

Westminster Abbey



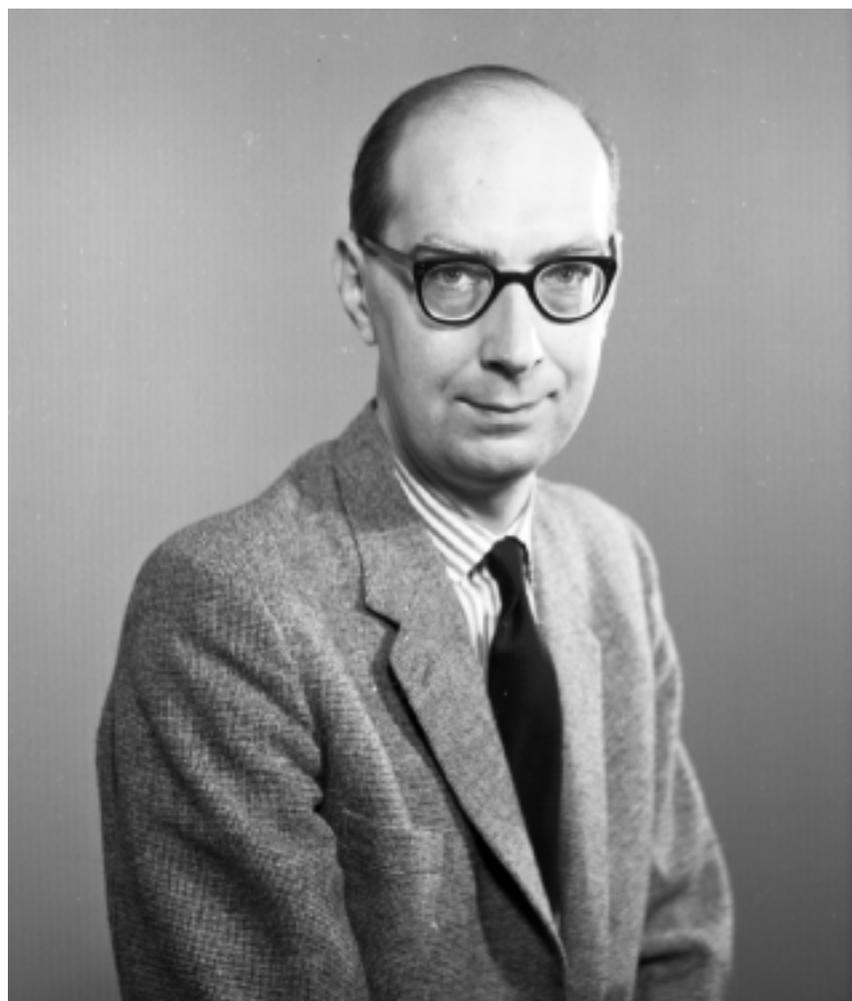
The Dedication of a Memorial to

PHILIP LARKIN CH CBE

9th August 1922–2nd December 1985

Friday 2nd December 2016

6.00 pm



HISTORICAL NOTE

An invitation to a drinks party, a visit to an empty church, a recently vacated room in a boarding house: such everyday events are transmuted by Larkin into poetry that gives weight to the ordinary dreams and fears of our daily lives, lived out as they are in the shadow of eternity. We recognise ourselves in his poems, as we do in a Chekhov play, and we smile and our smiles are rueful.

‘I like to read about people who have done nothing spectacular, who aren’t beautiful or lucky, who try to behave well in a limited field of activity and who can see in the little autumnal moments of vision that the so called “big experiences” of life are going to miss them. I like to read about such things presented not with self-pity or despair or romanticism but with realistic firmness and even humour.’ This, Larkin wrote, was the ‘moral tone’ of Barbara Pym’s novels. It is the moral tone of much of Larkin’s work. He believed art should help us either to ‘enjoy or endure’.

His life was crowned with success. He sailed into Oxford and sailed out again, a published poet, and to his delight, with a first-class honours degree. Shortly after Oxford he published two novels, *Jill* and *A Girl in Winter*, and became a professional librarian, combining the roles of scholar, curator and administrator in an exemplary career. His *Who’s Who* entry states his occupation as Librarian: ‘A man is what he is paid for’. His four collections of poetry, *The Less Deceived*, *High Windows*, *The North Ship*, and *Whitsun Weddings*, made him one of the most acclaimed English poets of the twentieth century. He won the Gold Medal for poetry and was offered, but turned down, the poet laureateship: ‘Poetry, that rare bird, has flown out of the window.’

*from Too Clever to Live
from Catching Life by the Throat: Poems from Eight Great Poets
Josephine Hart (1942–2011)*

PHILIP
LARKIN
1922-1985

*Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love.*

ORDER OF SERVICE

All stand. The Very Reverend Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster, gives

THE WELCOME

All sit. The Right Honourable The Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone PC DL, reads

SOLAR

SUSPENDED lion face
Spilling at the centre
Of an unfurnished sky
How still you stand,
And how unaided
Single stalkless flower
You pour unrecompensed.

The eye sees you
Simplified by distance
Into an origin,
Your petalled head of flames
Continuously exploding.
Heat is the echo of your
Gold.

Coined there among
Lonely horizontals
You exist openly.
Our needs hourly
Climb and return like angels.
Unclosing like a hand,
You give for ever.

THE TREES

THE trees are coming into leaf
Like something almost being said;
The recent buds relax and spread,
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again
And we grow old? No, they die too.
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh
In fullgrown thickness every May.
Last year is dead, they seem to say,
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

WATER

IF I were called in
To construct a religion
I should make use of water.

Going to church
Would entail a fording
To dry, different clothes;

My liturgy would employ
Images of sousing,
A furious devout drench,

And I should raise in the east
A glass of water
Where any-angled light
Would congregate endlessly.

All remain seated. Grayson Perry CBE reads

*from A LETTER TO MONICA
23rd OCTOBER 1962*

All remain seated for

THE ADDRESS

by

Blake Morrison

Poet and Author

All stand for

THE DEDICATION OF THE MEMORIAL

Dr Anthony Thwaite OBE, President of The Philip Larkin Society, and Professor Edwin Dawes, Chair of The Philip Larkin Society, unveil the Memorial.

Professor Dawes says:

I ASK you, Mr Dean, to receive into the safe custody of the Dean and Chapter this memorial in honour and memory of Philip Larkin.

The Dean replies:

TO the greater glory of God, and in thankful memory of Philip Larkin, and of all that he achieved and contributed to the life of the United Kingdom, I dedicate this memorial: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Flowers are laid by Rosemary Parry, Philip Larkin's niece.

All sit. Dr Anthony Thwaite reads

from CHURCH GOING

ASERIOUS house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

DAYS

WHAT are days for?
Days are where we live.
They come, they wake us
Time and time over.
They are to be happy in:
Where can we live but days?

Ah, solving that question
Brings the priest and the doctor
In their long coats
Running over the fields.

REFERENCE BACK

THAT was a pretty one, I heard you call
From the unsatisfactory hall
To the unsatisfactory room where I
Played record after record, idly,
Wasting my time at home, that you
Looked so much forward to.

Oliver's *Riverside Blues*, it was. And now
I shall, I suppose, always remember how
The flock of notes those antique negroes blew
Out of Chicago air into
A huge remembering pre-electric horn
The year after I was born
Three decades later made this sudden bridge
From your unsatisfactory age
To my unsatisfactory prime.

Truly, though our element is time,
We're not suited to the long perspectives
Open at each instant of our lives.
They link us to our losses: worse,
They show us what we have as it once was,
Blindly undiminished, just as though
By acting differently we could have kept it so.

All remain seated for

Riverside Blues

King Oliver (1881–1938)

All kneel or remain seated. The Reverend Christopher Stoltz, Minor Canon and Precentor, leads

THE PRAYERS

Let us remember before God with thanksgiving Philip Larkin.

ALMIGHTY God, by whose power thy servants walk and do not faint, and in whose strength they mount up on wings like eagles: we give thee thanks for the life and skill of Philip Larkin; for his imagination, creativity, and depth of expression. Grant that we, inspired by his memory, may rejoice before thee in celebration of all he has achieved, and in thanksgiving for all he has given us; through him who came that we might have abundant life, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Let us pray for those who by their work inspire others to comprehend the diversity of human emotion and experience.

ALMIGHTY God, source of all being, we thank thee for all who, through poetry and the power of writing, enrich our hearts with eternal truth. Touch their craft with thy Spirit, that through their words they might show us thy beauty, thy breadth, and thy transcendent majesty. As their work inspires us, move thy Holy Spirit within us, that our bodies, minds, and senses might kneel in awed adoration; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us give thanks for honesty and integrity of expression amongst those whose words bear much influence in our time.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast proclaimed thine eternal truth by the voice of prophets and evangelists, and the skill of those who write: direct and bless, we beseech thee, those who in our generation speak where many listen, and write what many read; that they may play their part in making the heart of the people wise, their minds sound, and their wills righteous, to the honour of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

All these our prayers and praises let us offer unto our heavenly Father, in the prayer Jesus Christ has taught us:

OUR Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

All stand. The Dean pronounces

THE BLESSING

UNTO God's gracious mercy and protection we commit you. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

**Members of the Congregation are requested to remain
in their places until invited to move by the Stewards.**