

# **In the Shadow of Amiantus**

**By**

**David W Wood**



*CheckPoint  
Press*

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For Maureen - My soul mate



## Foreword

Hello. I don't know you from Adam, but thanks for opening the cover, and getting this far. Obviously something must have tempted you to peek within, before simply putting this book to the side, and moving onto something else. If I was to put myself in your shoes right now, I'd imagine that you would be asking a few questions, which may include, is it interesting enough? Will I enjoy it? Is it worth the price? Will it be an easy read? I would obviously answer yes to all those questions, because I wrote the stuff. But perhaps that still wouldn't convince you, and why should you believe what I tell you anyway?

If you enjoy poetry that is unpretentious, short stories which make you think, or biographical episodes which will make you laugh and cry, then you will enjoy the book.

If you have ever been in a position, of having to stand by and watch, whilst the person you love most, dies from an incurable and painful cancer, then you will understand some of the feelings expressed. Even if you have not experienced something as dreadful as this, then it will give you an insight on the stuff, sometimes both bizarre and banal, that goes through the helpless watchers mind when bad things happen to good people. It's at times like this when sensible thinking doesn't matter a toss, and when your perspective on what is important in life takes on a new meaning.

But before you finally make up your mind.....

*“I told you I was unique”*

*She said, as he sat there, open mouthed, looking at her.*

*Her eyes touched his soul.*

*Then he asked the man with glasses and grey hair,*

*“Would you say that again?”*

*The man repeated it.*

*It still didn’t sink in.*

*The room had once been painted white, but now the walls were sort of dirty yellow. The air smelled of antiseptic. There was silence.*

*She said;*

*“Sounds like a Greek holiday resort,” then asking the question,*

*“Do I look like a pipe lagger?”*

Welcome to “In the Shadow of Amiantus” – a selection of contemporary poetry, short stories and early life episodes from my formative years.

Most of the poetry actually contains words and phrases that rhyme. Although there are a few attempts at free verse, there is nothing complicated. I do not write to impress, but in the hope that you will enjoy the words used, and the stories told, especially when I am being disrespectful to those in authority, and those who annoy me.

The order of the book is important, but not vital. You could certainly jump in and out as you please, but believe me when I say that it does flow, from Part 1 through to Part 3, where some of the poetry is expanded upon, and perhaps explained fuller. I love it when I can understand a poem.

## **Part 1**

A compilation of 40 poems, entitled **ParkBench Diaries**.

Musings from hours spent watching the world from a park bench. I try to bring to life some of the more interesting characters and places I have experienced and read about. The people written about are real people. Some are still alive. There is humour and sadness, history and nature, (including some fruit), courage and selfishness, and lots of other stuff. The poems are a truly personal journey, which will also provide an insight into how I think.

Where appropriate, there is a short note to a poem, simply to provide some context and background. Additional explanatory notes to poems are also included, at the end of this section.

## **Part 2**

**Jugglers Storybox**. 10 short stories, based on true characters and events.

## **Part 3**

**And then there was me**. This tells you about my early life, what made me as a person, certainly no fiction here. It is about a time of innocence, brought to a sudden end when I was 15 years old. It should make you laugh a bit, and perhaps shed a tear or two. And here we are again, with history repeating itself, some 40 years later.

So it's over to you.....

*Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*Dylan Thomas*

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## ParkBench Diaries



## *Prayer*

Blessed Holy Mother, Star of the Sea,  
I come here before you on bended knee.  
The thoughts in my head, can't articulate,  
I'm burning with anger, touching on hate.

Did God ever hear, the pleadings I made?  
Those times when I cried, and times when I prayed?  
Was He just out, when I knocked on His door?  
Or shun my approach at holy rapport?

Tell me dear Mother, what words are now in?  
Please show me the way, and where to begin?  
Perhaps it's all true, and nobody's there.  
There's nobody listening, to anyone's prayer.

So Holy Mother, I'm truly unsure,  
of what holy words, or rosary tour,  
will get You to hear, the thoughts in my head,  
or should I just scream my anger instead?

OK then Dear Mother, here I will start,  
I'll tell you my feelings, straight from my heart.  
I was taught to believe, He knows it all,  
Conducting life's play in His concert hall.

It was always God's will, when stuff went wrong.  
We'd count our blessings through religious song.  
Ask His forgiveness for all we transgressed,  
then absolution through penances blessed.

Our lives conducted to His holy plan,  
listening to platitudes from a robed man,  
believing all, God's front man would tell,  
of pain to be borne, to save us from Hell.

For the attention of all knowing God,  
you fucking thug, and cruel mugging sod,  
You're not getting my applause or acclaim,  
or mind numbing prayers by candle flame.

I can't comprehend what offence she's done,  
sometimes I think, you're conducting for fun,  
sick sense of humour, well all lost on me.  
So help me Dear Mother, Star of the Sea.

*Michael McGahey (1925-1999)*

He towered above the voices I heard,  
this principled man, this man of his word.

Never hypocrisy, he would insist,  
calling himself - a devout communist.

He was the real thing, and led us with pride,  
this man from the pit, this man from Gateside.  
“*Comrades*” he roared, to thunderous applause,  
“*We’re here to support, our brothers, our cause.*”

Rows upon rows, we stood there unbowed.  
In that gravelly voice, he spoke to the crowd,  
reminding us all, of why we were there,  
for working conditions, better and fair.  
And then to a man, we stood there as one,  
supporting the cause, until we had won,  
the right to work for a fair days wage,  
when going down below, in that metal cage.

The government spoke, they tried to deceive,  
an election was held, people didn't believe,  
in what they'd been told, about blame for the cost,  
that miners were wrong, so the government lost.  
Then from the south, a young man came along,  
he tried to lead, but got compromise wrong.  
He failed to grasp, the changing scene,  
and how it should work, and what it would mean.

And now in the corner there's an empty seat.  
The one on the left, the one where he'd meet,  
his friends and the press, to have a good row,  
or teach them all, about politics now.  
I remember that day, that day in the crowd,  
when that gravelly voice, made us feel proud.  
He was the real thing, and led us with pride,  
that man from the pit, the man from Gateside.

## *Elgol*

Twisting and turning past High Pastures cave,  
views round each corner your mind will engrave,  
enslaving your thoughts, while colours explode,  
for 15 miles....by single track road.

Pass by the marble, drink scenery in.  
Through shadow of Blaven, just past Torrin,  
as Loch Slapin shows you picture postcard,  
with Cuillin ahead, Coruisk bodyguard.

Greet highland cattle, bellowing hello.  
Sheep in the road forcing cars to go slow.  
Eagle above, flies soaring for prey,  
as rabbit below, runs through heather away.

For every step and mile that you go,  
nature unfolding her hypnotic show,  
enticing you in, seducing your soul,  
supplying a glimpse, through Heaven's keyhole.



Then over the rise, Scavaig lies ahead,  
stretching before you The Weeping Swan spreads,  
through land of MacKinnon, Skye's Noble Dale,  
with views to the Cuillin and bad step trail.

Go down the steep hill toward the small pier,  
look to the left see the islands so clear.  
Canna and Muck, and Eigg then become  
sentries protecting the mountains of Rhum.

Then seen from the edge of the loch where you stand,  
pointing to Heaven the Cuillin so grand,  
jagged purple black peaks piercing the sky,  
majesty wild is towering so high.

Watch the sunset, when black turns to red.  
Drink in the view and your soul will be fed.  
Beauty so wild, finding words hard to call,  
that view from the loch, across from Elgol.

*1307 (Friday, October 13<sup>th</sup>) - 1314*

The SAS of the Holy Crusade.  
The hunters of relics of Christ it is said.  
Arrested today.  
Templars abandoned, that unholy date.  
Imprisoned in Paris, and left to their fate.  
For Heresy.

The King of France had gone on attack.  
Six hundred and twenty, were put to the rack.  
Templars subdued.  
But Clement forgave, those sins they confessed,  
and Phillip contrived, at what he did best.  
Holy Feud.

Phillip told lies, about Templar deeds.  
He threatened the Pope, and Clement concedes.  
Battle won.  
Jerusalem's gold, held in their tower.  
Phillip had envy, and wanted that power.  
Templars undone.

Those monks who waged war, in Saladin's East,  
were now the King's pawns, in this gory feast.  
Betrayed.  
By a weak papal prince, exiled in France,  
controlled by the King, it was Phillips dance.  
Templars prayed.

Still held in Paris, for over five years,  
their Master was tortured, amidst all the smears.  
Jacques De Molay.  
Shouting "*Templars recant, from all we have said,*"  
he rallied his knights, those Templars who bled.  
"*We die today.*"

Then dragged across, to that place on the Seine,  
he was tied to the stake, and shackled in chain,  
then Master turned.  
As he prayed and predicted, he faced Notre Dame,  
before one year would pass, they'd meet their paschal lamb.  
And Jacques burned.

Eight months then passed, since Molay had his say,  
by then King and Pope, had faced their judgement day.  
They died.  
Templars escaped, from La Rochelle, they set sail,  
with Solomon's treasure, and Christ's Holy Grail.  
Some had survived.

Alba was reached. Templars protected.  
By Robert The Bruce. Crusader respected.  
Sanctuary.  
Templars disbanded, no longer in chains.  
Hospitaller's now, and Charity gains.  
History.

### *Mesothelioma (Amiantus)*

A terminal cancer, one that is rare,  
one for which there's no cure.  
Destroying the lungs, all organs too,  
with pain you shouldn't endure.  
Caused by asbestos, being breathed.  
Dust swimming in the air.  
Assisted by global company greed.  
People who didn't care.

A terminal cancer, one that is rare.  
It kills slowly and causes great pain.  
Caused by asbestos, being breathed,  
and global company gain.  
Signs of this cancer - very vague.  
Creeping symptoms which scare.  
Still no cure...cost is too high.  
This cancer, the one that is rare.

Referenced from MacMillan Cancer Support

*Mesothelioma is a terminal cancer. Once diagnosed, life expectancy is around 13 months to 2 years. About 2000 people in the UK are diagnosed with mesothelioma each year.*

*Asbestos is the most common cause of mesothelioma. Up to nine out of ten cases of mesothelioma are caused by exposure to asbestos. Asbestos is a natural mineral, mined from rock found in many countries. It is made up of tiny fibres that are as strong as steel but can be woven like cotton and are highly resistant to heat and chemicals.*

*During the 1960s the first definite link between mesothelioma and asbestos was made. In the past asbestos was imported to the UK in large quantities. It was used in construction, ship-building and in household appliances. Asbestos was very widely used in insulation materials, such as amosite insulation board, and building materials, including asbestos cement.*

*The people most likely to have been exposed to asbestos include - construction workers, plumbers, electricians, boilermakers, shipbuilders and demolition workers.*

*Family members of people who worked with asbestos and brought the dust home on their clothes have also sometimes developed mesothelioma.*

*NOTE: Even the Romans knew the harm that asbestos could do. They called it amiantus, which means unpolluted, and they called it this because it could be easily washed and used to make string vests. But even they knew the negative impacts of asbestos. Strabo and Pliny, two of the most famous geographers making maps for the Roman Empire in the first century BC, mentioned the sickness that seemed to follow those who worked with asbestos. It was recommended never to buy asbestos quarry slaves as they often died young. Lung ailments were a common problem to anyone who worked with asbestos fibres. Pliny even made reference to the use of a transparent bladder skin as a respirator to avoid inhalation of the dust by slaves.*

*“I told you I was unique”*

She said, as he sat there, open mouthed, looking at her.

Her eyes touched his soul.

Then he asked the man with glasses and grey hair,

*“Would you say that again?”*

The man repeated it.

It still didn't sink in.

The room had once been painted white, but now the walls were sort of dirty yellow. The air smelled of antiseptic. There was silence.

She said;

*“Sounds like a Greek holiday resort,”* then asking the question,

*“Do I look like a pipe lagger?”*

as she looked back at the man with glasses and grey hair.

The man with the grey hair and glasses, simply smiled; sadly, gently, and shook his head, saying nothing, averting their gaze.

The living nightmare started.

Their worst fears had come true.

Their world had fallen apart.

Nothing else mattered.

And when they just could not take it in, they left that terrible place, and went to the cinema, to see the cartoon, Valiant.

They laughed all the way through the picture, and then went for pizza.

When they went home, she knelt on the bedroom floor, sobbing. He knelt beside her, and held her tight, and she cried in his arms.

And his heart broke into a million pieces, as he held her, and felt her fear.

He was helpless, and he cried uncontrollably.