

This information from: <http://www.firstworldwar.com/poetsandprose/gurney.htm>
<http://www.softdata.co.uk/gloucester/gurney.htm>

Ivor Gurney 1890-1937

The Gloucestershire poet and composer Ivor Gurney (1890-1937) was born on 28 August 1890 and educated as a chorister at King's School, Gloucester, where he won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music. Gurney wrote both poetry and music from an early age, 14.

At the outbreak of the war he volunteered as a private for the Gloucester Regiment, although he was initially rejected on account of poor eyesight; he finally succeeded in joining the 2nd and 5th Gloucestershire Regiment in 1915.



First wounded in April and then gassed in September 1917 whilst serving in France, Gurney was sent home.

In 1917 his successful collection *Severn and Somme* went into a second edition. He continued to write music however, whilst occupied in a variety of jobs. *War's Embers* was published in 1919, with *To His Love* being published in this latter collection.

Always highly sensitive and moody, Gurney had developed signs of serious mental disturbance by 1918, although his mental condition was already strained by 1912. He was subsequently committed by his family to a Gloucester asylum in 1922 and later transferred to Dartford.

He never subsequently left hospital, although the popular myth that he continued to relive the war was not in fact true: he himself admitted lying - claiming he had suffered from shell shock - simply in order to gain a better pension.

Ivor Gurney, who never married, died on 26 December 1937 at the City of London mental hospital. During his life he had written hundreds of poems as well as approximately 300 songs in addition to instrumental music.

While his reputation during his own lifetime was primarily based around the quality of his music, his poetical talents have subsequently gained recognition (and were championed by Edmund Blunden).

The Silent One

Who died on the wires, and hung there, one of two -
Who for his hours of life had chattered through
Infinite lovely chatter of Bucks accent:
Yet faced unbroken wires; stepped over, and went
A noble fool, faithful to his stripes - and ended.
But I weak, hungry, and willing only for the chance
Of line - to fight in the line, lay down under unbroken

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Wires, and saw the flashes and kept unshaken,
Till the politest voice - a finicking accent, said:
"Do you think you might crawl through, there: there's a hole"
Darkness, shot at: I smiled, as politely replied -
"I'm afraid not, Sir." There was no hole no way to be seen
Nothing but chance of death, after tearing of clothes
Kept flat, and watched the darkness, hearing bullets whizzing -
And thought of music - and swore deep heart's deep oaths
(Polite to God) and retreated and came on again,
Again retreated - and a second time faced the screen.

To His Love

1919

He's gone, and all our plans
Are useless indeed.
We'll walk no more on Cotswold
Where the sheep feed
Quietly and take no heed.

His body that was so quick
Is not as you
Knew it, on Severn river
Under the blue
Driving our small boat through.

You would not know him now...
But still he died
Nobly, so cover him over
With violets of pride
Purple from Severn side.

Cover him, cover him soon!
And with thickset
Masses of memoried flowers --
Hide that red wet
Thing I must somehow forget.

December 30th

It is the year's end, the winds are blasting, and I
Write to keep madness and black torture away
A little – it is a hurt to my head not to complain.
In the world's places that honour earth, all men are thinking
Of centuries: all men of the ages of living and drinking;
Singing and company of all time till now –
(When the hate of Hell has this England's state plain).

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By the places I know this night all the woods are battering
With the great blast, clouds fly low, and the moon
(If there is any) clamorous, dramatic, outspoken.
In such nights as this Lassington has been broken,
Severn flooded too high and banks overflown –
And the great words of Lear first tonight be spoken.
The boys of the villages growing up will say, “I
Shall leave school, or have high wages, before another
January –
Be grown up or free before again December’s dark reign
Brightens to Christmas, dies for the old year’s memory.”
May to them the gods make not all prayers vain

Cotswold edge, Severn Valley that watches two
Magnificences: noble at right times or affectionate.
What power of these gods ever now call to you
For the folks in you of right nobel; and of delight
In all nature’s things brought round in the year’s circle?
Pray God in blastings, supplicate now in terrifical
Tempestuous movings about the high-sided night.

Men I have known find, are dead in France, in exile,
One my friend is dumb, other friends dead also,
And I that love dyou, past the soul am in torture’s spite
Cursing the hour that bore me, pain that bred all
My greater longings; love only to you, this last-year date.

(From Norton Anthology of British Literature, Fifth Edition)