it better to stay quiet
when told

I watched as he eat his cake
telling mum about the fly

I didn't tell him
what I had learned about bluebottles
I just watched him eat his cake
together with the dead flies vomit

“That Amount of Death is Pretty Black” By Lesley Burt

*Damien Hirst on 'Who's Afraid of the Dark'
(2002).*

The painting is hideous;
I wonder what Hirst means
by gluing thousands of flies on canvas.

But, on the way back from the Kwai Bridge,
we visit Kanchanaburi war cemetery.
As holiday chatter dwindles to silence
before row upon row of graves,

I try to imagine seven thousand men
standing side-by-side on these lawns,
in place of crisp white stones and flowers;

and so many similar cemeteries
around the world, peaceful, well-kept,
masking death. Then I understand.