

# High Storrs Alumni News

## Manor Lane Poetry

Many of our readers will be familiar with the link that Sheffield has with Mary Queen of Scots. Her imprisonment for many years at Manor Lodge, the building now standing in ruins in Manor Lane in the city, preceded her beheading at The Tower of London. But just what was it like for her in Elizabethan Sheffield? That question was posed by Old Centralian, David France, a pupil at High Storrs from 1953/58, when he took up writing poetry in his retirement.



His poem, 'Manor Lane' is one of a trilogy along with 'Sharrow Lane' and 'Dixon Lane', each poem representing stages in his life and places he was associated with as a boy.

'Manor Lane' speaks of his time as a boy in the years during and after World War II when he was visiting his maternal grandparents who lived at 116 Manor Lane, quite close to what everyone called 'The Manor Castle'. David compares his time there with that of 'the captive Queen'.

But after writing the poem he happened to be paying a visit to the Visitor Centre which was set up over ten years ago at Manor Lodge and mentioned that he had written the poem. Asked if he would let them have a copy, he agreed, but wasn't prepared for what happened next.

"Out of the blue," he says "I got a letter from Green Estates, an organisation cleaning up the Manor Park estate, asking me if they could use the poem in a sculpture in what was to become Castle View Park, one of several mini-parks created on former derelict garage sites. Of course, I agreed. About nine months later the sculpture was erected without ceremony. It's a very large circle in Corten steel with my words cut by high pressure water jets...and, my head swells here, my name, too."

"Of course, I am very proud and my wife Katie and I love showing visitors and friends the view of the castle through the sculpture from a seat in front of it"

"I'd be equally delighted if someone would do the same with my Dixon Lane and Sharrow Lane poems. Dixon Lane is where my paternal grandmother sold flowers... and Sharrow Lane is where I went to Junior School and also where I saw the huge difference in standards between the terraced houses on the town side and the tree lined grandeur of Kenwood and Nether Edge on the other side. It shaped my ambitions and my destiny."

Picture shows David at the Manor Lane sculpture.

## Manor Lane

*She was here, and maybe stood where I am standing now.*

*What day was that? What clouds drifted across those dark hills on that day?*

*Did she look around and ask "Where is this?" Or did she know that on the ground*

*Where she stood, in those declining hours before her head would be taken from her body,*

*There would be life un-bound.*

*The rivulets of rain run black down the valleys and crevices of the hill of shale<sup>[1]</sup>,*

*The spoil hewn from the ground by men in search of coal.*

*The water spreads the shale across the path I walk*

*And from the noisy slaughterhouse I hear the mournful bray of cattle*

*Whose nostrils fill with the stench of ox blood<sup>[2]</sup>.*

*Look! says the young man, pointing across the green fields to show his sister's children the  
Bomber which has crashed or been shot down<sup>[3]</sup>.*

*Behind us in the small farmyard are pigs which squeal and stink*

*As the old farmer fills their trough with swill <sup>[4]</sup>*

*Heedless of the sun sinking down behind the black western hills.*

*In the small chapel, blackened stones curtain the old women from the cruelties of war  
As they pull their thick coats across their bosoming chests, adjust their pin-held hats  
And pray, and sing, Dear Lord and Father of Mankind, forgive our foolish ways...  
For their Jerusalem is builded here among these dark, satanic hills,  
and they are strong with the knowledge of their God.*

*She was here, not in the small chapel, but in the black tower of the castle jail,  
Now a ruined pile of stones. She was here and for that long time, alone,  
Whilst beneath her slept her captors, cursing the cold and damp of these god-forsaken hills,  
Looking down on the town far below where men forge swords from coal  
And dream of the feast that is to come.*

*The boy looks up to the balloons which hang above the city,  
And shivers with the fear transmitted to him by the women who wait.  
Waiting, waiting, as she waited, not for the axe  
But for the bombing and the guns  
Which sit probing skyward with the searchlights among the dark surrounding hills.*

*Now the boy is back again and plays among the red jagged rocks that lie  
Next to the concrete shelter that stands still and unrequired.  
He tugs the mis-shapen hand of his grandfather and asks with plaintive urgency  
A thousand questions, Who? What? Where? And Why?  
And the old man knows there are no answers.*

*It is time for Her to leave and as she gathers up her skirts  
And chains, and climbs aboard the waiting dray,  
She looks about and those around her hear her say  
A brief farewell to  
This place where she has been, This captive  
Queen.*

*Four hundred years go by and still the ruin falls  
In mocking scorn of those who pass and cannot mourn  
The prisoner held so long within these walls.  
She too has asked those questions  
And found no answers.*

*All the history, all the pain. It seems the lives and times of Manor Lane,  
In a global span are just a dot, but to the chosen few, they're not.  
The Lane is changed. No fields of barley, nor of rye,  
Four hundred years, a million souls, time passes by,  
But here, for me, is where it all began, this treasur'd and nostalgic spot.*

*David France  
Alumni 1953-58*

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