

# REVENANTS AND REMAINS

*Creative Responses to Ruined Gothic Architecture*





## Revenant:

'A person who returns from the dead; a reanimated corpse; a ghost'  
(*Oxford English Dictionary*)

## Remains:

'that which remains or is left of a thing or things after other parts have been removed, used, or destroyed' (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

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## Introduction

The poems, short stories, essays, literary fragments and photographs showcased in this ebook were all produced over the course of *Experiencing Britain's Ruins: 'Revenants and Remains' at Five Northern Religious Houses and Beyond*, a programme of public events that ran between January 2022 and April 2023 and which was generously funded by a Follow-On Award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Grant Ref: AH/W004399/1). A collaboration between Dale Townshend (Professor of Gothic Literature in the Centre for Gothic Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University), Michael Carter (Senior Properties Historian at English Heritage) and Dominique Bouchard (Head of Learning and Interpretation at English Heritage), the project sought to explore the links between ruined architectural heritage, particularly ruined abbeys, monasteries and priories, and the supernatural, from the legends, tales and chronicles of the medieval period, through the Gothic imagination of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and into the present day. For more information about the project, as well as details about other aspects of its multi-faceted programme of events, please visit our website: [revenantsandremains.mmu.ac.uk](http://revenantsandremains.mmu.ac.uk)

Between October 2022 and January 2023, the award-winning novelist, poet and performer **Rosie Garland** ran a series of creative writing workshops at five monastic ruins in the north of England that are currently in the care of English Heritage: Byland Abbey, North Yorkshire; Furness Abbey, Cumbria; Lanercost Priory, Cumbria; Rievaulx Abbey, North Yorkshire; and Roche Abbey, South Yorkshire. Guiding and encouraging participants to respond to architectural ruin in the age-old tradition of topographical literature, Rosie's workshops generated a broad range of brilliant and original literary offerings, from melancholic poetic reflections on the vanished historical past to chilling Gothic tales of spirits roaming the ruined cloisters and horrific stories about blood-thirsty ghouls returning from the grave. As Rosie has commented,

*I love being a creative writing workshop facilitator. At the start of a session, participants have blank notebooks perched on their laps. Then, with gentle prompting and encouragement, the magic happens. By the end of the session, those empty pages are teeming with words that weren't there before.*

*This alchemy happened in every one of the five writing workshops for the Revenants and Remains project. Organisers wondered if only people who already identified as writers would attend. Anything but. Sure, poets and fictioneers came along. We also welcomed folk who admitted they'd not written creatively since their schooldays (a long while back for some participants). We talked about what ruins meant to them and read some famous poems, such as 'Ozymandias' by Percy Bysshe Shelley. And then they wrote! Nervous to begin with, it was wonderful to see them growing in confidence. By the close of each session, folk fed back how much fun they'd had, and were eager to share their writing. And what wonderful stories they told.*

We are delighted to publish a small selection of these pieces here.

In November 2022 and January 2023, Photoworks ran two ghost-photography workshops at Lanercost Priory and Furness Abbey, which were led by artist and curator **Sarah Sparkes**. Sarah works with magical or mythical narratives, vernacular belief systems and the visualisation of anomalous phenomena. Her work is often research-led, and explores the borderlands where science and magic intersect. She runs the visual arts and creative research project **GHost**, hosting seminars and exhibitions to manifest and interrogate the idea of the ghost.

The workshops (five in total) were attended by approximately 30 further education students studying Photography at Furness College and Newcastle College. The events were supported by site manager Lucy Ronald (Furness Abbey); Property Manager (Cumbria) Juliet Fellows-Smith (Lanercost Priory); and Lorna Batty of English Heritage's Shout Out Loud national youth engagement programme. Aiming to inspire creative acts of interpretation and to engage young people in the appreciation of ruined architectural heritage via the supernatural lore and legend that has become associated with each ruin, Sarah guided participants in the production of a portfolio of photographic work, her selection of which we publish here. Commenting on her experience of running these workshops, Sarah claimed that *'as an artist fascinated by ghosts, it's been incredibly rewarding to lead workshops for Revenants and Remains. Learning about the haunted medieval and Gothic history of each site from Dale and Michael while among the atmospheric ruins was an inspiring experience for both the students and myself and this is clear in the photographs they have produced.'*

Uncannily, the words and images assembled in this book enter into a fascinating dialogue with one another, with photographs sometimes illustrating text and text sometimes responding to photographs. These overlaps and connections being entirely unplanned, it is almost as if the acts of creativity in and around the sites of ruin have been guided by the very revenants that haunt them.





## *Cloud of Unheard Revenants*

Jane Corbett

As the historian snap-shut the red book of Chronicles – the only colour in the November-grey – a cloud rose from the pages into the bone-damp air. I'd been listening so I knew it wasn't old-book dust, I knew it for what it was, ghost mites of revenants escaping. An uprising of spirit-spores carrying unheard demands for blessings cloaked in cautionary tales.

I caught three words from a whispered story behind me, 'Nun', 'cabbage' and 'demon'. I wondered whether she'd brought the words with her, or if they'd drifted into her open mouth after escaping the book, and she'd just breathed them out.





Theo Young, Newcastle College

# *The Missing Brick*

Rosemary Whitehead

You and I both know this house is haunted, and the root of *my* fear, perhaps yours too, comes from the missing brick – the hole – in the steps down to the cellar. The dark space behind it? No way in. Or out.

Behind that hole where once a hand waited, a sliver of a wrist bone aching with how long it had been trapped. Waited, waited, the door was opening, the rustle of her long skirt, the smell of a gas lamp, waited, and reached out and grabbed. Gripped her ankle tight and sudden. His near bone, cold on her skin – *how are you still alive?* – her body twisted, shoulder cracked spine snapped clap clap thud. Skull on stone.

Red stone then brown then black.

The hand had gone back into its hole and waited there patiently, alongside what remained of his skin and soul. A trace of a human that had long ceased to be a person but who lasted far longer than most would endure until, at last, a glint of something slipped out of the hole, up, up – but not quite away.

So then, two bodies. One behind the cellar steps and one in front. One murdered? No, both. One slow and cruel. One impulsive and fair. No one was watching but this house and its stones.

Older neighbours talked and were, truth be told, glad she was gone. Younger ones climbed into her rose garden and dared each other to ring the doorbell. A song started to spread through the children of Norfolk Park –

*Emilia Emilia where did you go?*

*with your face like a witch and your voice like a crow*

*Emilia Emilia where are you now?*

*Did somebody kill you and if so, how?*

A policeman passed the park gates and saw children crowded onto the steps, pressed up against the green door. One child had her arm through the letterbox, reaching up and around as her tongue licked her lip in concentration. He crossed the road and shooed them, giggling down the steps and away. He'd heard the rumours too. He stood on the top step – considering – when he sensed someone behind him.



*Pretty sure she's dead inside. Never saw her leave. You going to do it or just tell your boss?*

*You live round here?*

She nodded and pointed to an identical house next door.

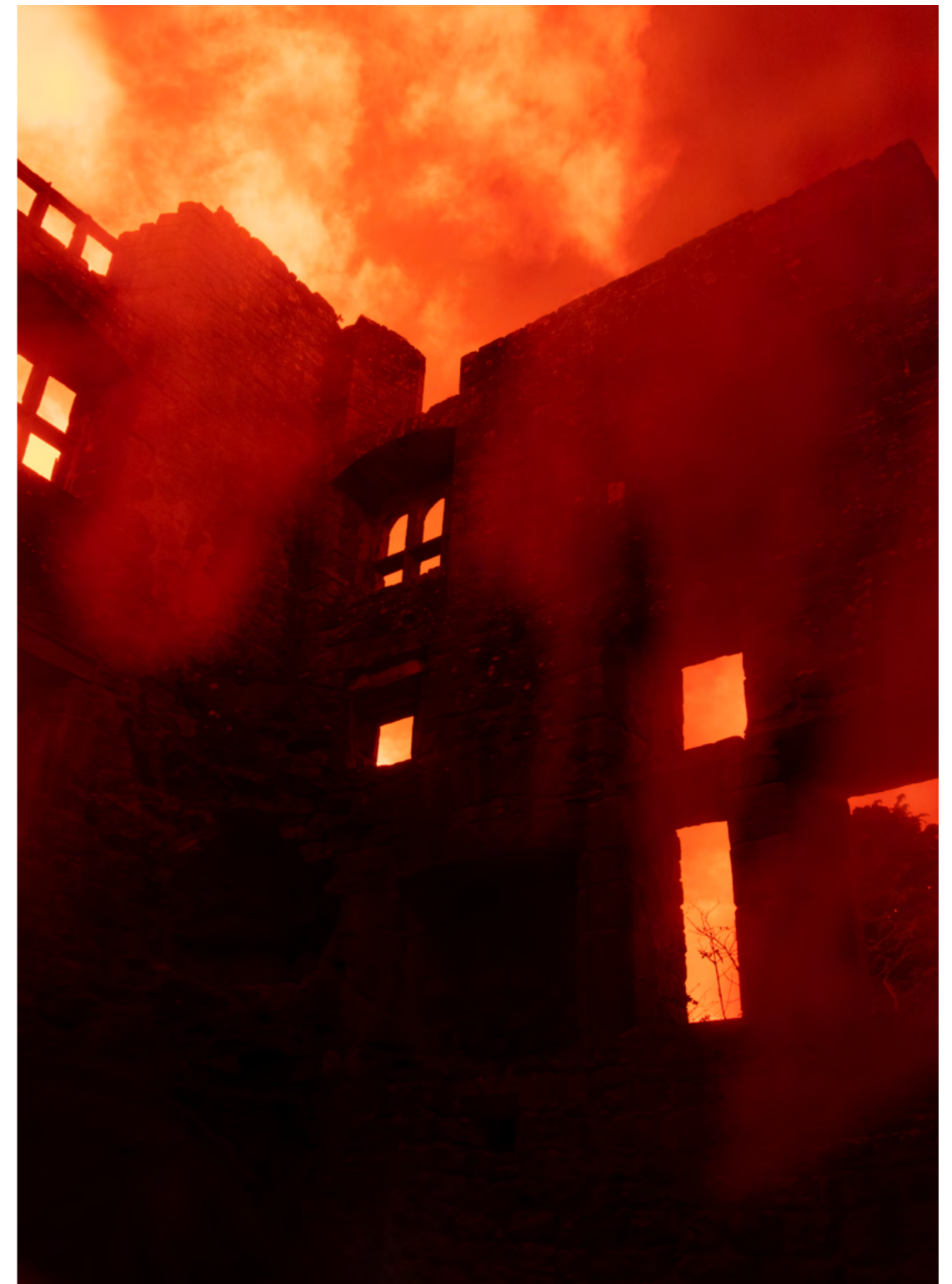
*Can't say any of us liked her*

*That's not really the point, is it?*

Lock broken, wood cracked, he entered the hall and the slap of smell hit him. He turned and saw wide, bright eyes watching, handkerchiefs over noses, children pushing to be at the front. At the cellar door, he stopped. It was not fitting. He shook his head and closed the front door, ignoring their protests. Now it was just him, the house and the smell. He lit a candle that sat on a table in the hall, followed the smell, opened the cellar door and looked down. Miss Emilia, contorted and still seeping at the base of the cellar steps, was forever branded on the back of his eyes.

They never thought to search further, even as the smell lingered long after the stone floor was scrubbed raw. The dark hole? The missing brick? Never a mention in ink on police paper.

Behind the bricks, he waits, thin fingers, sliver of a wrist bone, is he quite still? Don't linger on that step.



*Katie Lynn, Newcastle College*



# *Fragment Written at Byland Abbey*

Margaret Moore

I am the Byland Abbey rose window, facing east to capture the evening light. The stained-glass throws shapes onto the transept. I was the last part of the Abbey to be completed. Two turrets held me, though I no longer look as I did in my magnificence, just being partial now. I know I was once seen from the hills and lanes around; in fact, I still am! Now, you need to imagine the stone steps leading to an oak door beneath me. I rest and watch, now retired, watching the many visitors and, of course, the locals who know me well. Families on days out wander through, sometimes with naughty children who do not heed the 'do not climb on the building' sign.

I enjoy listening to services occasionally held in the Abbey as they remind me of old times. All the offices of the monks singing the plain chant. The wafting of incense on feast days, unable to escape as I was never opened or cleaned.

With the Dissolution the lead was stripped off, then exposed. Though I lost my glass I have retained my shape and story. I love the solitude of my valley and see so much, listening when the wind blows for the ghosts of the bells and the sighing of the ruins. Oh, that they could speak.





*Jordan Hodgson, Newcastle College*



*Michael David Thompson, Newcastle College*



# *A Ghost Story*

Jim Dawes



Having a liking of taking solo walks in the northern hills in most except the worst of our climate's offerings, I ventured out with my dog on a walk in the Yorkshire Wolds, a beautiful and not overpopulated area in East Yorkshire. Tranquillity abounds, birdsong and maybe the distant hum of traffic wending its way towards the coast or inland to the cities interfering with a whisper of wind, rustling leaves yet to fall in the autumn cascade. Recent rain had sought to sink into the soil but not had much effect and therefore not become a hindrance to making good progress into the dry valleys left by glaciers, their stark elegance offering tantalizing curves willing the walker to explore just that little bit more. These valleys are the workplace of the Wolds farmers who tend to let the sheep and cattle roam the grassy slopes in haphazard and lazy fashion whilst atop the hills, wheat and barley sway and swell their grain in anticipation of a good harvest. The isolation is unusual in Britain, but to get just a couple of hours away from the madness of working in an office or being badgered to get more production done before the end of a day is restorative and to myself and a few others, the ideal way of escaping an increasingly intense lifestyle.

The day was, in itself, benign, the sun sitting stubbornly behind a shroud of thin cloud stretching across the width of the sky, warm, sultry. A red kite whirled above and lay flattened wings wide, catching the wisps of wind and soaring, tail twitching left or right like a rudder, all the while looking for some carrion to float down to for consumption. I watched for a while and saw him drop lower on a slope where a half-eaten rabbit lay. He had seen me but standing still I tried to blend in with the surroundings, glad my clothing was quite inconspicuous. I absorbed myself in this scene of nature exposing the circle of life. A second kite landed and joined in the lunchtime treat. Being a good few metres away I was considered no threat and the carcass was further reduced to skin and bone. I had no idea how long I had been watching but then both birds took flight and climbed dramatically into the sky, disappearing over the tree line on the ridge, some sixty metres or so above me. I felt a chill. Strange for a mild day and no increase in wind that I noticed, I walked on, my dog breaking into a trot after laying down for the entirety of my bird observations, then, without any cause, she stopped and stared ahead, shivering, whimpering slightly, just enough to hear. Her hackles stood up on her neck and she came close to my leg, a sign she needed to be near me. She remained still and I put her lead on in case it was cattle being restless, which would mean a scramble up the steep



side of the valley and the safety of open fields, a stile to separate us from any irate beasts. I had not noticed any cow pats and so doubted this but better safe than sorry. We settled on getting around a third of the way up the hillside to get a head start, if need be, but also getting the advantage of being able to scan the valley floor from a higher position. The result was that there were no beasts in the field and no sheep dotted around, just us two in our own space and time. Keeping her on her lead I led her back to the valley floor and resumed the walk.

The dog was still reluctant to venture where I wanted us to go. A mist had descended and began to thicken, almost without warning. It enveloped us, further reducing the light as the outline of the sun disappeared and I experienced that icy coldness of winter, the temperature dropping in just a few minutes. I delved into my rucksack and emerged with flat cap in hand and donned it. It was now that I heard a creaking, rattling sound, distant at first, but coming closer. The dog was pushing tight against my leg, pressing heavily and now shaking. I bent low to stroke and comfort her, baffled by what was making her more nervous than I had ever seen. She is a rescue dog from Spain, and despite the years that I have had her and spent a long time coaxing her and comforting her into being a lovely companion who adores long walks and being with me, I now had a very timid, shaking wreck at my side. The sound was getting louder, and I peered into the mist that was billowing and thickening almost perceptively. The sound of heavy breathing joined the clatter of hooves and creaking of wheels. I made out a shape. A figure walking alongside a horse, a carthorse, pulling a heavy cart, just two wheels, the shafts and a load beneath a sheet. It seemed to be a man, although his face sat deep in a hood so no distinctive features could be seen. His hands looked filthy and held onto the reins by which he led the beast. A putrid smell filled my nostrils and the man looked towards but through me as he got within a few feet. I said hello, but it was a mere whisper: fear had gripped my throat and I was dumb. I stared at the weird sight as it lumbered past, my greeting unanswered. As the cart lurched, my eyes looked to see what the wheel had contacted. It was then that I noticed to my horror that the horse's legs did not contact the ground, that there was no sign of the hooves, and that the wheel was moving as if through a field of grass. Maybe a foot or more was missing. The man was also wading, only visible from mid-calf. They moved beyond me, no words were exchanged and my dog remained quaking against my leg. I looked at the back of the cart as it moved further away and into the mist. On the back were three objects covered with sheets – grubby sheets, tied with rope and making the unmistakable shape of a human form, two small and one larger. I just froze and stared. The mist grew thinner and the air lost its stench; the sounds faded and the sun resumed its attempts to break through. Birdsong resumed and traffic noise hummed again. I was suddenly very tired, weak, confused.

Knowing the area, I got onto one of the many footpaths criss-crossing the area and found my way back to the car, some two miles away, happy that the strange ordeal had passed, but curious that the experience had made such a profound effect on my dog, who took the rest of the day slowly to recover from the trauma. The next day I sought out a friend who studied local history

and who said there was reference about the dale I had been walking through and suggested I borrow one of his books on the subject. He invited me back to his, and over a cup of tea, we thumbed through the old book and found a short story of a legend of a horse and cart with three victims of the plague being taken from the village to be buried further away in the vale somewhere. The village became one of hundreds that were abandoned during the plague, with only visual imprints of the shapes of long-lost houses and barns recently pictured from drone photographs. The descriptions closely matched what I had seen, and although the account was over a hundred years old, it included the same mist and cold, the horse and cart and the hooded face where only vague features were discernible. One really spooky thing was that the date of the vision and the time that I saw it coincided with the account given in the book. I got goosebumps again and the hackles on my hands and neck rose as I sat reading about the similarities. The book even recorded the name of Horsedale Wold. I had never remotely thought that I would have an experience quite like this. I have never walked that Wold again since, and shiver each time that I open my OS map of the area and my eyes are automatically drawn to those contour lines.

My dog, I am pleased to say, recovered within one day, but eyes me suspiciously whenever we go for a walk on the Wolds. She knows what happened, and so do I.





## *Port-Royal-des-Champs*

Mary Reval

At Port-Royal there are no walls left to talk about what happened there where once France's best taught and learned, where literature and philosophy once flourished, where minds spoke openly, explored possibilities beyond the beaten path.

Raised to the ground in an orgy of hate by the Sun King and his Jesuit afraid of challenge to dogmatic power. Only a small chapel was spared where dissenters died singing in a fire storm, thrown into a mass grave together with

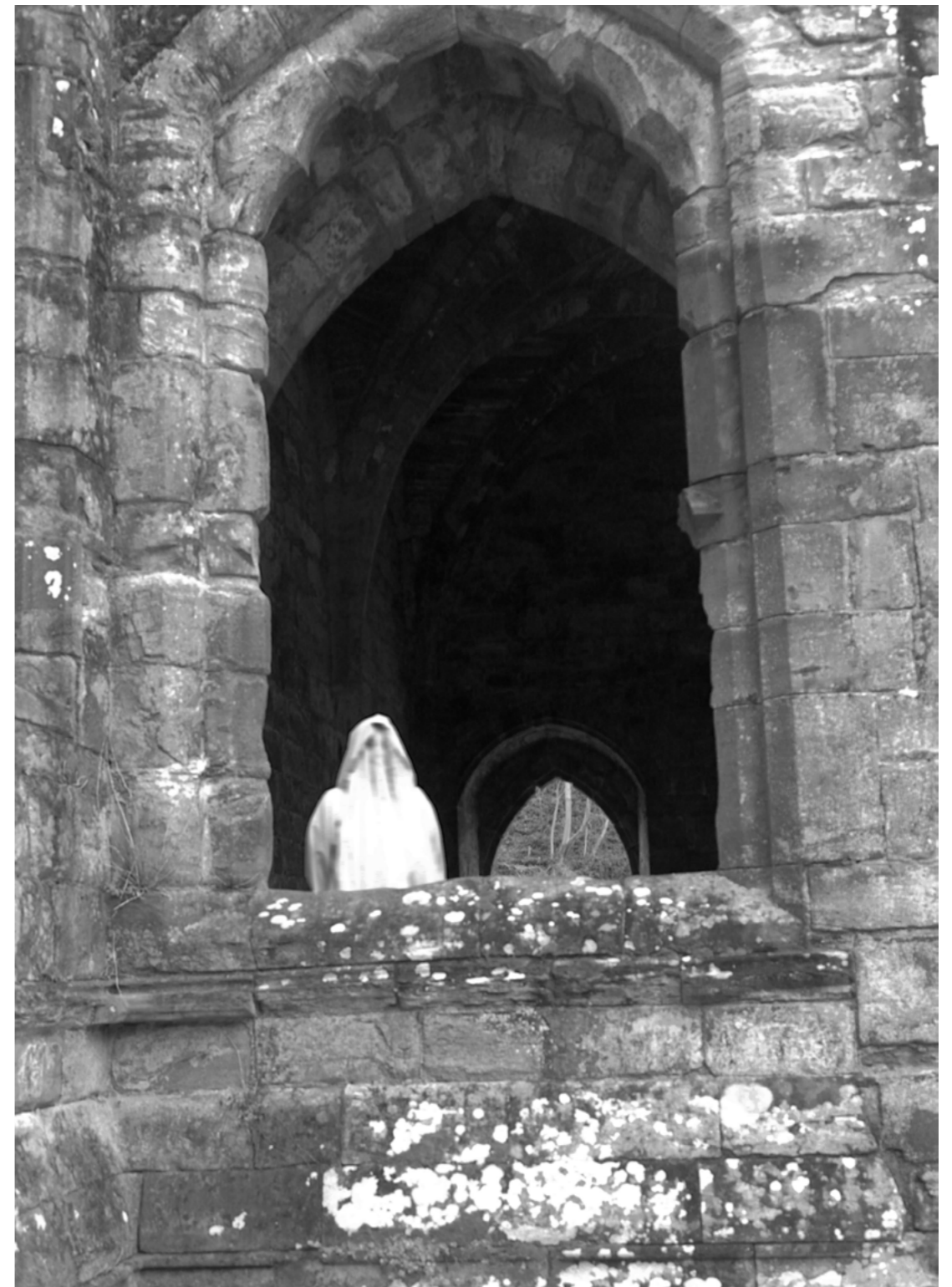
corpses long dead, dug up from the Abbey's cemetery, a space unmarked to wipe out all memory of free minds who once lived here and tested the limits. But their spirits drift gently in the hum of the honeybees across the place, leave a feeling of serenity and triumphant peace.

I sit on a sunny bench next to the site invaded by an unknown sense of bliss and the insight that the dead here are alive.





*Brogan Mullen, Furness College*



*Chloe Capovila, Furness College*





*Lily Whitehead, Furness College*

## *Letters to Furness Abbey*

Ruth-Anne Walbank

Dear ruined abbey,

Are you really haunted?

If yes, blink twice in crackled mortar  
crumbling from your moulding stone.

If no, stand silent on your slanting ground  
in memoriam of ghosts you could have known.

Dear dismembered, ruined abbey,

Are you happy in your ruins?

If yes, send smoke signals in burning cedar  
through the abbot's fat and falling chimney

If no, stand silent in your towering fragments  
and mark the grieving landscape with your misery.

Dear, decrepit, dismembered, ruined abbey,

Did you know how history would happen?

If yes, carve apologies in eroded graves  
for the monks who built your story.

If no, stand silent in protest at  
your propped up  
dissolution and hallowed  
hollowed-out  
glory.



# Castle Rising

Rosemary Whitehead



*Dedicated to a small bird I ran over on the A149*

From up here, the fenland is a broken chequerboard that divides up brown farrow, green wheat, yellow rape. Wild patches are rare so we blinker ourselves to what most of this land has become and seek out land that still grips the past.

The road winds around low ground with the canal up high and we birds circle bare branched trees overhead. Tim's finger-bones grip the wheel. We swoop lower and the car comes close to the high rising bank above. One of us flies too low, misses an air current and crunches under his tyres.

Tim's heart pounds at the killing and he swallows back bile – bless him, he's not the killing kind. That small bird, who could fly, swoop, soar, build nests, raise young is now nothing more than a feathered, boney bump on a man-made road.

Tim doesn't even know what kind of bird it was. Black, he thinks, but now everything suddenly seems black or grey or mist. It's turning into one of those days.

Shall we leave him to futile thoughts of mortality and man's destruction of nature? Let's allow the canal banks to break, the water its freedom again. Breathe. Soil refreshed, land boggy and only isolated pockets of higher ground. Come rise up out of the nourished sog and join us birds up, up and over – can you see down there? Down below? There's her castle. Isabella's. A castle that will stand the test of time and that Tim, still wallowing in the small grief at ending a bird's life, will visit today.

Isabella is not so concerned at ending lives – her hawk has been on fine form so far today. Yesterday, she rode alone and killed a boar, bristly, bleeding, dirty snout. Reminded her of her husband in his last year. Its head will greet visitors as they reach the top of the narrow entrance steps. This castle, she knew, had never been intended to be more than a hunting lodge. But here she is, a queen, and here she finds, actually, that she is left in peace and can hunt and kill to her heart's content. Her aim has become exceptional, her horsemanship too. All she now resents is the lack of high ground to gallop across and that her favourite boots take a full week to dry out.



She thinks of the fire that will be waiting in the great chamber and counts the dead birds by her side. There are nine. She whistles to call the hawk back, stands with her gloved hand raised. She watches as he dives headfirst towards her, large black pupils ringed with yellow fixed on her, he pulls his wings back and plummets – gravity will take him back to the ground and back to his mistress. Faster, faster, she does not flinch. His familiar weight lands on her hand and she strokes his head feathers, then kisses him with a soft whisper:

*Kill us one more*

And then she throws him high in the air once more and watches his flap and climb, the current he catches and his soar. She closes her eyes and flies with us, up, up and over these foreign bogs and woods that she's grown to love. She looks down on herself and her cold, wet feet and chuckles. There will be strong wine at lunch.

Tim warms his hands on his coffee and enters the castle earthworks. Castles please him. He likes to place his palm on stones and try to hear the voices absorbed through centuries. As he sits, he notices where mosses and tiny ferns cling to stones. Some walls are more plant than stone: nature is taking the castle back into the earth. He glances up and sees a hawk circling. He knows that this is Isabella's castle; he breathes her air and wishes he had more of her fire. He loves her story.

Above him is Isabella's bedroom where she contemplates two things: her face in polished silver and her dead husband.

Isabeau the Fair, he'd called her. He could appreciate, aesthetically at least, her face, her breasts, the curve of her collarbones as long as he didn't have to touch them. When he did his duty, he wore gloves, grimaced and closed his eyes. We know, we were there. And so was his lover sometimes. His wife the most beautiful woman in Europe. Her failing was her lack of sword.

*Would that my body had been ripe early enough to seduce his father instead.*

The father's dying wish was to have flesh boiled from his bones and the bones to lead a conquering army into Scotland. Isabella and Tim both enjoy spending time imagining the practicalities of this. Would they have rigged up a kind of skeleton puppet and danced him into combat? Or would his bones have been divided up amongst the front line and welded onto helmets and shields? No matter, he never got his wish. She pinches her cheeks red and loosens her shoulder-bones against the cold.

Tim breathes in the sharp chill of the castle and wishes he could stay with her

*The last thing I need in my life is another limp sodomite*

He blinks. Then breathes her in and feels his ribcage expand. He feels compelled to stand and finds his hand is held high. He hears before he sees a swoop and rush of feathers and wind. The hawk is upon him; her claws sink into his flesh and grip. They lock eyes: the bird's are wide and yellow, the man's wincing and grey. Tim doesn't dare breathe and feels her claws drawing down close to bone. A pause. We watch and wonder who will win. Tim's jaw locks and he lowers his arm, slow at first then gathering speed before he flings her high and she flaps free and wild and high above her castle. His temples pulse as he watches his blood fall and stain her flagstones.

*Not so limp after all*

He smiles and walks towards his car.





*Charlotte Beck, Newcastle College*



*Amy Johnstone, Newcastle College*



# 400 years of Courage on the Wall

Jane Corbett

Dancing round Dacre Hall in the black mask it was hard to breathe. She'd chosen it to make a dramatic entrance, to hide her own hooked beak, her jealous beady eyes.

She flew at the window, tried to break the glass with her beak, desperate for a wind blast from the ruins.

Her vision misted  
faint-away  
black must  
unmask  
mask  
suffocating

She slid down the wall into a pool of black fabric. The faded griffin above, painted four hundred years ago, was now fire-eye alive, full-feathered wings beating out 'be brave in death, you were murdered on the dance floor'.



*Ethan Taylor, Newcastle College*



## *Kids Go Free*

*~based on words found on the site before 'all are free'*

Margaret Moore

The hut for the keeper  
Locked up, is it the winter?  
Byland stands stark  
In ruins an Abbey.

Stones recycled  
To build walls for fields,  
Cottages and mend  
Helmsley Castle

The Inn for the Abbey  
Once the Guest House,  
Stands empty  
No longer the place of  
Good food and warmth.

The tenants had troubles, so  
Guarding an empty shell  
Are chained stone dogs  
The floral tubs tired.

'Kids go free'  
To run the ruins  
'What's that mum'  
As they look down the well.

The public footpath is signed  
As it skirts the periphery but  
*Beware the bull*

I ponder, walking over the field  
The steps of people past  
Trodden before and now again.

Sit now at the distance  
On the memorial bench  
At the lowering sun  
On Byland.



*Libby Knight, Furness College*





*Imogen Martin, Furness College*

# *James Tankerlay Resurrected*

Sam Macfie

Father James Tankerlay had spent half his life behind the precinct wall of Byland Abbey. He was familiar and content with his unvarying life as a monk and expected it to continue in the same fashion until his death. He had no doubt that, as a member of the Cistercian order, he was on the shortest and surest path to his heavenly reward, so he was not a little perturbed to have his daily routine interrupted by being beckoned into the draughty parlour by the Prior, that day in the early autumn of 1349, after the service of Prime. There he received a short blessing from the Prior who then informed Fr James that the abbot wished to speak to him after the midday meal. He could not imagine why he should be summoned by the abbot. He was certain that he had not transgressed in any way in the recent past. He was a most diligent and conscientious monk and was considered to be among the most pious of his brothers in Christ. Nevertheless, he felt worried and his prayers at Terce were even more earnest than usual. He had good reason to be concerned.

Shortly before the appointed hour he left the confines of the cloister. He could not remember the last time he had done so. He walked the short distance to the abbot's house and used the iron door knocker to rap on the door. The abbot's servant let Fr James in and led him in silence to the abbot's hall. A fire was burning in the grate with Abbot John seated beside the flickering flames. He indicated with a sign that Fr James should sit in the chair opposite him. Fr James knew that he should not speak unless his abbot invited him to do so and even so he should be sparing with his words. To his surprise the abbot addressed him in a friendly manner.

'As you know,' he began, 'I have been abbot for only a few weeks, since Abbot Walter died of the pestilence, God rest his soul. I have not had the opportunity to speak to you since I became abbot but I understand that you are a serious man and a most pious monk. It is for this reason that I have chosen you for a special task which I know you will undertake with your customary solemnity and devotion. The parish priest of Cold Kirby, as you may know, recently succumbed to the pestilence that is running rife in the country at this time. The good people of that vill are eager to find a replacement but none has been forthcoming due to fear of the plague. The spirit of God is powerful in you and I know the Lord will protect you from this terrible disease and so I have informed the parish clerk that I have appointed you as their new priest.'



You will leave the monastery tomorrow after Chapter. I have arranged a carrier to convey you to the priest's house at Kirby so that you can take up your new calling without delay. You may now go back to the cloister to resume your monastic observances.'

Fr James stood up and bowed to his abbot. He left without having said a word in the short time he was in the abbot's presence.

Next morning Fr James passed through the two gatehouses for the first time since the day he entered the monastery. The carrier was awaiting him by the outer gatehouse. They greeted each other with a silent bow. The priest had with him the meagre essentials he would need in his new life. He sat beside the driver and marvelled at the countryside, shrouded in mist, as the cart slowly rumbled over the rough tracks. The horse struggled and slipped on the muddy road up Wass Bank, passing the quarry where the stone for building the abbey had been excavated two centuries earlier. They arrived at Cold Kirby in the mid-afternoon. The priest's house was beside the church. It was a modest two-storey thatched structure but there was a welcome plume of smoke rising from the chimney. The priest signed a blessing to the carrier and entered his new abode. Although sparsely furnished, the interior was clean and neat. A fire crackling in the hearth lifted his spirit and he knelt in prayer to offer thanks to God for a safe journey as well as his new very adequate accommodation. There was nothing he was lacking. In the main room there was a loaf of bread, some cheese and eggs. In a corner was a large cauldron of fresh water and on the dresser sat a large pitcher of ale. Clearly someone had taken trouble to make him welcome. He was hungry as he had missed the only meal of the monastic day at midday. So he sat at the table and had a meal of bread and cheese and refreshed himself with a mug of ale. After finishing his simple repast he had time to visit the church and to chant quietly a belated None to himself. As a monk he felt bound to follow the regular round of the eight canonical hours that were attended by every monk in the Cistercian community.

He returned to the house as the light was failing and noticed that candles were now lit therein. On entering he found, to his surprise, a young woman washing up the plates and utensils he had used for his meal. For fifteen years he had not seen a woman and had spent much time in prayer, successfully suppressing lustful thoughts. The woman cleaning up after him was the subject of most of the Kirby swains' daydreams and it was known that the son of a local knight was paying court to her. The sight of this beauty before him had a profound effect on the good priest. The years of suppression were undone in an instant. His immediate instinct, and consequent action, was severely to admonish her and to tell her to leave and never return. Like his brethren he was well versed in the teachings of the blessed Bernard who had strong words to say about the seductive effect of women upon men. At that moment he understood his warnings with great clarity. After she had left the house in a shower of tears, Fr James knelt in prayer and asked for forgiveness and divine help to banish the thoughts that now assailed his mind. He remembered that he had brought a scourge with him and with this fearsome instrument he administered a severe

beating to himself. The pain of this punishment partially achieved its objective of ridding himself of the thoughts that shamed him. The devil had lost no time in attempting to lure him into sin.

The following day, Fr James said Mass in the little church that was filled with his new parishioners. He was careful to keep his eyes averted, lest he should meet the eyes of the woman, or indeed any woman. His sermon was about the Devil, his constant presence in their midst and the need to be mindful of not falling into sin. After the Mass he stood at the west door of the church so that he might meet some of his flock. They were pleased to have a priest at last and many offers of help were made. Mercifully, he did not see the woman.

The poor priest was not at all prepared for the life of a parish priest. He was unaccustomed to conversation. In the monastery, weeks would pass without uttering a single word out loud, other than when prayerfully reading or singing the psalms in the abbey church. Having to deal with lay people and their problems were outside his experience but he was determined to make a success of his new life and gradually he shed many of the monastic routines to which he had become accustomed, replacing them with pastoral care and administering the sacraments.

One of the pastoral duties that was expected of him was the care of the sick, not just as a priest but as a physician also. He had a natural sense of empathy with his patients, and for those he could not heal he could at least ease their passage into the next world with his prayers and the sacraments. His skills were needed only too frequently, particularly with the epidemic still raging. After he had been in Kirby for a six-month he received a written message asking him to call upon a Mistress Merrin, who was delirious with fever. He went to see the lady that day. He pushed the front door ajar and called to say he had arrived. From the gloom of the cottage a figure appeared. It was a woman wearing a hood that obscured her face. She told him that Mrs Merrin was her mother. She had been ill for two days and had rapidly deteriorated in the course of the day. Fr James examined the woman and concluded that she was another victim of the plague. Gently he informed the daughter that her mother was very ill and there was little prospect of recovery. He told her to open the shutters and doors of the house to allow the foul air to be expelled, to rub the lesions with vinegar and to drink it herself as a preventative measure. He advised against blood-letting as her mother was too weak. He knelt beside the old woman's bed and suggested she might like to give her confession but she was too confused to understand. He therefore blessed her and gave her absolution. This gave great comfort to the daughter, if not to her mother whose condition noticeably worsened in the short time the priest had been in attendance. He remained with the two women until the elder died before nightfall. He was able to give her the last rites and the death was peaceful. He helped the daughter lay out her mother and said some words of consolation.

As Fr James went to the door to leave, the daughter dropped her hood to reveal her face and spoke to the priest. She thanked him earnestly for his care and introduced herself, which she had not done earlier.



'My name is Meg. You may remember me as it was I who was originally tasked with being your housekeeper until you threw me out on your first day as our priest. To this day I am deeply sorry that I offended you. I had intended no mischief but only to ensure that you had what you needed on your arrival.'

Fr James, by this time in his new ministry, had adjusted well to customs beyond the cloister and had come to understand that the blessed Bernard was not always an infallible authority on the role and wiles of women. He was ashamed of his earlier rejection of Meg and asked her forgiveness, which was given without hesitation. The priest said that he had been without a housekeeper since that time but would be glad of some help with domestic matters, which he had sorely neglected. Meg said that once her mother had been buried and she had had some time to grieve she would gladly return to his service.

After a month she returned to the church house to relieve the good father of his domestic duties so that he was able to concentrate on his spiritual and pastoral roles. Meg visited every day and was meticulous in her work. She ensured that the house was clean and tidy and that the pantry was adequately stocked. Often she would prepare a simple stew or some pottage for her employer, taking care to avoid meat from four-legged animals, as the Rule of St Benedict commanded. The two met infrequently. Meg was aware that she was developing an affection for the priest but she knew that she could not express this without incurring his rejection.

As mentioned earlier, Meg had a suitor. His name was Robert de Stuteville. He had become a regular visitor to her house since the death of her mother. He was the black sheep of his powerful family and his advances were not welcome to Meg, but she was powerless to prevent his visits. He was deeply jealous of Meg's association with the priest and his coarse imagination was untrammelled. He insisted that she should terminate her employment with Fr James and threatened her with violence if she disobeyed but she ignored his threats. De Stuteville, therefore, hatched a plan to dispose of his 'rival', as he considered the priest to be. He called upon him one evening to discuss a donation that he wished to make to the church. He brought with him a gift of a flagon of small ale, which he presented to the priest. A seemingly friendly discussion regarding his potential gift to the church ended with de Stuteville agreeing to meet the bill for the repair of the church roof in full, for which the priest was very grateful. However, the ale had been laced with hemlock, not enough to taint the flavour of the ale but more than adequate to ensure the innocent priest's demise when the flagon had been fully consumed, a process that took two days. Three further agonising days passed before the poor man died from the poison. He had thought that he had contracted enteric fever and neither he nor anyone else suspected that he had been poisoned. Meg was distraught but she saw to it that the body was respectfully laid out and let the inhabitants of the village know so that they might pay their respects. She informed Abbot John of Byland who arranged for the body to be collected for burial at the abbey.

The carrier arrived late next morning and took Fr James's body back to the abbey. After it was washed and anointed, it was put on a stand before the high altar. Candles were placed around the bier and a rota of monks was drawn up to keep an uninterrupted vigil until the burial. Abbot John decided that as Fr James did not die as a monk in residence he should not be buried in the monk's graveyard. Furthermore, Fr James was thought to be a priest of exceptional piety. The abbot decided therefore to inter him in a prime site in the east cloister walk in front of the entrance to the Chapter House. His former brothers would therefore be reminded of him every day as they walked over his tomb on their way into the Chapter House for the morning meeting.

Meg's days were now miserable. She had lost the priest whom she had come to love and her suitor was becoming more possessive and demanding of her attention.

'Now that priest is dead,' he asked her, 'why can you not show me some affection? I am a wealthy man and wish to share all I have with you including my life.'

'I would rather kiss dead James's lips than you in your finery,' she boldly replied.

This was too much for the unfounded pride of the man and he hurled a savage punch with his gauntleted hand at poor Meg, striking the left side of her face, which bled ferociously. A stud on the gauntlet had struck her eye, causing it to rupture. Meg screamed with pain and terror, then fainted. De Stuteville panicked on seeing the carnage he had caused. Without a thought for his victim he fled the house, mounted his horse and, with all speed, he rode home.

Much later Meg regained consciousness. She was severely weakened from loss of blood and from the pain of her dreadful injury. She managed to drag herself to her bed and again lost consciousness until the following day when de Stuteville returned to assess the situation. He found Meg in a bloody condition. The wound was discharging an offensive exudate. He attempted to rouse her from her unconsciousness by shaking her and when that failed, he slapped her face. The pain of his action had the desired effect. Meg opened her one good eye and whimpered when she saw him. 'Say nothing to anyone of this or I will blow out your other eye,' he warned her.

Meg was in no state to say anything.

'If anyone asks what happened,' he continued, 'you must say that it was the priest who, in his vileness, has joined the undead as a revenant and has been visiting you nightly. Last night he attacked you and did this terrible thing. I will inform the abbot what has happened.'

'No,' she barely managed to reply.

De Stuteville's response was to thrust his hands around her neck and squeeze until she could no longer breathe. He gripped her thus until her weak



struggles ceased and then he cast her aside and washed the blood from his guilty hands. He left the house to find someone to whom he could tell his lies about the cause of Meg's death. Her neighbour was collecting eggs from a chicken hutch. She promised to see to it that the necessary arrangements were made for Meg's burial if de Stuteville would pay, to which he agreed with poor grace. She was shocked and surprised to learn that it was the dead priest who was responsible for the terrible deed.

De Stuteville lost no time in visiting Byland Abbey in order to meet the abbot to give his explanation of the tragedy that had occurred in Cold Kirby. He told Abbot John that Meg had been the mistress of Fr James who had become over-possessive and jealous of any man who encountered her. He had returned as a revenant every night since his death to ensure that she was not being unfaithful. There was no knowing why he should have assaulted her so seriously, but clearly his jealousy had no bounds. Abbot John found it hard to believe that the priest was capable of such wickedness but, not knowing of de Stuteville's reputation as a savage and unprincipled man, he trusted his word. Additionally, he was aware that a number of revenants had been recorded very recently by the canons of Newburgh Priory, just a mile away from Byland. The Devil was ever on the watch for new victims amongst the living and the dead and Fr James was but one. The abbot knew what his grim duty had to be.

When all the monks, including the lay brothers, had assembled in Chapter the following day, their abbot described what he had been told, and led to believe, about the death of Meg and the transition of James Tankerlay's corpse into a revenant. A visible shudder, not due to the cold, passed through the entire community. The lay brothers, who were standing on the priest's tomb in the cloister alley outside the entrance to the Chapter House, instinctively moved off the now accursed grave stone. Abbot John reminded the community that as the revenant was already dead, its disposal must be more thorough than what a simple burial would allow: burial facing downwards, burning, decapitation or hurling the weighted corpse into deep water, amongst others. A show of hands was asked for to decide which method was to be used, and water disposal was chosen as none present had the wish to mutilate their former brother in Christ.

The unpleasant task of exhuming the body was carried out the following day by two of the lay brothers. They waited until daybreak to ensure that the corpse was back in its coffin after its supposed nocturnal activities. They noted that body had putrefied to a degree that might be expected for the span of time that it had been interred. It was wrapped in a canvas sheet, with heavy stones placed within, and tied securely. An ox cart was commissioned for the journey to Lake Goremire, which was situated not far from the abbey and within the extensive lands owned by the monastery. Goremire was the ideal watery grave as, by long repute, it was said to be bottomless. The team of animals were slow and skittish in their progress to their destination. They arrived at the lake in the mid afternoon. The brothers carefully backed the cart down to the lake and slid the body into a rowing boat. The lake was shallow around the perimeter so they had to row into the middle where it was deepest. The two brothers pushed

the body off the wooden plank it was lying upon. With a gentle splash and a gurgle, the body sank rapidly. The men watched it disappear as it began its eternal journey through the clear water to oblivion.

The name of James Tankeray was expunged from all the monastic records and those of the parish of Cold Kirby. The east cloister alley was reconstructed so that no trace of the grave remained and for several decades his name was not mentioned aloud. In the early years of the fifteenth century, the novice master, Fr Richard Burrige, who spent much time amongst the abbey's books, found a volume – a treatise on Cicero and other subjects – that had blank pages at its end as well as empty spaces between subjects. Being of a thrifty nature, he could not bear to see unused expanses of expensive vellum, akin to the idleness that blessed Benedict warned monks against as it allowed the Devil to intrude, so he filled the spaces with salutary lessons for his novices in the form of twelve ghost stories. The shortest one related the sad tale of James Tankerlay. His story had been whispered and embellished over the earlier decades and, for reasons best known to him, Fr Richard chose to record the most damning version for posterity.





# *If the Stones Could Talk*

Ron Creer

1.

Stephen's viewpoint

These 900 years we have peered  
Down from our 70-ft-high perch.  
We've seen all those who  
Travailed in, may I call it, my Abbey.

The first abbot, out of respect or thanks,  
Insisted our likenesses were carved,  
For the land, this Vale of Beckansgill  
Was mine. Mine to own, mine to give.

Yes, I allowed, with gracious generosity,  
This building, this magnificent edifice,  
To be erected to honour me . . . and God.  
Intimations of immortality?

So I have witnessed it all  
From before my coronation when,  
As Count of Blois, I granted the right to  
Those monks of Savigny, those Norman men.

In my name they built, they created,  
They consecrated this most wonderful memorial  
In a most tranquil spot among  
Woods and hills and water.



2.

Matilda speaks up

Oh do get it right, please:  
I am Matilda, once of Boulogne,  
Not that other of my name,  
That witch, my cousin Maud.

She may have been Empress but  
Her feud with my husband  
Makes her a stranger to me.  
I am the Queen now, not her.

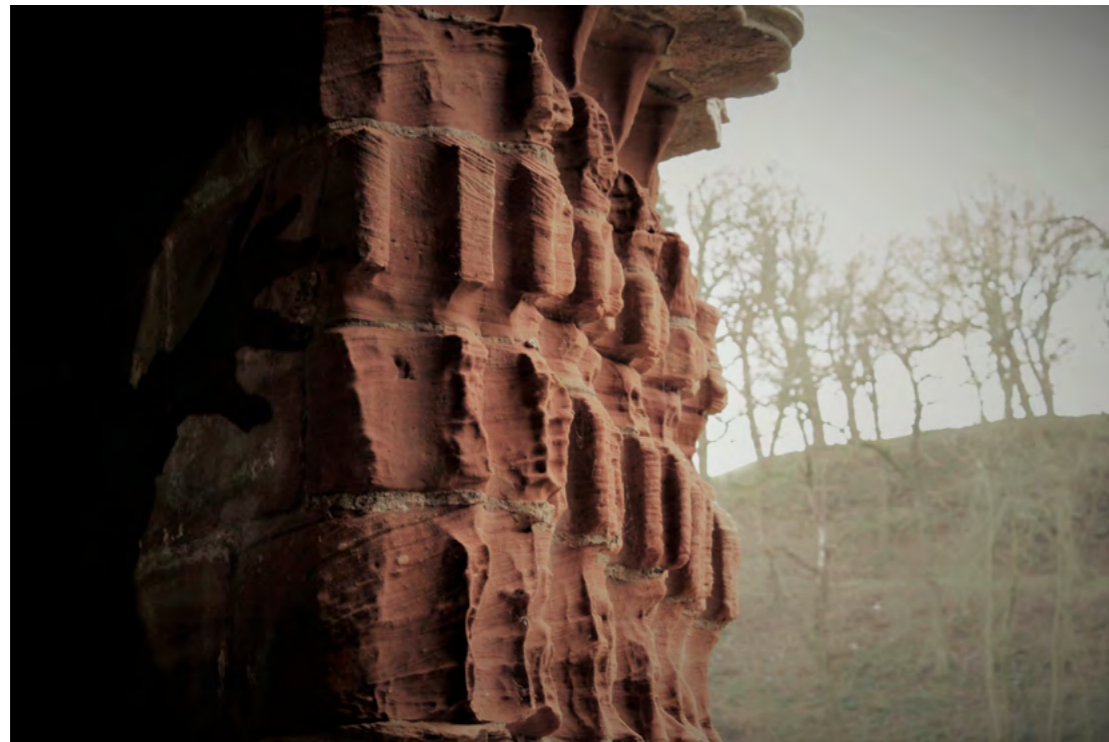
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Like Stephen, I look down  
On the grounds of the old Abbey,  
Now ruins of course with more  
Grass than before, more strangers too.

Somehow, despite the despoiling,  
The site retains its splendour,  
As if the ghosts of all those who  
Were here are, like us, looking down.







*Anna Cumberbatch, Furness College*



*Charlie Morton, Newcastle College*



*May the Grass on the Road  
to Hell Grow Long for the  
Lack of Your Footsteps*

Jane Corbett

Behind Lanercost Priory, a traffic jam of bones in the cemetery, the gravely flat slabs of a moss-greened highway. Before today, I wouldn't have known the backlog was caused by a revenant, dug in, determinedly deep at the front of the queue, long pleading for a blessing that hadn't come. Holding up the journeys of the other bones, blocking their paths to heaven, or their roads to hell. Only the moss and I were free to creep away.



*Amanda Stacey, Newcastle College*





*Sarah Campbell, Newcastle College*

# *Jerusalem*

Jeanette Johanson

The road was steep and she stopped to get her breath as she made her way out of the village. Above her the burnished tips of the conifers brushed the silver-grey taffeta clouds. Daylight was clinging on, just.

*'And did those feet, in ancient times...'*

The voices were faint and she wasn't sure if they were inside her head. The houses below looked small, like buildings in a model village, and were dwarfed by the remains of the towering ruins of the Cistercian abbey behind them. The Village Hall, the building that had meant so much to the community, looked insignificant as its grey wooden exterior began to disappear in the fading light. It was more than a slight wooden structure to her, and inside were some of her most treasured memories. She had been so sad to see it in its present condition – forlorn – there was no other word. It was so cold, and ivy was creeping through the roof at the back. Mould stained the salmon-pink walls, the plaster was cracked and flaking, and the cream emulsion that they had used to brighten the place up was peeling. The carefully stitched pennants that spelt out their branch name trailed across the floor and the upright piano that used to be their accompaniment was way out of tune, its lid left open and its keys full of dust.

*'And did the countenance divine shine forth upon those clouded hills...'*



The voices were a little louder this time, and she was sure that a group of women were singing somewhere. She remembered the friends she had made, the rallies they had supported, the charity fund-raisers they had worked so hard to organise, the garden fete when the summer deluge had threatened to ruin their perfectly baked Victoria sponges, the street party for the Queen's Jubilee, the Beetle drive when the beetles had been too lazy to come out of their box until someone (accidentally?) tipped it over and they scuttled across the polished wooden floor boards scattering the women to the four corners of the room, the jams and chutneys they had made for the villagers during the pandemic, the evening they had crafted by candlelight when the electric was cut off, the patchwork they had so carefully made for the Federation Quilt. They had even made the journey down to the Albert Hall for the National Conference the year that Tony Blair was given a slow hand-clap for canvassing. She had felt so proud to be part of it all, and a bit overwhelmed by the numbers of women from across the UK who shared her values by belonging to this organisation.

'I will not cease from mental fight, nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,

Till we have built Jerusalem in this green and pleasant land'

The voices rang out now and she continued on her way, lifted by them, so grateful to have been involved with it all, and to have so many happy memories.



*Liana Palaby, Furness College*



# *Byland Abbey*

Margaret Moore



An ancient Abbey sprawls against  
The vibrant winter sky  
As it fades to dusk and dark night.

Secrets held in ruins of stone  
Though much moved, now  
To village homes or  
Rebuild a castle.

Fallen pillars in ignominy  
Build wall to edge Byland Road

Dressed stones, hold masons'  
Now village stories  
Absorbed in the pitted  
Surface of porous limestone.

Stop, feel the stone  
In or around Byland Road  
Visit again and again  
How much there is  
To know but, in the quiet  
Abbey stories told.

Listen, hear and feel  
My story held safe in stone.



# *Mud & Bones*

Daniel Morgan Woodburn

The earth is made from mud and bones. Beneath each footfall is more history than one person can conceptualise. The vaulted halls of the infirmary have seen scores of dead and dying beneath them. Now, they play the harmonic sounds of fleeting Latin before any guest who tries to revitalise them.

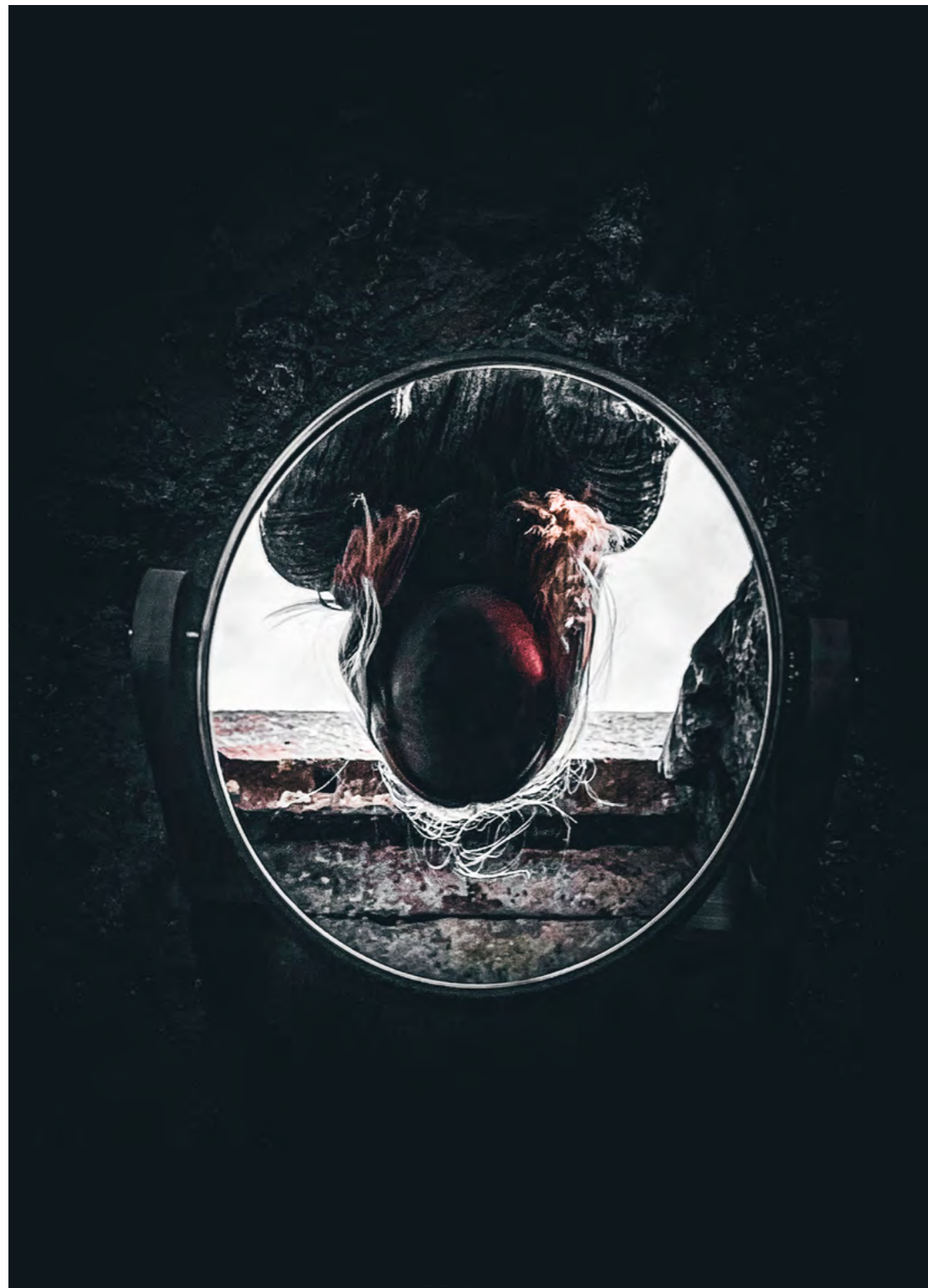
Screams and wind flood sunlit rooms once designed to be sunless, but the screams belong to playing children running from imaginary monsters instead of grieving parents. The spirit of the building itself sutured it by steel frames and emergency work – it begs the question: when does a building die? People, like ants, swarm lichen-covered stone, they re-define and re-purpose its bones for their own needs; no longer a place of worship but a monument to the erosion of time because the ants have called it that and erected their nest nearby.

The gift shop sells sugar, honey, and legend to keep the patrons invested in the older-than-Frankenstein patchwork spirit of the ruins alive enough for the purpose. One day, the building will be gone, the unknowable ruins of the gift shop will be our heritage.



*Finn Sanderson, Furness College*





## *Requiescat In Pace*

Nancy Walbank

This rare and beautiful gilded silver crozier once sat in my hand when I was of international significance,

My bones taken from my tomb, spread out before the sun and the moon but not before the army of heaven.

Instead, I wake to a world where worth lies only in the gold badges of office I bore, their meaning as insignificant as the gilded wings of the archangel whose shattered image fluttered sanctity over my flock.

The fix of my bones is an object for your amusement –

A fat, old man, arms stretched in death to encompass his girth.

Then, here was somewhere, and I was someone of wealth and power who wore a relic ring.

Once upon a time, my name was the lodestone.

My bones were buried to rise in the East.

I spent centuries hearing my name muttered by monks begging me to carry their petitions heavenwards, weaving their faith through the marrow of my bones upon their fasted breath – then silence.

Now, I awake an exhibit in a world without saints.



