

Virconium

Merryn Williams

*Eighty-five years is nothing, an imperceptible
blink on the face of the stone god of history.
I say it does not count. Greater stretches of time
have passed, since the Romans abandoned Wroxeter.*

*Eighty-five years ago saw a student cycle
the long, dusty, carless road from Shrewsbury;
blue September, the Wrekin as it is today,
dew glistening on the mounds, similar sheep grazing
between the bath-house walls of the ruined city.*

*This was better than Latin. He scoured the site
for iron keys, a fragment of dark-red pottery,
a coin, stamped with the image of the goddess Luna;
urged his brother, think what we may be missing,
the great find of the century!*

*Some of his finds got into the town museum,
can be seen there in dusty glass containers,
mixed up, not labelled with his name, Wilfred Owen.*

*The boy picked up his steel horse,
made his way through summer darkness back to Shrewsbury.
School was next day, and war was a barbarous game,
fit only for Romans.*