

## *St Mary Magdalene, Langridge*

The country lane runs down  
The steep side of the valley;  
Deep banks on either side guide  
Determined pilgrims to the little church.  
Four ancient yew-trees guard the gate,  
Enfold the departed where they stayed  
One night before their final rest.  
Tombs are sprinkled about the churchyard,  
A place of peace for a thousand years.

One Norman arch circles above the door;  
Another frames in geometric shapes  
The church's modest chancel.  
Above this arch is the church's treasure:  
The graceful sculpted lines of a damaged  
Madonna and Child from Saxon times.  
Defaced in a bout of reforming zeal,  
It was buried by faithful parishioners  
Proud of their Virgin and Child,  
And found in a farm in Victorian times.  
Restored to her niche, the Mother  
Wraps her powerful sceptred Son in  
Sinuous curving folds of stone,

Her loving pity undiminished  
By the savage blows that smashed her,  
Only increased by the faith of those  
Who preserved her beneath the soil.  
The heart in hiding was beating still.

Tenderness may be hurt by hammers of hate,  
But emerges undaunted like this *Mater Dolorosa*,  
Who offers us hope: when cities are in ruins,  
And poisoned by death, all shall be well,  
And all manner of thing shall be well.  
After a time underground, we may say *Rabbouni*,  
When we hear the gardener gently call, *Maria*.