

### 1. The Challenge

Now I've really gone and done a silly thing.  
Something I might easily regret,  
Though not something others will forget  
Or let me off the hook. Oh no, the ring  
I've put upon my finger, the promise  
Made in all sincerity is simply that  
I'll write a poem in sonnet form and at  
The rate of one a day. Now this is  
Madness. I am engaged upon a plan  
Which will demand more brain and will-power  
Than all the new year diets that our  
Media try to tempt us to. It's more than  
Mortal wit and honest toil can do!  
And yet I'll do my best to see it through.

### 2. Not Doing Much

Not well enough to work, not ill enough  
To be confined to bed – a perfect  
Situation for a while. Just select  
The photo album, the jigsaw, the stuff  
You never get around to looking at  
And realise how much relaxation  
You can take – if pushed. Your fixation  
With achieving this and doing that  
Has to take a back seat for a day  
Or so – and you're instructed to remain  
Inert and not to phone or email  
Or even think about such things. Lay  
Time aside and notice how much more you've got:  
How not doing much sometimes hits the spot!

### 3. Upon Waterloo Bridge

From a London omnibus, with thoughts  
Of Flanders, Swann and old Westminster Bridge  
I look out along the river at the port's  
Vast windy sweep, the rivers curving stretch  
And all the gracious buildings alongside,  
And admit that, yes, dull would they be of soul  
Who'd be unmoved by this vista: this wide  
Townscape packed with landmarks new and old:  
St Paul's dome still centre stage, the Gherkin  
Lurking further off and all the crossings,  
Jetties, sightseeing boats and working  
Craft which take my eye - and to me posing  
The dread question: dare I write of such a scene  
With Wordsworth's spirit hovering in-between?

### 4. The Army Invisible

We're the army invisible. We come  
When you're asleep or half awake to clean  
Your rooms and corridors, wipe off obscene  
Graffiti, swill away the leavings of some  
Celebration we would not be party to  
Or sweep away the paper trail of notes  
You didn't notice that you'd lost. Hang coats  
Back onto hooks, try to make Room 42  
Take on a semblance of the sort of place  
Where learning might go on. We've learned a lot  
About your Higher Education: not  
To expect too much of learned faces  
Who can find a hundred reasons not to give  
The small amounts your army needs to live.

### 5. Rugby? What me?

What am I doing, sitting here watching  
Grown men groping, thrashing, tumbling, falling  
Over each other in a muddy mauling  
Heap? It's a 'Six Nations' rugby match  
And I am quite enjoying it. It's mad,  
For sure, but there are moments of speed, grace  
And dexterity as well as brute force  
And shoulder power. So am I glad  
When England win? I don't really mind.  
I'm happy that I'm staying with a friend  
And we can share some time, chill out, unbend  
Rediscover jokes of old and find  
That in good company, to my alarm,  
Yes, even rugby has a certain charm.

### 6. The Prince who married Cinderella

Ah-ha! Whose shoe this is, I think I know,  
And look, the other is three steps below.  
So why is that one abandoned there  
Just by the cupboard under the stairs?  
She leaves her slippers everywhere, kicked off  
In kitchen, bathroom, living room and loft;  
Sometimes within the garage I may find  
Another footwear item left behind  
Or sometimes underneath - or in - the bed  
A partner of the one left in the shed.  
And when I raise the matter and complain  
About the boots still wet with mud and rain  
She will just smile as if at something droll.  
I'll toe the line for she's my very soul.

## 7. A Request

I've had requests to write about old age,  
Time passing, and the remorseless  
Tick of time. Now birthdays, I must confess,  
Don't worry me. No, it's more the pages  
One by one that turn so rapidly, the days  
Rather than the years that flip so lightly by  
So that you think that time does *really* fly  
And you're not surprised or at all fazed  
When another chapter ends. How old am I  
You wonder? Upstairs, you take a look  
And see in mirrors someone that you took  
For someone else. You blink and force a smile,  
Pull in your stomach as the birthday guests arrive.  
"Cheer up," they say,  
    "be grateful that you're still alive!"

## 8. Carpe Diem – or not?

For once in a while – please – Don't Seize the Day!  
Just let go upon its own sweet way  
And let the clock tick tick as it wishes  
Give yourself time to savour that delicious  
Almond croissant, taste the coffee and not  
Drink it when the heat is lost – or too hot  
To appreciate. Don't grasp the day and shake  
It like a dog with a rat. Remain awake  
To other sounds, let music be a foreground  
In some waking hours - not background sounds  
You hardly really hear. Don't seize the day.  
Let mind and body have some time to play.  
*I know all this is very good advice.*  
*You know me well. You'll have to tell me twice.*

## 9. Shopping

I'm sure it's far too long, this shopping list.  
Half these things we bought last week. Well. Weet-  
abix just disappears it's true, they eat  
It fast – but do we really need more crisps?  
They're not a healthy option, we all know -  
But – what? - I'm the one who ate them all?  
Well, I may have had my share. I don't recall  
Consuming all those chilli flavoured ones. Oh,  
Now you mention it, while that football match  
Was on, I did get through a few. Shall I go  
And see what's on offer over there? Just so  
We don't run out. Yes, I realise that's  
Not on your list, but it's on mine and  
It would be silly to run out of wine.

## 10. Every Little Helps

Is there no nook of English ground secure  
From rash assault? No piece of ground on which  
Like weary soldiers on some last ditch  
We make a stand and try to ensure  
That here at least another Tesco does  
Not smugly grasp with its rapacious hand  
That football field, that unused land  
Where kids can play, weeds grow and bees can buzz.  
'Every little helps' indeed and each time  
Small resistance irks the march of smiles and suits,  
Delays the putting down of concrete roots,  
We signal that some do not view as prime  
Importance fifteen types of marmalade  
Or dishcloths of a hundred different shades.

*Thanks to Wordsworth for the opening lines.*

## 11. Hemswell

A mirror greets you at the stairway top  
And then another, both ornately wrought;  
More lie along the corridor, brought  
By hopeful vendors to this hotel of shops.  
Across the way, room after room displays  
Its wares: china tea sets, coins and Dinky toys,  
Garden tools with well-worn handles, Boys  
Annuals, sad dolls, trophies, hand-painted trays  
All jostle for attention here. Downstairs  
Writing desks and blanket chests compete  
With sideboards and tables, hall stands complete  
With brass-handled canes, brollies and pairs  
Of candlesticks. What would the boys in blue,  
Who lived here once, make of this motley crew?

*The Hemswell Antiques and Collectibles Centre takes  
up a large part of an ex-RAF base near Lincoln.*

## 12. Mammon and the Muse

I got a letter by old fashioned mail  
With a Norwegian stamp – I liked the look  
Of it: not a bill or invoice but from a book  
Company in Bergen. Now who could fail  
To be intrigued by such a letter?  
They're publishing a book called 'Junior Scoop'  
To assist primary teachers and their groups  
Of pupils to learn English better.  
*Fagbokforlaget* wish to reproduce  
A little poem of mine from long ago  
And picked 'My Colouring Book'. I do not know  
Quite why it suits – but hope it will amuse.  
Now I can't really rest until I've found  
The exchange rate of krone into pounds.

### 13. Snow Feelings

I have a double-edged relationship  
With snow. An on-the-one-hand-on-the-other  
Kind of response. As it falls I'd rather  
It continued. When it ceases, feelings dip  
As if something special has been removed  
And normality will soon be resumed.  
But as the car is smothered, logs entombed  
And walking to the post office proves  
Hazardous, emotions change. It's hard  
To get our groceries, the post is late,  
The visit that we planned will have to wait  
And the cat refuses to step into the yard.  
We like a pretty postcard scene out there  
But inconvenience we just can't bear.

### 14. Choosing Shoes

It's just like choosing a pair of shoes, she said,  
You know, trying on, seeing how they fit,  
Hoping to find the one that's really *it*  
So you don't have to worry how you tread;  
Discarding some because a little tight  
And others that don't hold you firm enough,  
Seeking delicate but underneath quite tough,  
Solid when you need but otherwise quite light:  
Balance is important. Be on your guard  
'gainst imitations and substandard goods.  
If you're patient and you shop around, you should  
Find something that will last. It's really hard  
But worth trouble, worth the lengthy wait  
When you end up finding just the perfect mate.

### 15. Damocles or Writer's Bloke

I'm staring at the keyboard, trying to think  
Of what to write: some inspiration please!  
Just as I get started, my brain begins to freeze  
And poetry's forgotten: it's a drink  
I really need. I'll brew a cup of coffee  
And make it good and strong. A biscuit  
Fills the gap, read the paper then, oh, it's  
Time for lunch! I can't write for toffee  
(I should look up what that means). The keyboard's  
Back in front of me, really needs a dust...  
I wonder what this symbol is? I must  
Investigate some time... But now the Sword  
Of Damocles hangs above my head:  
Got to write a sonnet before I go to bed!

### 16. Blackbirds

The blackbirds are squabbling over some scraps;  
They are an argumentative crowd,  
Always bickering, bad-tempered and loud  
Like sharp-faced grannies waking from naps  
And complaining about what they have missed:  
A crumb of gossip or the stale rind  
Of a not-to-be-forgotten quarrel – mind  
What you throw them! With a flick of the wrist  
I shower broken up yesterday's toast  
On the roof of the shed. A flurry of wings,  
Then they settle again to their stabbings  
And squawkings, picking and choosing the most  
Precious bits in their bright orange bills.  
Never at ease, never quiet, never still.

### 17. Other people's bookshelves

Other people's bookshelves fascinate me:  
The ordered arrangement or the random  
Accumulations over time that land on  
Top of previous strata: they all make me  
Want to browse. Here I see Simon Schama,  
*Easy Japanese Pickling*, P D James,  
*Kite Runner* and *Giant Book of Card Games*  
By *Bacon's Essays*, a *Book of Karma*  
And the hardback *Complete Book of Dog Care*,  
*Household Physician 1889*,  
And *Birds of the Farne Islands* in a line  
With Wheeler, M, and Moorhouse, G! Where  
Else would I find such an eclectic hoard  
Save here? Books, memories and friendship safely  
stored.

### 18. A Modern Pilgrim

A Bancker there wass and that a worthye man  
That since the tyme of bankynge had beganne  
Filled full his dayse with toiling by ye screne  
And with ye telephone wolde oft be seene  
Y-makinge deals with othere banking wights  
While keeping certayne thinges well out of sight.  
His Porsche he kept well-polishéd and clene  
Also his bodye eek well-honed and lene  
For in ye jymme he labored whan he coude  
Just as he travailed for his country's goode:  
But though he labored he did nothyng make.  
Yet he thoght it wolde be a gross mistayke  
If no bonus came in pondes sterlinge  
Beyonde his wage and all his other earnynge!

## 19. Vinyls

So now, where are the songs of yesteryear?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music new  
On CDs and on iPods and through  
Downloads via Spotify you can hear  
The sounds you most desire – on demand;  
(Strange idea to demand your art  
Or entertainment like a king at court  
Having his musicians play at his command.)  
But who hast not (being of a certain age)  
Sat careless on the living room floor  
And sifted through the LPs, more and more  
Engrossed in covers half-recalled, like pages  
From a childhood book. Such memories. Such art!  
Some go. But with some you just can't bear to part.

## 20. Waxing Philosophical

The weather here, though not quite tropical,  
Has been fine with warm sun through the day  
Prompting us into the garden: make hay  
While you can – oh, quite philosophical!

But the sunlight so powerful and bright  
Illuminates shelves, tables and chairs  
And shows dust particles, tea-stains and hairs  
And the window panes just look a sight.

So while you may yearn for the sunshine  
And for balmy days down by the seaside  
In that swimsuit that once was a thrill,  
Give a thought to the expanding waistline:  
Remember that things have their flipside

And beware what the light can reveal.

## 21. Thoughts from the Clockmakers Museum

The long-case clock strikes three, a tinny sound  
As if a high pitched voice should issue from  
A burly weightlifter but then a gong  
Like chime repeats the hour, and then around  
The room more dings and tings and donges give out  
Each with its own opinion of the time  
Each from a decorated case sublime  
Not worried that its accuracy's in doubt.  
Not so with John. His *lignum vitae* works  
Are masterpieces of precision  
An indication of that dogged vision  
That would at last convince the bewigged clerks  
And nobles from the Board of Longitude  
And give the genius his well-earned dues.

## 22. Marooned

On the edge of the island there's a reef  
Between the reef and the land, a lagoon  
Where not long ago, a traveller, marooned,  
Waded ashore in the hope and belief  
That the island would just be his home  
For a few days or at most for a week  
While rescue teams, eager and expert, would seek  
Him out and soon have his location known.  
But days turn to weeks and no rescue comes  
Though he scans with his ears and his eyes.  
His mind's full of plans, smoke, messages, fires  
And the tunes which he constantly hums:  
Can't get them out of his head, though he tries:  
Those eight discs of which he's heartily tired.

## 23. Untitled

Here is tea on a tray, the best tray of course,  
Biscuits and sugar and a jug of hot water  
All brought to her bedside by the daughter-  
In-law, whose face does not show the remorse  
That she feels for the times in the past  
When her thoughts have been poison, her words  
Have been worse. What with talk overheard  
And old rumours and gossip, truth was cast  
To the wind. There's an opportunity now  
To make restitution, for there's death  
In the family and illness and debt;  
And some things that once she refused to know  
Are clear to her now. Forgive and forget?  
The best tray is carrying tea and regret.

*From a painting once seen in a stately home*

## 24. Cousin Charles

"Never came empty handed" someone says,  
"He seemed like Captain Hastings when he danced"  
And yet another speaker was entranced  
By his generosity in simple ways:  
Not forgetting birthdays, chocolates sent  
On special occasions. They feel bereft  
That Charles who talked to everyone has left  
The building. His gracious presence lent  
A simple happiness to those he met  
And his sending off was something unique  
With person after person moved to speak  
Of him with fondness, humour and regret.  
It's something we find quite unusual  
To discover we've enjoyed a funeral.

*Charles Ingham 1925-2013*

