

### **Death of a Veteran - South London 1973**

Pollarded by countrymen,  
Spared by Victorians,  
And Edwardians, as London sprawled.  
A soot black, lichen less, stag horned giant,  
Rooted in sticky toffee clay.  
Rising above advancing,  
Waves of terraces of terraces  
And buses, the 12, 176 and 185.

A sapling in a hedgerow,  
Shielded from grazing cattle,  
Lammas leafed and oak appled  
On a terraced hillside field.  
There, silent, but set aglow,  
By the distant Great Fire.

Tall enough now for roosting rooks,  
And in the fading light  
A part of Palmer's 'delicious dream'  
Intervisible with Blake's infant visions  
Of angels in trees,  
On Peckham Rye.

Chimney smoke pea soupers,  
In time, acidified the bark.  
Luftwaffe photographed,  
Witness of the Blitz.  
By now,  
A relic of sloughed rural skin.

A teenage boy,  
Smoking and brooding in his nest unseen,  
Where the trunk branched  
And spread, loftier than St Pauls below.  
Blackcap, chiff chaff, perched above  
And once, a pied flycatcher,  
On route to Welsh woods.

They said plant a tree in 73  
But they took one down,  
For a bungalow called Zennor,  
In time, shaded and coloured  
By a flowering cherry tree.