



Stories of the Stones

A collection of poems
inspired by St John's
& Westgate Hill Cemeteries
telling the stories of
those resting there



written by Donald Jenkins
& Stories of the Stones Group

Background

St John's and Westgate Hill Cemeteries in Elswick, Newcastle are registered Grade II in recognition of their architectural and historic importance. Each provides an important record of the social history of the area and offers a biography of its community. These Victorian burial grounds are currently on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register, due to being in poor repair and prone to anti-social behaviour.

In 2023 funds from Historic England & Newcastle City Council were matched together to kick start an engagement project to explore how these cemeteries can better provide for their current and future communities.

Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust (www.twbpt.org.uk) restores buildings and sites of heritage value and brings them back into use to be enjoyed for many more years.

In collaboration with the local community and the Council, The Trust engaged creative practitioners to work alongside local people to research and create using the themes Nature, Arts and Heritage, exploring ways to make the sites welcoming and thriving community spaces, while collecting information needed for funding bids for future engagement and restoration.

**This project has been
supported with funding from**



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The Project

Stories of the Stones is part of this community engagement. Artists - Donald Jenkins and Julie Ballands, have created this poetry book and website: www.storiesofthestones.com to celebrate the lives of those buried at the cemeteries, its history and nature.

The Book

In this collection, you will find poems that tell the beautiful stories of everyday people, the unsung heroes, forgotten histories of those who have enriched the communities of the Inner West of Newcastle over the last two hundred years. Through the short form of poetry you will get to understand the feelings and challenges these people faced and in doing so, hopefully find connections with your own lives.

Poet - Donald Jenkins carried out interviews with residents of the West End, living descendants of those written about in this book or users of the cemeteries. He then with their consent, wrote eight poems which are prefaced by photographs and background information about their loved ones.

The book also features poems written by members of the Stories of the Stones group, local residents who engaged with the project. They meet weekly to research the history of their ancestors, take part in creative workshops, find out more and share what they know about these amazing cultural greenspaces and the lives laid to rest there.

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Williams Family

Six members of the Williams family are buried in one plot and share one fabulous gravestone at St John's Cemetery. Living descendant, Susan McGarry (pictured below) is the voice that can be heard in poem - 'Much More than a Epitaph'.



1. **Great Grandmother: Martha Jane Williams nee Singleton** was born in Grantham and married John Henry Williams in 1885 at St. Stephen's Church, Elswick. She died in 1925 in Sycamore Street, Elswick, aged 60.

2. **Great Grandfather: Martha's husband John Henry Williams** was born in Cornwall in 1864. When the family moved to Elswick, he worked at the Elswick works in various jobs: driver on the railway, riveter, craneman, striker, labourer, steel plate leveler and blacksmith in the forge department of Armstrong Whitworth. He died in 1940 aged 76 at Sycamore Street, Elswick.

3. **Great Uncle: Martha and John's son William Thomas Williams** known as Thomas was born in 1887. He was disabled, unable to walk. He died in 1942 aged 54.

4. **Uncle: William Thomas Williams' nephew and namesake William Williams** known as **Billy Williams** was born in 1932. He did National Service. He died in 1955 aged 22, electrocuted in an accident at work.

5. **Grandmother: Billy Williams' mother Margaret Williams nee Drummond** was born in 1895 in Hull Street, Benwell. She married John Henry Williams in 1920 and had 8 children. She died in 1961 aged 65.

6. **Grandfather: Margaret's husband, John Henry Williams** was born in 1895 at High Cross Cottages, Benwell. He worked as a fitter at the Armstrong Whitworth Elswick Works. He died in 1971.

Much More Than An Epitaph

by Donald Jenkins

There is – a stone that connects me to a place I never lived
Stories with nostalgia from a childhood that wasn't mine
Fairy tales that were told, my eyes feel they didn't dream
Heroes I have met who were gone before I learnt to breathe

There is – a stone more prestigious than where elites are laid to rest
A plot of grand design though its tenants were rank and file
Generations who left roots catching fish to building tanks
Family that headed north for work from shores of Penzance

There is – a stone holding many folks with hand-me-down names
Ghostly photos stuck in scrapbooks that resurrect their grins
Ancestors over centuries who must've lived through ups and downs
Gaps I try to fill to glue the past with here and now



Family Stories by Susan McGarry

I come from a world of family stories
of previous people, places and lives,
a street of characters, flat caps, pigeon fanciers,
traction engine driving,
broad twang, engineering know-how,
smelling pungent Walker Boneyard
at dinner time,
stirring shipyard hooter signalled the start
and end of every day.

The spitting valve of a pressure cooker
resulting in hot vegetable, ham shank broth,
the feel of new Council house comfort-
parquet floor, scullery pantry,
serving hatch with garden front and back.

The sight of grass corner verges,
lampposts like milecastles
signifying how far you'd walked.
I come from being curious, finding out, listening in,
remembering, growing to love to learn
from everyone and anything.

High Cross Cottages

by Susan McGarry

Born in a cottage with whitewashed walls
for Armstrong workers,
as good as Cragside to us
with stepping stone chimneys
and sliding down roofs,
thin picket fences and swinging clicking gates.
Outside, a great dirt playground road
contrasting with the deep white sheets,
fresh and billowing on the washing line
after Monday's hot, steamy Poss Tub session.



NewcastlePhotoArchive.org.uk

Wila Collier

Wila Collier
performing
stunts at
Pinders Circus
and a party



Wila Collier

Grandmother, Wilhelmina Carlisle was born on the 11th of March, 1912 in Pelton, Durham.

When she was 14, a circus came to town. She decided there and then that she wanted to join, so she left home and became part of Pinders Circus. Wila (as she was better known as) trained as many things –bare back horse rider, dancer, a Native American warrior.

She married Gilbert Cooper in 1931 when she lived in Warrington. She later moved to Ryehill in Newcastle and was the first female driver for Wall's Ice Cream.

She remarried and then became **Wila Collier**. She had four children, one of them was called **Muriel Kegg** who is the mother referred to in a later poem - 'Who am I to you?'

Her Grand daughter, **Carole Pattison**, saw her as a mother figure and it is Carole's voice that we hear represented in the following poem - 'She Will Always be a Traveller.'

Wila died on 17th March, 1999 and was actually cremated in West Road Crematorium but we have included her incredible story due to her having family buried at St John's Cemetery.

She Will Always Be A Traveller

by Donald Jenkins

The amplified chime of Greensleeves fills the estate,
pricking up the ears of every child within a half mile;
like excitable metal detectors that've located some treasure,
we scurry along back lanes to claim our prize.

I don't ask my mam for permission
or scramble about for spare coppers,
cos my Nana drives the ice cream van,
so, I get chocolate flakes for free.

She's a flurry of scoops and cones,
head out hatch to work a crowd:
natural born hawker with all the best patter –
seasoned performer, seen many an encore.

I'm sure this tinny jingle reminds her of the big top
with dizzying melodies of a circus piano waltz,
where she vaulted on and off a stallion's back,
hypnotised a python wrapped around her neck.

Does she ever miss that life she ran away to?
Chanting in a headdress with chieftain and a cowboy;
with a skirt and petticoat, she even danced the can-can.
The stories of a rebel, I could listen to for years.

I want to be just like her, try the things she's done:
race whippets for a living, run a fairground stall.
Hope she keeps the promise to let me ride in her van,
helping sell cornets when the summer comes.

Richard (Jackie) and Muriel Kegg



Father: Richard Kegg, better known as **Jackie Kegg** was born in 1930.

He married **Mother: Muriel Kegg** (born in in 1935) in 1954 but she divorced him due to Jackie's ongoing alcoholism. She then got married and divorced again but in an amazing set of circumstances, remarried Jackie in 1992.

They are both buried in a double grave at St John's Cemetery having passed away in 2010 and 2012 .

The impact this experience had on their family is told though the eyes of their son, **Tony Pyle** in the following poem- 'Who Is He To Me?'

Who Is He To Me? by Donald Jenkins

I thought Dad's arm only cared for one thing –
downing Broon, sinking pints of Exhibition,
repetitive strains from lifting loopy juice
that weighed us down, again and again.

Mam had enough, arms folded, all fed up,
bags packed at station, ready to split.
A giant pointed down at five-year-old me,
asked a weighty question: Who will you live with?

Choosing her warm-blanket arms, we fled Toon,
escaped Dad's flailing limbs, staggering antics –
being so mortal, he tried to sell his body
to science to fund that heavyweight habit.

With anger in my arms, trauma grew into rage,
too often lashed out – and never backed down,
when he showed up where I worked, half-cut –
my fists had to be dragged from the weight of his brow.

Mam spotted his softened arms on TV
while being interviewed in a halfway house.
They met, rekindled souls – he got sober.
My guts were lead weights when they remade their vows.

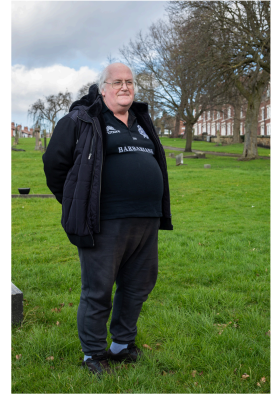
I thought Dad's arm only cared for one thing,
but he holds my son snugly like quilts in a cot;
though never shouldered role of a father figure,
to know him as my friend – is a weight taken off.

Mary Hetherington and the Sedgley Family

Mary
Hetherington



The family in
Hartlepool



David
Hetherington

Mary
Hetherington
working
at bar at racetrack



David
Hetherington
as a child



The Hetherington and Sedgley Family

Mother: Mary Hetherington, know by most as Minnie was born on the 15th of October, 1920 in Newcastle. The oldest child of **George and Catherine Sedgley**.

She worked as a laundress during the Second World War. Later in life, she did various cleaning jobs and worked at a firm called Tiny Togs on Elswick Road ironing children's clothes.

She liked to go out to family events, weddings, christenings, dancing and singing.

As a single mother, she raised her only child and living descendant - **David Hetherington** who said, "I never went short for anything, even though it must have been a struggle. The best times was when she worked for Scottish and Newcastle Breweries, mainly on the mobile bars. She used to be able to get tickets for the race meetings".

Mary died in March 1972 with cancer and is buried in St John's Cemetery alongside five other members of her family.

It is the voice of her son - David who can be heard in the following poem 'My Mam, My Family' and then the poems he penned himself - 'King by Name', 'The Sedgleys, The Hetheringtons' and 'To Be Accepted?'

My Mam, My Family **by Donald Jenkins**

At home – I was just a one-off, a total one-off.
Hated disappointment when unwrapping presents,
finding mam had bought me another board game for two
but no one to play with.
She was usually busy reading the paper
but mostly working night shift.

Looking at instructions, assuring myself I knew the rules
but got absolutely hammered by cousins
when they occasionally paid a visit.
Board and dice hoied off the table,
ending my go with a shower of Monopoly money –
I'm not playing anymore!!

Often tired from pulling pints at the racetrack,
Mam's infrequent playtime with me was mainly just
spinning jukebox singles I picked up for cheap;
making rare connections along 7-inch grooves,
mixing her new with old – The Beatles, Glenn Miller.
I would slip on the odd Black Sabbath or Deep Purple,
loved it when she didn't stop dancing.

Down there, we were a family – a proper big family –
summer holiday getaways to sunny Hartlepool,
stopping at great aunt's daughters, granny's brother's sons,
uncles who'd give me half a crown to spend on the bandits.
Second cousins, we'd run about, working wor selves till dark.
From a distance, mam kept an eye, while playing bingo.

King By Name by David Hetherington

One of my earliest memories of music
was lying in bed being sung to by my cousins.
A song with my name in it - Davey Crocket.
This was followed by me being excited to tell my mam
I had learnt a Christmas carol with my name in it -
'Once in Royal David's City'.
I was only young and put to bed
with the words of 'King of the Wild frontier'
echoing in my mind as I dropped off.
At school, they rammed the carols at you
but I was proud to tell them I had a city named after me.

I grew up interested in the Alamo , Davey Crockett
and how he had three ears- right, left and the front ear.
People always called me Crocket
when I was an infant at school.
I must have been the only David.
It was so catchy, that my grandmother got in on the action
by making me a Davey Crocket hat
out of the sleeve of an old fur coat.
It was a sad time when I found out he was dead
but John Wayne played him well.

I liked Davey Crocket being sung by relatives
all out of tune with the smell of beer and tabs
reeking off some of them.
Then because my birthday is near Christmas,
a chorus about my city,
still waiting for my crown,
but in later years, I grew up with a sense of humour
and progressed into proper music.

The Sedgleys, The Hetherington **by David Hetherington**

I can remember my dad when I was very young
taking me to the boxing and wrestling at Saint James Hall.

After my parents broke up,
my mam and me lived with my grandparents for a while
where I made some good friends
who unfortunately I've lost contact with over the years.

I grew up on Westmorland Road
via Clumber Street and Bristol Terrace.
My school was about a hundred yards from my house,
but I slept in most mornings.
My teacher lived over the road
and took me along after I'd fed my cat.

I used to like the taste of chewing gum
in the packets of cards-
'Mars Attacks', 'The Man from Uncle'.
I'd torment my granny
to empty her PG Tips box to get the cards.

Watching the 1966 World Cup final with my family,
I picked up lots of new words.
In 1969, my grandparents had their Golden Wedding
on Xmas Eve, another big party.
They all brought turkeys, whiskey and beer,
all the family were there,
all good memories, parties and weddings.
Now sadly, there's more funerals than anything.

To be accepted?
by David Hetherington

Early sixties,
off Westmorland Road,
opposite Elswick Park, The Savoy Cinema,
in between a few streets –
Choppington, Brunel and Clumber,
where the ramp to Cruddas Park flats is now,
there was a chip shop.

Next to it was a place that claimed to be
the first mosque in Newcastle.
We had to pass by most days
to get to the chip shop in the backlane.
Being young, we used to stare at it-
a bright green building
which stood out against the drabness surrounding it.

The priest at St Michaels
welcomed the new arrivals to the area,
we still didn't know what Muslims were
but didn't care as long as they played football.

Thomas Telford

Thomas Telford was the second of three generations of brush-makers, following in the footsteps of his father and master brush-maker, **John Telford** (born around 1790).

Through research, we get the sense that Thomas was a businessman who has expanded his fathers business into a proper factory, someone with a bit of civic spirit who was very dedicated to getting on the council and other official bodies and helping to make Elswick a better place.

The Newspaper archives show that between 1883 and 1890, he tried on a large number of occasions to be elected as a councilor for the Elswick Ward, generally unsuccessfully. Repeated disappointments did not put him off and in 1890 he was elected to the council, as well as being on the board of St John's Cemetery in Elswick.

Thomas Telford's home seems to have been on Hinde Street which was along Scotswood Road. His factory, which we think was near the Cattle Market (around the Centre for Life), was quite a significant place, not just a little shop. In 1865, he was selling a large steam engine described as suitable for turning a lathe, presumably for making brush handles, so this was a proper factory by this time.

We understand from speaking to living descendant, Eric Waggot, that the family moved to the township of Benwell from Northumberland in the late 1700's, a story which is told in the following poem - 'A Sweep Through Time.'

A Sweep Through Time by Donald Jenkins

Steady journeymen, precision brush makers
sit round a pitch pan,
their masterful hands dip bristles
into warm black tar of woodman's glue,
tying root ends with twine.

In spilt seconds - pine sap cools,
wiry bundles are stuffed in stock,
craftsmen determine
if this will be a fine broom,
do fibers align to get a good bend?

Their calloused palms don't forget
toil of elders who got them there,
elders who knew only farm life,
cattle fence builders
with well-seasoned elm.

Elders who left behind field work,
chilling threats of hunger,
joined exodus
to secure their worth,
prove their hands had value.

FUNERAL OF THE LATE COUNCILLOR TELFORD.

Yesterday, the remains of the late Councillor Thomas Telford were interred in Westgate Hill Cemetery. The deceased was held in deserved esteem, and, despite the unfavourable weather, there was a large attendance at the funeral. Amongst those present, in addition to relatives, were the Mayor of Newcastle (Ald. E. Culley), the Sheriff (Mr. Riley Lord), Councillors Kirby, Flowers, Waller, Laird, A. Scott, T. S. Alder, T. B. Sanderson, Weidner, Quin, A. Henderson, Hedley, Chapman, J. Fitzgerald, and Hepburn, Mr. Morrison Johnston, Chairman, Elswick Burial Board; Canon Bromley, Dr. Evers, Mr. William Thompson, Mr. John Davidson, Mr. J. W. Parker, Dr. Boyd, Dr. Mason, Mr. J. S. Thompson, Mr. Hunter, Mr. W. Cox, Mr. Elliott, Mr. Morrison, Mr. Walker, Mr. Richardson, Mr. Reddin, Mr. J. McHugh, Mr. John Mullen, and many others. In the unavoidable absence of the Rev. A. Phinister, of the John Knox Church, the funeral service was impressively conducted by the Rev. R. Leitch of the Presbyterian Church, Blackett Street.



(From a photograph by Mr. E. E. Ruddock.)

The late Councillor Telford, whose interment was attended by many in addition to those mentioned above, was a well-known man in Newcastle. He was a Novocastrian, born and bred, and had attained a competency in his business as a brush manufacturer. It was not without some difficulty that he reached municipal honours, but after repeated attempts he succeeded, in 1889, in being returned for South Elswick Ward, which ward he continued to represent up to his death. In addition to being a City Councillor, Mr. Telford was a member of the Board of Guardians, in connection with which body he took a more prominent part in the discussions than he did in the Council. He was thoroughly opposed to anything that seemed to savour of the introduction of politics in either body, and he had a warm and sympathetic feeling for the poor, which eminently fitted him for the position of Guardian. For several years he was a member of the Elswick Burial Board, and he acted as one of the Elswick overseers. Mr. Telford had a clear recollection of Newcastle as a town, long before it had attained its present important standing as a commercial centre, and his reminiscences were always of an interesting kind. Gifted with a genial disposition, and possessed of a cultured mind, Mr. Telford was a man whose company was sought, whose friendship was valued, and whose unostentatious services on behalf of the public were fully recognised by his colleagues.

STEAM ENGINE AND BOILER FOR SALE.—TO BE SOLD BY PRIVATE CONTRACT, a vertical STEAM ENGINE, 6-inch Cylinder, 2 feet Stroke, with Flywheel 5 feet diameter, Boiler and Fittings complete. Suitable for driving Lathes or a Fan Blast. The Engine may be seen at work on application to Mr. THOMAS TELFORD, Brush Manufacturer, Hinde Street, Scotswood Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. 1218

Joe Haydon

Joe Haydon visits St John's Cemetery every day. He doesn't have any family buried there but is one of many regular dog walkers, a community of familiar folk who choose to use the safe and calm surroundings of the cemetery to give their furry friends some exercise.

Sadly, Joe suffered from depression a few years ago but still ventured out to the cemetery to walk his pet. There he noticed the large amount of plastic and silk cemetery flowers that were blown all over the cemetery, scattered over the path, grass and where they are not supposed to be. He took it upon himself to gather them, find an empty bit of the graveyard and start planting them to create his own sort of little garden.

This daily routine supported by other users of the cemetery helped with his recovery. It is his voice that can be heard in the next poem - 'Repurpose'



Repurpose
by Donald Jenkins

Fill this gap with colour
Fill this dark with sun-bleached petals
Plant a garden for cemetery flowers
Plant a bed for tributes scattered
Rest those orchids meant for mourning
Rest carnations blown from gravestones
Build a new home for orphaned roses
Build a safe camp for nomad lilies
Gather wreaths that've lost their purpose
Gather thoughts I've lost since breakdown
Create a routine, arrange the chaos
Curate a bloom, place head in order
Wipe these tears with green fingers
Wipe these doubts with daily targets
See a difference, change in season
See myself, a seed has blossomed



The Latcham family and the Montagu Pit Disaster

Thomas Alfred Latcham Jnr lived at 100, Norwich Street in Benwell. He was only 14 years old when he was killed in the Montagu Pit disaster on the 30th of March, 1925.

He was the son of Thomas Alfred, Latcham Snr, and Jane Latcham. Both parents are buried in St John's Cemetery, next to the Pitman's Monument. Their burial plot was bought by compensation money paid by the pit owners.

The tragic story of the pitmen can be heard in the following poem called, 'Gone to the Lord' written by John Thomas White, great grandson of Thomas and Jane Latcham. The poem was written for the 90th anniversary of the disaster and was read at Saint Margaret's Church by John White, the only relative in attendance.

St. Margaret's Church was where the funeral procession left from. The coffins were laid out, their ghosts were with us.

John has also penned the subsequent poem - 'Jane Latcham' about his memory of meeting her when he was young.



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**Remembrance of the Montagu Pit Disaster,
30th of March, 1925
by John Thomas White**

Gone to the Lord they are, men, boys as fit props fell
Tunnels submerged. Not even foul air to breathe
Gases, tepid waters merged
Torrid tidal waves of wretched filth
No look for these lads
They the right to dig King Coal from muck
But not in ground, so unsound, no plans or maps to see
Greed of owners pushing their might with glee
Gone to the Lord they are, too far to reach
Men of cloth they do preach
As families at pit head they wait
Too late, for the thirty-eight poor souls are gone
As one by one taken to hearse they are
Then down so silent streets save for sobbing wives
Mothers, sisters, children, small
It's them that bear such pain, such cost as well
Damn the owners all to hell
Gone to the Lord they are. Men, bairns, the mate
Ninety years past since 'High Monty's' loss
Went the lads through Heaven's gate
God bless him. History does not forget them yet
Gone to the Lord they are

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2015**

Jane Latcham 1887-1960

By John White

As a bairn, I sat on my Great Gran's knee.
She was born in the Victorian age,
I learnt of her grief, her son sat on her knee-
Thomas Latcham, age fourteen
died in the Montagu Pit disaster,
a monument raised in Elswick Cemetery,
her story sustained my politics,
it's the red banner for me.



Jane
Latcham

Ralph Hall Calvert

Ralph Hall Calvert was born on 2nd March, 1893 in 18 Teynham Street, Elswick,

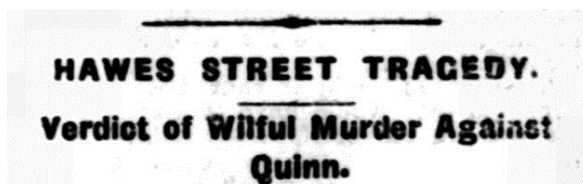
He was employed as a machinist/hand driller at Armstrong's Ordnance Works on Scotswood Road.

He married Sarah Veitch in 1915 when he was 22 years of age and they had two sons before Sarah sadly died in 1918.

In 1919, as a 25 year old widower, he had his brush with danger with the last man hanged in Newcastle - Ambrose Quinn when Ralph apprehended Ambrose after he murdered his own wife -Elizabeth, by slitting her throat with a razor in the middle of Hawes Street, just off Scotwood Road.

Ralph later married Elizabeth Muldoon in 1924 and they had four sons together, one being Gerald who is the father of Pam Royal whose voice can be heard in the following poem 'He caught a murderer and...'

Ralph Hall Calvert died on Wednesday 11th May 1955 in his hometown at the age of 62 and was buried in St John's Cemetery Elswick on Saturday 14 May 1955.



Ralph Hall Calvert

Ralph Hall
Calvert



This is the grave of Joseph
A Calvert at
St John's Cemetery,
brother of
Ralph Hall Calvert,
witness to the murder



Hawes Street,
where the murder
took place and what it
looks like now



The Vickers Factory
tunnel where
Ralph Hall
Calvert died in 1955



He caught a murderer and...
by Donald Jenkins

From the minute Ambrose slit her throat
till his neck snapped in a noose,
he wished he'd left it.
A day of drinking climaxed in brutal ritual –
marriage terminated; his wife stopped breathing.

No sooner had Grandad wrestled Ambrose,
he wanted it left.
After the uncharted heroism,
abruptly flooring a killer,
his instinctive response had run its course.

Once the moment had passed,
till Grandad passed,
events were left unspoken,
didn't care for medals or being a bother,
he never asked for directions.

After prison bell didn't strike the hour,
no bell was tolled, no flag exhibited.
Final execution on an autumn morning,
before Ambrose dropped,
he left no statements.

A century since, the story's been buried
in family secrets, an unmarked grave,
the whys are unanswered,
I'm left feeling cheated,
that Grandad isn't well known as a saint.

The Royal Family

Father: Kenneth Robson Royal was born in Dunston on the 2nd of June, 1925. He died on the 22nd of June, 1982 and is buried in St. John's Cemetery in Elswick. He worked as a fitter/ turner at Vickers Factory on Scotswood Road and later as a crane driver at Associate Leads Works in Elswick.

Mother: Winifred Henrietta Royal Nee Yaden was born in Elswick on the 12th of August, 1924. She died on the 20th of November, 1985 and is also buried at St John's Cemetery in the same plot as her husband. She worked as a barmaid, cleaner and as a cook in Bowers Restaurant in Newcastle city centre. She also helped put fuses into bombs at Vickers factory in the Second World War.

Their son – **Ian Royal** is the voice that can be heard in the following poems - 'Sat on the Sand', 'Not just the little things' and 'Who I am'.

Sat on the Sand

By Ian Royal

Sat on the sand,
somewhere near Tynemouth,
Whitley Bay or even Cullercoats,
my dad, about 40 years old,
white vest, trousers with turn ups,
no shoes just socks,
my very own 60's John McClane,
me about 5 or 6 years old, shirt off
but vest still on like my dad,
skinny little arms around his neck.
I looked younger but he looks older,
a happy scene, salty warm and safe,
black and white image
but I can feel the colours of summers long gone.
Is this the only time we did this
or is it the only time it was photographed?

Not just the little things

by Ian Royal

I remember cobbles and bumpy bike rides
I remember football games with 20 players per side
I remember the lovely coal fire smell
I remember my mam shouting - Oh bloody hell!!
I remember her standing grim in her old pinny.
I remember my dad calming her down with
- Let's be fair now, Winnie
I remember being carried to bed
I remember the sadness now that they're both dead



Who I am
by Ian Royal

I heard - Don't worry it will be alright from my mam
I heard - If we can, we will from my dad
and we did most of the time.

The smell of the blazing coal fires and flaming fish and
chip papers of my childhood,
the sounds of 1960's pop stars,
my sister's girlfriends laughing and screaming,
the sound of our old radiogram dropping 45's,
Frankie Laine cowboy songs and Bonanza,
the taste of Barsix and Bower's restaurant,
Knickerbocker Glories on Saturday afternoons,
cousins always present, aunts and uncles close by.
I look for fairness, rules and justice
but I see unfairness, cheating and injustice,
I am myself and I am happy with that.

John and Fran Neilus

Grandfather, John Neilus was born in Renfrewshire, Scotland in 1896 and came to live in Newcastle after he fought in the First World War. He married **Florence May Davidson**, a Canadian nurse in 1917, who he met while being treated in a field hospital after he got half of his head blown off in battle.

He brought his family to Elswick to work in Vickers and became an air warden at the factory in World War Two. He died in 1957 and is buried at St John's Cemetery, near where his son - **Frank Neilus** was later laid to rest.

John's granddaughter/Franks daughter and living descendant – **Pat Neilus** is the voice that can be heard in the poems - 'Waning' and 'Frank Neilus'.



Waning
by Donald Jenkins

Wish I'd listened more, remembered more,
taken in more information,
salvaged valuable fragments,
stored more pieces of broken gemstones.

Wish he could tell me more, just once more.
Like Oliver, I'd ask for more,
not dismiss it as teatime patter,
taste pride in his dad's adventures.

Wish I knew more than half a story:
how half of Grandad's head was blown off;
how this scalped soldier lived more years.
How at war – he found love.

Wish I'd grasped more of their fairy tale:
how they met inside the trenches –
did she, a nurse, give him more care
as they got hitched, had lots more children?

Wish I'd known him more; known Dad's hero
who fought in first, in second – air warden,
his alerting eyes patrolled the heavens,
yelled: Put that light out, there's more Germans!

More, his face seems from 'Dad's Army'.
What is it, real or from the telly?
No more photos, they're lost in boxes –
I want more than fragile memories.

Frank Neilus

Memories of Dad and Jimmy Forsyth

Both walked miles

One had memories in his head, one in a box

Both had a dodgy eye

Photos and memories go together

Dad also had a brother called Jimmy

Both could not fight in the war because of injuries

Both became natives of Newcastle

Dad from Scotland, Jimmy from Wales

Isabella Rankin Nee Dodds

Mother: Isabella Rankin Nee Dodds was born in Newcastle in 1899. She raised six children herself after her husband Gibson Rankin died in 1942. She was a wonderful mother, always looking after the family. She would do anything for anybody, all with a smile on her face.

Her son, **Sidney Rankin** is the voice that can be heard in the following poems - 'Bouncy Bread' and 'Always be Happy'

Sid Rankin at his parent's grave



**Baby Sid
with his mother
Isabella Rankin**

Bouncy Bread **by Donald Jenkins**

I want to bake a stottie to make my mam proud
but it won't taste as good...
There was nothing plain about her frisbee bread,
chewy crumb savoured best - when still oven warm.

Her yeast rose and smile never sank,
a lone parent saw to, six bellies fed.
Sunday roast – me, the youngest, treated to bones,
slurped out marrow through a protein straw.

Happiest in her kitchen, door open wide,
back turned to sink, chatting with neighbours,
sharing their tips for baking day rituals;
hard graft aromas spread through the terraces.

If I'd listened to hints, scribbled down recipes,
my stottie would taste as good...
Learnt to knead dough like Nana told her,
this stottie would consist of love.

Always Be Happy by Sidney Rankin

My mother was always happy,
she would do anything for anybody.
She always had a smile
and I think that is the one thing she had,
that she passed onto me -
Always be happy!

The smile on her face
was always there,
she never seemed to be sad.
She would always be there
to give me a hand
and help you with all your problems.
Always be happy!



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Cemetery Queen

A sacred place that you do not use as a playground,
guarded by sentries cold and grey,
fallen stones as lost heroes laid down to rest.

The chapel is her pinnacle tiara,
she wears a bright blue hat on top,
getting darker at the bottom,
flowers sprout from hands,
chains of daffodils around her feet.

What can she see? What has she seen?
Wooden ships and ships of steel,
Tyneside's rise to industrial age
remembers old streets, cobbled lanes,
some names long forgotten.

Nights with zeppelins in one war,
bombers in the next,
mixed fumes of factories' smoke,
burning coal fires,
industrial waste, smells of toil,
rot of lives taken now cleansed by dawn,
stage is renewed for souls to come.

What has she heard? What can she hear?

Sobbing, religious words, kind words,
horses' hooves, wheels on cobbles.

She feels loneliness, regret,
sounds of joyous workers at play,
celebration of peace, the repeated cycle,
steady pound of a gravedigger
at midwinter funerals,

old chapel bells ringing,

collective voices of all those resting,

-Come and join us, we are at peace now,

we'll look after your family and friends.



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