



Bedalder Renga

**A River of
Warleggan**

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for Roger Farnworth



Roger Farnworth loved Warleggan parish: its windswept golden-gorsed moors, the dimpled fields with ungoverned hedges, the beech-filled quarry we named Raven's Chasm where I spent hundreds of quiet hours watching the kestrels wheel and the ravens hulk on their huge nest, the quiet green-dark woods where Roger's wife Laura swam in a pool we called Fallen Branch. As time passed, Roger learnt about the archaeology of the parish. He was astounded and delighted at the Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows and view-frames on Carburrow Tor - still part of our world, our predecessors in the parish calling their wonder to us at this place, this life, across thousands of years. The wild world embued and infused our togetherness. When I was a child, Roger and I would slip out at dusk and watch badgers, foxes playing, rabbits flickering across the darkening fields, barn owl swoop. Laura showed Tristan and me how to find nests, slipped between stones, swung between branches, a neatening of nature. Our early years in the parish were full of wild-flower discovery - fox-and-cubs, bastard balm, tormentil, stinkhorns and lords and ladies, bog asphodel and milkwort. The parish was a place to delight in. Laura once wrote, *'Moon tonight is heart-stoppingly beautiful. I glanced up and saw that flip of fragility in the sky still blue but with a rumour of apricot throughout the roundness of blue into which I stared. That apricot colour ... there's even a hint of unripe apricot about it, for one sees or thinks the hesitating greenness; and a sigh of violet's there too ... well, how wonderful Warleggan is at such a sky! Never have I known such delicacy so gigantically offered. The colours are of such*

an 'almostness' that one experiences something very wonderful ... one's perceptions are so subtly altered that one is tempted on unawares till there's a gentle knowing that you're in the heart of a colour. And somehow the beating there slips a better rhythm to one's own heart' (March 5th, 1978).

Through and around this world ran water, shaping everything we looked at. Roger remarked often at the wonderful way 'four folds in our landscape create our four rivers - the Bedalder, Dewey, Fowey and Sina stream'. He loved our steep narrow valleys running down from the moor, often stopping the car to look at them from afar. I remember once being in such a valley with Roger in the parish; perhaps I was around fifteen years old. The sun was setting and Roger suddenly had this wild urge to outrun the sun. We raced, panting, between tree roots, higher and higher, tricking the sun and holding it in its falling.

Roger wanted to share his delight at the remarkable nature of Warleggan Parish with other people in the parish and beyond. He felt that creating activities around our rivers would be a wonderful way of focusing, drawing down our attention, letting us think, feel, experience our astonishing, immediate world. Over the last year or so of his life he planned a number of activities designed to draw in everyone. His ideas included capturing the rivers' moods in all seasons through painting, photography, archaeology and poetry. He imagined

a rumbustious 'Banks of the Bedalder Challenge - no foot on land' from Claypit to Panter's Bridge with children and adults plushing down the river all the way, and he dreamed up a wonderful children's day: a huge montage in paint, moss, flowers, feathers and fun.

Laughter, delight, exploration, discovery.

One idea Roger had was '*Caught in the coils: catching the changing mood of river landscapes from source to waters' meet*'. We chose this idea as the basis of our homage to Roger, to our lovely Warleggan Parish, and to the people of our parish. Helen Jagger, a friend of Roger, worked with us to create a Renga around the River Bedalder. She explains, 'Renga are collective poems. They bring solo voices into a multi-voiced conversation while poets spend time together in the landscape. This seems an appropriate form with which to celebrate places special to Roger. The great originality of renga as a poetic form lies in the dual simultaneous movement of continuity and break. Renga creates alternating three and two line units. Each unit acts as a link to the preceding one, and is developed by two or more poets who restrict themselves to linking their contribution to that of the poet who hands over to them. Thus, any given link must form a poem along with that which precedes it'.

Ten people came together to create Roger's Renga on August 10th, 2014. They were Roger's children, their partners and his grandchildren, and friends: Tristan Farnworth, Vincent Hughes-Burton, Cathy Rozel



Farnworth, Jürgen Peter, Rozelle Morwenna Peter, Katinka Iseult Peter, Adrian Rodda, Cariad Astles and Alan Godwin. Lynda Mudle-Small and Katinka took the pictures illustrating the Renga. Helen worked on combining everyone's poetic responses to the Bedalder River at Wooda Bridge and at Claypit Lake into a renga.

Pam Leppitt, Warleggan ecologist, took us on a walk around Wooda Bridge. She helped us to look closely, truly closely, at moss, ferns, insects, flowers, to really see what is happening in a tiny wild world lived so very differently to ours. The Bedalder here surges over stones, tumbles, collects sticks and leaves - whirling them into tiny pool dimples before surging on, down to Panter's Bridge and beyond to the sea. Sometimes the river is idyllic, a patter of gentleness; sometimes it overflows banks, tears down trunks, re-arranges its course, tugs out plants and scatters them, helpless. Integral to my many home-comings over the years was Roger stopping on Wooda bridge, turning off the engines, winding down the car windows and looking, just looking, sharing Roger's deep intense pleasure without words, at this river of all moods.

Years ago, this river was bent into a source of power for the Wheel Whisper tin and copper mine (Raven's Chasm to us) set in gnarled oak woods. Some shafts go down 60 fathoms - 360 feet. As long ago as 1718 these workings were described as 'having been very much wrought in old time'. Production continued until 1911 with limited re-working in World War II. Water power from the River Bedalder was

used to drive machinery, including a 24 foot diameter water wheel which drove the 16 head set of Cornish stamps. At the head of the now over-grown chasm is a huge cave, home to horseshoe bats. You reach it by walking up a brambled-over narrow brook, struggle up a thin waterfall, clamber into the cave which soars high above your head. Tunnels radiate off it, some passing by repute underneath Warleggan and the Rookery itself. Such walks are not allowed by the mine owner, but we have always loved our secret visits within and beside the quarry. Laura wrote one winter's day, *'Walk to Badger Spinney, and down beside Raven Chasm. Scarcely a bird or flower to be seen, but a sense of thrill and life ... also at the river ... very few birds in Spongwoods'*.

John Keast, Warleggan historian, showed us around the Glynn Valley clayworks up on the moor about a mile higher upstream. Near here, the Bedalder emerges as a peat-stained stream, burbling quietly, very narrow, fringed by gorse and foxglove. This was once a site of immense toil, where men mined for china clay and, to a lesser extent, for tin. The clay was first worked in 1875 and, apart from a break during World War I, produced china clay - and local employment - until 1942. The clay was not of good quality with excessive contamination by white mica. Working this deposit was only economic because of the presence of the Bedalder which provided power. It turned the water wheel which drove pumps, and carried the clay around the site in suspension along mica drags and to

the settling pits and tanks. At the beginning of the last century a bitter feud erupted between the parishes of Warleggan and Cardinham over the cost of repairs to the granite clapper bridge straddling the Bedalder known as Caremarsh. Cardinham organised the work and requested a payment from Warleggan of half the cost - £4.15 shillings. Warleggan was adamant that this was too much and lawyers were engaged by the combatants. After three years of wrangling Warleggan paid £3; their lawyer's bill was £1.11s.6d.

Today the place our family has always called Claypit Lake is an industrial landscape subsiding into the natural. It is overrun with short grasses, intensely pink heathers, golden gorse, sedges, ferns, cotton grass and our special delight, sundews. Amethysts can be found in the 'storm scoured clay channels' of the twin peak clayhills, the immensely deep lake beyond an ever changing mirror where Laura swam two or three times a week. She wrote of one wild walk, *'I filled with thrill when on the moor height I literally had to lean to the power that plunged the air forward. Oh, what a wind! My leaning against it seemed the bowing of respect that such splendour insisted upon'*.

Our Renga is a homage to everyone who loves Warleggan Parish and its four rivers. It is a bowing of respect and love to Roger, lover of our parish for more than forty years.



"leaf litter"

oak trunk morning
moth lifts out of moss -
light breaks

a rainbow of greens
leaflitter

giant beech brushes
mop clouds noisily
off the sky

leafless branches
against a clear blue lake

ancient trees
clog and stifle
underground mineways

the lane snakes through lichened trees
carries grass on its back



"bitter blackberries, thorns"

a barely cold mole
wide claws redundant
stares skywards

eyes that barely saw
now see no more

once clay-laden carts
forty hooves long
squelched out water

now claws, splayed needles,
float in its puddles

sodden fur
a black oilskin -
dead mole

bitter blackberries, thorns -
no return valve



"cut beech slice sharp like an axe red stain still on"

hot moisture squeezes our mud
lumps and pebbled bumps
brownly humpy

awful taste, mouldy smell -
the first hazelnut

determined fragile trees
branches like arms
bowing

wool snagged on old barbed wire
a disused rusty wheelbarrow

cut beech slice
sharp like an axe
red stain still on

a blur of pink
tells a champion's story



"when do we see the meant green?"

one on top of each other
ravens' nest apartments
the penthouse sweet

sessile 'cecile' oaks
with names and types and species trees

to make understand
to human thought
what is is is

volumes in wood, cracked spines
arboreal history

fissured oak trunk
bark's green breath
whole worlds

not green but enshadowed
when do we see the meant green?



"Silver lichen colonies"

Ash bark
silver lichen colonies
living in harmony

fungi spreads spores
across intense learning faces

bracket fungus on tree slice
like ribs on a trainer's sole -
slip proof

mushroom peppered
with small holes

fern moss lichen
their spore and spawn pervade the air
evade our senses

until they alight on bark
begin to grow and colour



"Blechnum spicant"

eye to glass
fern spore-studded with future -
job done

they all go twang and throw the balls out
(she said)

a fern
unknown to other ferns
arches its back

long slender stalks
a sexual ribcage

Blechnum spicant
rolls Venetian blinds -
its fertile frond

juicy bramble leaves
but three odd ones out



"boiling bubbles grow and break"

coarse green hair
sheathed in red -
red fescue

lemon shavings -
cow wheat flowers

Wooda Bridge, Roger stop
heart flowing in delight (heart stop)
sun sparkle water tumble

underwater stones
look like glinting gold

a triangle stone
cups a pool
a dish of river sauce

boiling bubbles grow and break -
the river kitchen in frozen ferment



"swallows dip and sweep"

puddle of water surrounded by stone
river flows past -
cold hands

leaf litter
stubbornly grounded

the mica pool
divided
by swimming lanes

the river is very wet
wide where it shallows

Pooh stick pencil
writing the river
dives in

swallows dip and sweep
over and under, tweet



"Claypit Lake opens its arms to moor"

punctuations of great wind sigh
over river chuckle, sun-ochre spangle
russett dark sweet speckle

wind and water
break on hearing

threaded bilberries
cling, cluster, scramble
through lustrous fescue

river finds blockade
takes a different way

Claypit Lake
opens its arms to moor -
breathe broadly

the only noise now
the industry of nature



“this dialogue between human and nature – a Viennese waltz”

this dialogue
between human and nature -
a Viennese waltz

human steps out
then nature responds

now human leads
then nature sweeps them around
quickstep, foxtrot

mathematical pattern
arborous leap

1911, 1902, 1923, 1942
all together
now all gone

the quarry captain's house
stands cut stone, empty



"glisten waves are washed up tiny jewels gather at the shore-side"

quarry hacked
now bracken, bramble, fern
captains elsewhere

ravens nest still
in the left leaning Scots Pine

comb the water
of the redundant pit
over the wooden pier

glisten waves are washed up
tiny jewels gather at the shore-side

sky tips
home of sand martin
great traveller

one ton of china clay
nine tons of waste



"clay dump ridged by rainwater"

clay dump ridged by rainwater
silted mica sand delted into
spilled, skirted, spoil spread

even the gorse embrace fails
under incessant water

water is power
leat-led over granite setts
carries and compresses

sifting sand from clay or black tin
water washes, feeds one hundred families



"five empty wagon bays"

leats clasped by heather
bramble knot
the old ways

bared below wall hawthorn
turns on itself, defiant

on the drags,
mica and water sluiced out -
china slurry

giant settling tanks filled
by the harrowing barrowful

laboursome
shovelling clay slurry -
squidge and tumble

five empty wagon bays
industry silenced



"now fern flourish"

digging sand
thirty three burden men
onto railway trucks

how many men to turn
rotted granite to shining paper?

white horse, white sheep
on Hard Head Down -
a trove of scattered dung

the pits go round and round
and round and brick

buddles, black tin,
60%, money work
now fern flourish

fern tucked into
tumbledown building



"nature returns creepingly"

burning arsenic
a calciner's poisoned fumes
now yellow tormentil

the tin stamp crushes the ore
you can't crush the awe

but surging, urging
slighted, jealous, cunning
nature returns creepingly

the wall becomes a hummock
a cushioned throne

coarse gorse
yellow blast
shouts in colour

water separated warring councils
who begrudged a bridge



"river seaweed stretched out in current clarity"

Caremarsh, strife, stillness
men's anger quietened
river indifference, sparkle

twinkling ripples
hurried and secretive

river seaweed
stretched out
in current clarity

wrinkles in the river
hair blowing in my face

river leans
light shadows
foxgloves dry sticks

seed heads rattle
late summer



"river flows on"

damsels fly cobbled water
river bed mimics sea
wide leafed plants are seaweed

leaning downstream:
sea-lettuce in a salty rock-pool

hard work, sweat,
now in no man's memory
river flows on

on the river path
past washes through.

