Lost and Found

*Cracked Voices: A song cycle* [CD]
*Cracked Voices: Poetry and tales from the lost borderlands*, Graham Palmer (One Tree Publishing)

 'We are all curators of memory.
 We collect and recollect.'

The lost borderlands here are Herefordshire and Cambridgeshire, the stories, poems and songs are stories of ordinary people who somehow aren't as ordinary as first appears: each has something different about them, something *extra*ordinary. So Palmer's book features metal detectorists, 17th century witches, fossil hunters, a schizophrenic hermit who met Charles Dickens (he was not impressed), a chimney sweep turned bird-catcher, residents of an 'invisible' P.O.W. camp and a fraudulent concert pianist.

These stories, briefly told in the first section of Palmer's book, are the basis for narrations and poems which form the second half of the book and have been set to music by composer Jenni Pinnock. Two voices weave their songs between simple and spacious clarinet and piano accompaniment, with brief narrative interludes among the songs. I confess I struggle with classical singing, but here the focus is on the narratives of the song, and – to me – there are elements of folk music creeping in around the edges which help this listener enjoy the CD.

This project is an intriguing one. It could be regarded as a kind of rural psychogeography, digging into the everyday traces of the past which have made the area under investigation what it is, or as local history. The blurb on the back of Palmer's book suggests that readers 'think of each as a voicemail from the past', an intriguing idea in itself. Palmer is an acute researcher and ventriloquist, his stories and poems and libretto truly do bring these cracked voices to life; Jenni Pinnock's compositions take them to another level. This is an unusual and rewarding project, one that evidences and celebrates ordinary people's extraordinary lives.

 Rupert Loydell

The *Cracked Voices* CD is available from:
https://jennipinnock.bandcamp.com/album/cracked-voices

The book is available at https://grahampalmer.co.uk/