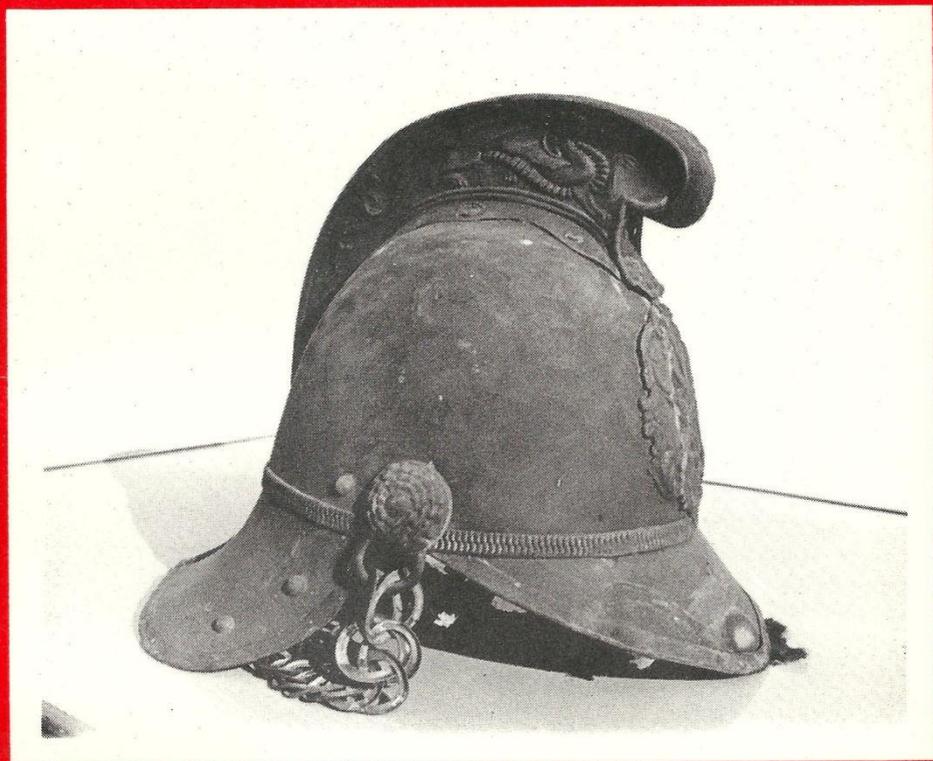


**FIRE ENGINES
GO
CLIP ! CLOP !**



FIRESERVICE AND OTHER POEMS
BY
TERRY CORDREY

FIRE ENGINES GO CLIP! CLOP!

Fire service and other poems.

By Terry Cordrey.

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Thirteenth in the series 'Writers of the South East'.

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To

Pauline, Matthew and Melanie
I.C.U. Brompton Hospital

My friends of N.S.F. and Mind

Fire Service poems:

East Sussex Fire Brigade, especially;
Fred Bishop and White Watch, Brighton (1975)
Graham Stafford, Peter Winder and crew, Battle (1970 – 1975)

To the memory of Terry Stuart, Brighton.

My thanks to:

Charles and the Maidstone Poets

Jill's parents

Peter, Sue and family

Dick and Jenny

Janet (T.C.A.S)

Carol Easton

Carmel, Naomi, Canadian High Commission, Canada House

Sheila Hope, Museum of Mankind

Steve Crisp T.V.S.

Gordon Honeycombe

FOREWORD

I met Terry eight months ago. In that time I have watched the progress of his poetry and been amazed at its rapid evolution, - the result of hard work, dedication to craft and a willingness to make constructive use of ideas gained from more established writers, I feel confident that this is a growth that will continue, with an increasing technical competence and range of tone and subject matter.

Probably most people write poetry at some time or another; rather less have an original talent; less still have the seriousness and inner drive characteristic of someone who could truly be described by the often casually-used word 'Poet'. Terry does.

*Charles Thomson
September 1985*

SECTION ONE

Fire Service poems.

I AM A FIREMAN

As the furnace embers smoulder,
I look down upon your body
And take its image to my home,
My wife, my children's laughter;
Through the love they rightly seek,
I will whisper with my sadness,
'I am sorry – I'm pre-occupied'.

FIRE ENGINES GO CLIP CLOP!

'What fire engine will I ride today?'
Brought forth an embarrassed hush.
Men looked down, shuffled their feet,
The guv'nor started to blush.

'Uh! Oh! I think I've dropped a b....!'
And gave a stifled sigh.
'Fire engine? Fire engine?'
The guv'nor's shocked reply.

'You're a fireman, not a civvy!
So now let's get it right
And listen while I tell you,
Perhaps you'll see the light.

The fireman had brass helmets.
Fire engines went clip clop!
The coal burned in the bottom
And steam came out the top.

Never say Fire Engine,
Not even in defiance.
It's wagon, lorry, tender
And in posh terms an *APPLIANCE!*

VOLLEY BALL

Jolly volley
Jolly volley

In the drill yard,
Come on lads!

Volley volley,
Volley volley.

Station fire call!
All the wagons,
Full attendance,
Leave the net.

Jollyvolleyjollyvolleyjollyvolley
Jollyvolleyjollyvolley

JENNY

(HELL IS CRUMBLING)

Jenny! Jenny!
Two-tones blowing,
Blue light flashing,
Out the station,
Down the street.

Jenny! Jenny!
Six hearts pounding,
Firemen dressing,
Boots and helmet,
Tunic, axe.

Jenny! Jenny!
Here's the building,
Smoking, flaming.
Find the hydrant,
Start the search.

Jenny! Jenny!
Hose branch working,
Hit the ceiling,
Mind the rubble,
Hug the floor.

Jenny! Jenny!
Rescuers rushing,
Tear ducts streaming,
Seared skin stinging,
Acrid smoke.

Jenny! Jenny!
Yelling, screaming,
Keep on fighting
Hades hostage,
Help is near.

Jenny! Jenny!

Roaring, crackling
Drowns her dying
Pain filled panic –
Get her out!

Jenny! Jenny!
Bedroom's flaring,
Windows melting,
Hell is crumbling,
Burning hope.

Jenny! Jenny!
Suffocating,
No escaping,
Pillow pining
Lullaby

Hush-a-bye baby
On the tree top.
When you awake
The burning will Stop.

Jenny! Jenny!
Save the next door
Neighbour's building,
Clear the gear up,
Tired and cold.

Jenny! Jenny!
Butt-ends glowing,
Blank minds staring,
Tried our hardest,
Weary, wet.

Jenny! Jenny!
While returning,
Callous joking;
Firemen hiding
Weeping souls.

TENSION BREAK

No fires
For days,
Air edgy,
Talking terse,
Flimsy shirt
And leggings.
Drills done,
Sweating,
Guiding
Hose reel
On drum.
Chatting,
Eyes on
My task.
Sudden silence,
Been talking
To myself
While crouching
Over drum,
Things
Changed.
I twigged
Too late!
In a flash
Cold splash
On my back!
In shock,
Stiff,
Spun round
Saw man
And bucket
Run away.
Put pump
In gear,
Full revs,
Grab hose.
Must get
Bloody even!

DEATH OF SUPERMAN

(A fireman dies)

Hisss-shah, hisss-shah,
The face mask of my air set
Makes me detached, invincible to flame.
Through smoke I search the toy shop,
Oblivious to pain.

Hisss-shah, hisss-shah,
I feel immune like Superman.
The back of my hands in front, up and down,
Warning me of obstacles,
Feeling my way round.

Hisss-shah, hisss-shah,
My torch can't see through smoke.
Hot gases, particles, cremation's cloud,
Black claustrophobic cumulus,
Kills all, but Superman!

Hisss-shah, hisss-shah,
I remember a news item.
Cameraman was killed (South America),
Filmed his own death – three shots.
Detached – forgot – too late.

Hisss-shah, hisss-shah,
A rumble and I'm buried.
The floor has given way, didn't test it
And now my body's doubled,
Head pressing on my knees.

Hisss-shah, hisss-shah,
Detached – forgot – too late.
The debris squeezes tighter, gets hot,
My breaths are getting shorter,
Diaphragm constricted.

Hisss-shah, hisss-shah,
Imprisoned, one hand waving free.
I am tired, willpower and strength waning fast.
'Weakening green Kryptonite?
Must be – I'm Superman!'

Hisss-shah, hisss-shah,
It is dark, but I see steam.
Santa Fe, a hissing western loco,
Wheel cylinders in rhythm
With my breathing, hisss-shah!

Hisss-shah, hisss-shah,
Its bell begins to echo,
I see it shining, swaying back and forth.
I am detached again,
My body left behind Ting! In an empty memory
Ting! In an empty shop
Ting! The sale has ended
Ting! The shop has shut.

ONCE A FIREMAN, ALWAYS A FIREMAN.

“WhenTheCylinderValve’sOpenedHighPressureOxygenPassesThroughSintere
dMetalFilterIntoTheCentralColumnOfTheValveGroupConnectingNeck.Somels
LedOffToTheBypassValveSeatingWhichIsHeldInTheClosedPositionByAStrongS
pring.TheMainStreamContinuesToTheMainJetWhichIsSetAtRightAnglesToThe
FlowIntoTheFloatingValveChamberThroughTheBackPresssureDiscIntoTheOxy
genSupplyTubeAndThenToTheRear....”

Dick Sharr

Retired London Fire Brigade breathing apparatus instructor.

To which I reply, “Bromochlorodiflouromethane”

One day I will learn to say, “B.C.F.” like everyone else.

One day the two of us might talk about the weather, like everyone else.

One day two security men might talk about? Like everyone else.

SECTION TWO

Other poems.

WHACKING GREAT HORSE

After getting up late,
I was driving to work
And fuming behind
A slow moving jerk.

In a field by the road,
As I had a quick peep,
A whacking great horse
Was chased by a sheep.

The ridiculous sight
Of those two at play,
Forced my foot off the pedal
And made my day!

THE READING

A girl was sitting
In my carriage.
I was reading
W. B. Yeats,
Longing to stand up
And read it aloud to her,
But I thought, 'No,
She'll think I'm a bloody idiot!'

TREES

If everyone picked a leaf
There would be no autumn.

LUMP OF WOOD

The paper's up, the gloss is dry,
But one thing this room needs,
A chunk of wood to stand right there,
My mantel's centre piece.

It will be a lump I've found
In the gasp of a fallen tree,
That's lying there on muddy ground,
Decaying history.

Cankered knots and dusty bark,
Ends fractured, jagged in pain,
Shocked white throughout its flesh,
Brown rim, feasted chocolate ice cream.

Into the warmth of my house and my heart,
This mummified loaf with a mouldy crust,
A heavy great lump devoid of its sap
Would otherwise fade, flaking fine dust.

The heat of my blood, by flicker of flame,
Through ravished, carnivorous convulsions,
Sucks the sweat of strong hands for its sensuous
sheen,
Fed by the force of my fingers.

Reborn to pulsate and swell within spectrum,
Dark green, browns and nourishing ambers,
That's sticky on sight, but smooth to the touch,
While I drool with my visual hunger.

To those who know me, but really do not
And others who tried to and never could,
I'm tempted to say as they question its art,
"Oh that, it's a bloody old lump of wood"

A DAY ON MY OWN

Had a day in London;
Walked to Trafalgar Square
To thank a lady
Who'd sent me a flag.

Went on through Piccadilly
To the museum where
I was given a poster
They didn't sell.

Strolled back to Whitehall
To a craft shop;
Browsed through Dylan Thomas
And bought a doll.

Was tired and hot,
Smelt a burning cigar
So bought one
And a cigar box.

Sat in a precinct
In a light breeze
Smoking my cigar
And watched a dust cart.

Picked a leaf from a tree
On the Embankment
Then watched the boats
And debris.

Went to a pub.
The Maple Leaf,
Had real Canadian beer,
Subtly sweet.

Returned to the station,
Going the wrong way,
Passed policeman

Twice, whistling.

Ate some fat food,
Chewed it slowly
In time for the train
Back to my car.

Saw two red lights
In the car park,
They had been on
All day.

Turned off the lights,
Put doll and poster
On the back seat;
Car started – first time!

FOR MY SON MATTHEW

On the bank nothing was said,
Alone together, both deep in thought,
Bobbing floats, weed strewn river,
Father and son and the fish we sought.

Blades of grass, brittle and stiff,
Coated in frost like ceramic strings,
Still air, sanctified silence,
No shadowy sound of whistling wings.

Nature's slow arousing rhythm,
Distant church bells with porcelain peels,
Brightening sun, thawing ice,
Slack line tightened, 'click click' on the reels.

We struck at the slightest bite,
Both unconcerned if nothing was caught,
Alone with our special bond,
Father and son and the fish we sought.

FOR MY DAUGHTER MELANIE

Have you ever seen night turn to dawn
And heard its silence?
Watched the orange sun rise
In the brown eyes of a fawn?
Ever felt a rabbit's breath
Through long cool-bladed grass?
Have you sought the purest spring
And bathed its trickling waters?
Or stood amidst a forest
Through the static of a storm?
Felt raindrops kiss your T-shirt
While the air was clean and warm?
Is your heart slowly saddened
As the sun ebbs and fades away,
Even though reality has said
It will rise another day?
Ever gazed upon young innocence
That embodies all of time?
Then you are truly blessed with faith
And have a daughter such as mine.

PUNK ELEPHANT BALLOONS

Drowsily driving to a drab distant dawn,
Grubby grey clouds smothering the sun,
Tenacious tree trunks, leaves without lustre,
Lumpy brown gravy, school cabbage dark green.
There before me in motionless movement
The three time tenses
Suspended in silence;
Spheres seeking sunrise.

Surely I'm dreaming, not properly awake?
Splashes of colour vulgarly burst
From an army blanket – hot air balloons!
Lifting from nowhere like air force jump jets,
Anaemic abeyance, alerted
From a jungle grove;
Out of place and yet not.
I look at the past.

A line of dinosaurs, one million years old.
Gargantuans grazing Earth's tacit treadmill,
Minds straight ahead without animal instincts,
Feeding to Doomsday, mouths always empty,
Haunting, hovering leviathans.
In panic, I gasp,
Glance down then back up,
For nothing else matters.

Fanfares and trumpets, they change to the present.
Punk elephants parade, trunk to tail,
Brainwashed to boredom. Trained day after day,
Sequined mantels in a dirty marquee;
Embroidered logos, eye peeling colours –
London Life, Kodak,
Travel gas and Bandag,
Their pilots waving.

But not at me, to young children yelling,
Looking up, for theirs is the circus,
A travelling show. Eyes back on the road,
My waves ignored, they fly right ahead.
I am invisible, irrelevant
And fade in their shadow,
Future ones greeted,
Their elders ignored.

Absolute silence, window down, engine off.
They are so close, so dense and yet fly,
Space odysseys with noteless concertos,
Weightless wanderers, galactic freighters,
Compact celestial cargos, meteorites,
Mysteries for Man.
Propane pulsates, red,
Yellow and purple.

Solar wind weathered, space scavenged and scarred,
But allegiances clearly displayed.
After eons away they patiently
Pass, the burners stab like hissing stiletoes,
Rising up, growing smaller and faster
Until they are gone.
Everything is normal;
It's started to rain.

BLACK POEM

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SO DEEP YOU WILL

EAT MY BOWELS AND
BE UNABLE TO FINISH.
I, ITS CREATOR WILL
HAVE EATEN FROM MOUTH
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E CONSUMED
MYSELF.

I will never write a black poem.

NIGHT SHIFT MADNESS

There's a man outside with a hammer,
He's making a hell of a din,
If I stay awake much longer
I'll use the hammer on him!

There's a witness knocking the door.
'Have you thoughts for the future?' she said.
'Yes! Right now, if you don't mind,
It's back up the stairs and to bed!'

There's a dog barking over the road,
He's hoping I'll chuck him a bone.
I think he will be disappointed
When I lob him a bloody great stone!

The telephone rings and I answer,
But warn them before they can speak,
'Put it down and I won't know whose calling.
You've just woke a night working freak'

'How did you know it was me then?'
His identity given away.
The man, witness, dog and Charles Thomson
Survived night shift madness that day.

But now I wear ear plugs and blindfold,
At last all my worries are gone.
'Cos there's no way I'm gonna lay listening
To man, witness, dog and Charles Thomson.

POCKET ROCKET

A pen will reach
Where a missile can't.
One moves direct,
One with a slant.

TOVIL DUMP

The sun through the dust
As a halogen lamp,
Upon his overalls
Greasy and damp,
With a puff and a wheeze
The man with stout belly
Bent over the brim
Hoorah, an old telly!

THE BUTCHER

Chop! Chop! Upon his block
The butcher cuts his meat.

Chop! Chop! A girl walks by,
His fingers go a t

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WE WENT TO BROMPTON

West Malling, East Malling and Barming
And then we will nearly be home.
Father, son, a day full of errands,
Market, shops and a hospital room.

Matt's tea intruding my sleeping
And forcing me down to the loo.
Still yawning while washing and shaving
And toothpaste that tasted like glue.

Though raining hampered my driving,
Matt insisted the market's the place.
The shouting, bawling and weaving
Took the grin right off of his face.

He was stalling, stumbling and mumbling
Till we found a computer game stall.
Then beaming, gleaming and steaming,
Went from market to library hall.

For brooding and browsing with boredom
As dad picked two books from the shelf.
Then the sweating, puffing and climbing
Up the hill. Boy, this is bad for my health!

MacDonalds – nice heating and eating;
Meat nuggets, cheeseburger and fries.
In panic, paid more for the parking.
My, how the meter time flies.

Trolley steering, selecting and stacking
Our groceries for two for the week.
While unpacking there's purring and stroking
For cats see their favourite treat.

Back for smoking, joking and reading,
Train journey up to the town.
On the tube we were standing and staring,
Concerned and we couldn't sit down.

Sloane Square, South Kensington, Brompton,
Our love's in the ward up above.
Rose Gallery, she walked out to greet us,
We hugged and were showered with love.

Time for kissing, cuddling and playing,
Such young and beautiful eyes.
Too soon we were tired and nodding,
We whispered our saddened goodbyes.

Then the walking, tubing, commuting
And a drink – half liquid, half foam.
West Malling, East Malling and Barming
And then we will nearly be home.

BASICS

I was really brought down to earth
When my wife read my poem
And said, 'You're right,
Trees are like dinosaurs'
I said, 'I'm not writing about trees.
I'm writing about hot air balloons''

BEETHOVEN

The butcher gave me a can of shandy.
I was unaware how much I needed it
Until it touched my lips.
I visited my friends.

They played Beethoven.

SUNGLASSES

All the combinations for a crepitus day,
The morning after a night shift,
Unable to sleep.
Eye sockets dry like Velcro strips,
Body tanked up with last night's tobacco,
Feet tender and turgid,
Digestive system confused by the clock,
Skin a sweaty souring sausage,
Numb gnawing limbs
Felt like molars on muscles, annoying my nerves.
Mind full of poetry that will not pass
To my pen.

Photochromatic glasses pressed on my pulse.
I needed DARK sunglasses
To blot out the World
And to hide from the market's marauders,
The perspiring paste of my person and
Its body clock.
A lion with toothache lounging, harassed by the heat
And bumping, braying buyers,
Heckled to spend,
Unable to think, tensed and tired,
Besieged by a bursting brain,
Reaching for rest.

Carried in confusion by the crowds
To a cobwebbed quiet corner
Of the market.
Its ground gritted with the grimy
Giblets of surplus stock from
Jumble sales.
Two torpid totters were sitting
On opposite sides of an unsold table
Playing chess.
Complacent concern for customers,
Predominately pedestalled above their
Blanket of bargains.

I stopped by the shelves of a book stall
And browsed, while the seller
Spoke softly.
We were near the river and trees,
My sweat subsiding in the shade, bathed
By a breeze.
A pastoral pause with poetry, then
I left for the harmony of home
To reflect and write.
Tension trickling whimsically away,
Winnowed by the words of Wordsworth –
Shine poet!

A CUP OF TEA

I sit and drink a cup
From the pot,
It isn't hot,
It's far too sweet,
It's far too strong,
It's brewed for far too long.

It's Maggie's bloody fault.
She was chatting
To Mrs Bratting
About Sue Smith
Mike Green's old flame
Who's gone out on the game.

I wonder where she works?
And if she's good?
I know I should
Not think this way,
But Maggie's tea
Aint hot enough for me!

(Charles Thomson/Terry Cordrey)

VISIT FROM A SUFFERING FRIEND

'Can I hold your hand?'
She asked and I reached across
In front of the driver.

'Heh, you're very strong'
I must be to fight the day,
I must fear nothing.

'I've been put away. I'm ugly'
No, you're not. You look great
And a lot slimmer.

'I saw you on the telly'
No, it was someone else.
I was at the local theatre.

'I am evil. Run away!'
You are not. I am not afraid
(yet inside, I fear everything).

'The Nazis came to kill us last night'
No they didn't. You had a nightmare.
We beat them long ago.

'One escaped. Will you kill him?'
Yes, I will destroy him
By tonight. Do not worry.

Thoughts too quick to grasp,
Heading straight towards her,
For once, alert and fighting,
Eyes bright, looking younger.

'It's been five years, I'm so down'
That's okay, you can be down,
But never give up.

'Why am I like this?'
You'll get better, don't despair.
Her eyes were moist.

'Will you write a poem?
For me?'
Yes Jill, especially for you.

POEM FOR JILL

With the fading of the dark,
Mistral day melting the curtains,
Warmth flows free of feathers
That wrap a wingéd heart,
I will use extremes of my emotions
For enrichment, each day my life will start.

I've fevered through inner terror,
Thought the dream was starkly real,
Begged crying on my knees
And no one seemed to listen.
Down, despaired and decimated,
No hope, no life, no vision.

Each day I'd swim in panic
For a rock to reach and rest,
Mouth always under water,
Face down in stigma shame
Till the day I touched dry granite,
Faith filled my feeble frame.

Exothermic exultation
And the heat of love grew strong,
While I reasoned with reality
Accepting what was there,

Turning round and facing,
Head up to shout 'I dare!'

And the fight was long and bloody.
I stood alone to claw and kick
Till the day I came to join you
(in spirit we were never apart).
Extremes of our emotion, weapons
Of enrichment, each day our lives will start.

I dream of Canada and claustrophobic trees,
The Great Divide, the wilderness of the North.

To the memory of Wah-Sha-Quon-Asin.

"I think for someone who's been writing poems for perhaps less than a year and has just given his first public performance that was an absolutely tremendous performance."

Maidstone Summer Festival 1985.

'Former fireman Terry Cordrey brought tears to the eyes of the audience with his first poetry reading with the Ten Maidstone Poets.

The audience gave him two ovations when he finished his piece'

Maidstone Extra.