

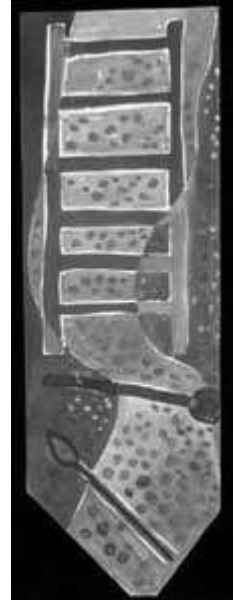
Hey, look at this!

Neil Richardson writes 12 articles about his own poetic work and what people, ideas and influences led him to write some of his poems. The series will last for the twelve months of 2010.

BANNER TEN:
ladder, sponge and spear

Sharp Tears

Sharp tears with every heavy, laboured breath -
How many more? Each one extends his pain,
Delays the harsh, inevitable death,
Each gasp reminds him of despair again.
My God, why? Why have you forsaken me?
A dry throat barks out, parched and desolate.
The last hope gone, he longs now to be free
Of tepid love, and spineless, spiteful hate.
A sponge is quickly pressed on his bruised lips
And vinegar cuts through his mouth and throat.
It floods his mind, and every fibre rips.
His body sags, and some are seen to gloat.
A young man, broken, brutalised and dead -
"Where's all his friends gone now, eh?" someone said.



EPILOGUE

God's Waif

A few are left, close by, to take him down,
Withdraw the nails, remove the thorns, wipe clean
The mess of death and smooth away the frown.
It's women's work, to cope with the obscene.
All in a rush, they put him somewhere safe
Until a proper burial can be done.
Alone, abandoned, cold, he is God's waif,
World's victim, reject, rubbish, Mary's son.
Some mount a guard while others go and fret
In case some trick is played, some lie put out.
His friends, too scared to think deceit as yet,
Collapse defeated, total is the rout.
Where is he now? Where is our living bread?
"He isn't here, look elsewhere!" someone said.

In 1989, a specially commissioned set of **The Banners of the Instruments of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ** were installed in Holy Cross Church. They replaced an older set and were then the third set to hang in the Church since the Foundation stone was laid 50 years previously in 1939. The banners were designed by Ginette Gillard of Jeymer Drive and the needlework was undertaken by Marion Richardson. The project was paid for by Malcolm Ede in memory of his mother Edie who had died recently.

The old banners which had been installed in the 1960's were looking dowdy and were in serious need of replacement. Here you see what they looked like in 1988. They are said to have been designed by a former Head Teacher of Betham Infant School, Miss Barrett. The first set to be hung were designed by Fr. Anthony Mapplebeck, a curate in the parish from 1940-1945 who went on to become Vicar of Mevagissey until 1981.



There are ten banners but I wrote 12 sonnets, one for each banner with an introduction, and an epilogue.

I have chosen these two sonnets because obviously I couldn't include all 12 in a magazine article, and also to co-incide with the April edition of *Magna*, published at the start of Holy Week, 2010. I wrote the sonnets during the course of 1989 and 1990, after a year of seeing the new banners hanging over head, Sunday by Sunday. I remember that the sonnet for banner 10, **Sharp Tears**, was written during the course of a meeting of the Housing Committee of the London Borough of Ealing, of which I was a member at the time. I was scribbling away, oblivious to the business in hand, and totally absorbed by the words swirling around my mind, seeking for meter and rhyme suited to the solemn subject!

The poems all end with the phrase "... someone said." and I saw the poems providing a narrative of the events depicted in the banners, but always present is the outward appearance and the inner meaning, quite different and requiring the eyes of faith to discern. **Sharp Tears** is an attempt to make a graphic account of what the person crucified is experiencing, and for Jesus, with the added indignity, pain and poignancy of knowing his true identity and from whence he had come. Despite this being the purpose of his life, the torment was real and as an act of undefended love, it crowns his whole life.

God's Waif is a poem trying to express the sense of defeat and dejection, grief and hopelessness with which his followers and mother must have greeted his death. For them, it is all over. The grave claims Jesus and beckons them also, and at this point, nothing would have been more welcome. I tried to capture the sense of isolation, in the cold tomb, the sharp reality of defeat and death, seemingly killing off his whole life's work, killing off the movement he started, bringing total disaster, only a few days since the triumphal entry to Jerusalem when the crowds shouted **Hosanna**.

I imagine his friends, weeping with each other, asking the question:

Where is he now? Where is our living bread?

And then, as Easter Day dawns and the women go to his tomb to tend and prepare his body for burial, they hear the unbelievable message:

"He isn't here, look elsewhere!" someone said.

That message is true today. He isn't in a tomb, but he is here with us, as we celebrate his resurrection at Easter and on every Sunday, for every Sunday is a celebration of his victory and new life.