

## Landscape of my flesh

Brick by brick they carried them off the steam lorry. Smooth red faced bricks like the look of shepherd coming off the hill at the back on a windy day. At the beginning in the cold Spring you could carry four on one hand. By the end of Summer the brick hod no longer made you curse. It's metal resting on broad shoulder muscle. The old brickies, craftsmen all of them, always known for cleaning their boots and washing their tools after a days work. They used to laugh at our mortar mixing. Spitting into it with contempt. We carried on in silence unloading brick by brick. The rough ones for laying round the back were the worst for cutting and grazing your hands until callouses would form. How old was I then? Most of the men had gone away that year. The valley became a lonelier place. More silent.

We used to throw balls to each other, and high up into the blue sky. Who was that boy who caught it and never came back? Underneath graceful curves on a long forgotten muddy field. To run and run, that was all there was to life on some days. Then after running to lay down on the grass and stare up into the clouds looking for buzzards gliding over us. To lie there next to my friend feeling my heart beat against my grey shirt and the damp grass between my shoulders.

The best moment was sneaking off with a lump of putty from the glaziers tin. Mauling and mashing that grey greasy matter between my sore hands. Squeezing shapes snail like and gnarled tree roots through the gaps in my fingers. The oil soothing my rough hands after a day of loading up brick by blasted brick. Pressing my fingers into its cold grey matter and seeing the swirls my skin left on its surface. A tiny landscape of my flesh.

Tony Benn

Artist writer 2014