

Breakfast at the Friar Arms

You say you'd like to move to St. Palendra
and kiss the stone we St. Palendrans kiss
on holy days on our elbows with a wick
burning in front of us at an altar. Well,
entering what looks like a badger hole
at the back of a fenced-off local cave,
you'd feel your rented helmet tapping
the underside of the Ralston Boulder,
named for one who preserved the site
by choking himself on strips of cloth
while his torturers were on ale break.
Once through, though, you'd relax.
Your eyes would adjust to a round
chamber banded with pink granite.
It'd be worth it, back at your hotel,
to say you'd received the blessing
as if it were your chance for fealty
to a toothless hag with a stone-axe
while a bearded furnace mechanic
conjured the names of fifty rebels
tethered to their ox-carts and hung
in pairs from trees along the roads
of St. Palendra—start and finish for
seditionists on their dirty hustings,
detested shire, blot on the imperial
shield, though nowadays promising
with our storm-watching weekends
and timeshare condos. What's that?
Your wife wants to tour the harbor?
Amble along the quay? I'll be here
if she should change her mind about
our discounted tour for barrow buffs
who contemplate a cottage on the bay.

PETER RICHARDSON