

Travellers – 30th November 2012

Milestones are physical as well as metaphorical

I sat on the TransPennine train leaving Leeds –
Passing boarded-up houses, smart empty apartments,
Old mills sprouting shrubs from the tops of their chimneys -
Speeding to York cross agrarian landscapes;
The Wharfe bursting free from her corsetting banks,
Turning flat fields to silver in the bright winter sun.

Flashing through Linton, my thoughts collocating
Recalled other travellers from far distant days
Riders who travelled on foot or by horseback,
Footprints on muddy tracks, marking the ways

The first King Edward setting out sorrowfully
From Lincoln to London, following the coffin
Of Eleanor of Castile, his much beloved Queen,
Taking the long route around through Northampton -
The Great northwards Road, the King's very own Highway
Full flooded to quagmire from the spill of the Nene.

The farm-labourers and servants, tramping the turnpikes
To Michaelmas hiring fairs, holding mattock or mop,
To be sealed for a shilling, for another year's labour,
Their lives zig-zagging from homestead to homestead,
Passing by milestones as they moved on again -
Events marked by milestones on footpaths through time.

I thought about students whose own lives will zigzag,
Through waysides untrodden in their ancestors' time,
And events and the turning points, their own personal milestones
Will be recklessly tagged on facebook's timeline.



King Edward I had elaborate stone crosses erected in memory of his wife Eleanor of Castile, marking the twelve overnight resting-places along the route taken in 1290 when her body was transported to London. Only three remain in place today, at Geddington, Hardingstone and Waltham Cross; Charing Cross is a replacement.