

Transican Books

Boyd K. Lichfield was born in Romford, Essex. He joined the Royal Air Force at the age of 15 as a Boy Entrant and stayed in the RAF as a specialist in Wireless Networking until he was 21, serving in Singapore and the Borneo Confrontation of 1964.

Once out of the RAF he found it difficult to adjust to civilian life. It was at this time in 1966 that he started to construct a new form of sonnet, folk poetry which he termed 'pomes' drifting around France, arriving back in Britain via a free passage given to him by a ferry company, penniless and without even a pair of shoes. Initially, he did odd jobs in Britain and came to Leicester in the Spring of 1968 because his girlfriend at the time was at the University.

He was soon involved in performing and promoted poetry around the Leicester area by arranging poetry readings at the Phoenix Theatre in 1968, 1969 and 1972. His poetry band 'SOOP', was formed in the Town Arms, Christmas Eve' 1968. Appearing at schools, factories and venues up and down the country he recited verse to a musical background to complement the text.

The music was performed on a variety of instruments from woodwind to keyboard through to harmonica and strings. The band appeared at the Round House in London at the 1969 Poetry Marathon. Around 1970 he showed his work on the 'pome'⁽²⁾ to G.S.Fraser, Reader in English at Leicester University who was particularly helpful and supportive of his efforts and helped him secure a grant from the Arts Council of Great Britain.

Lichfield subsequently became a member of the Literary Advisory panel of the East Midlands Arts Association (1969-1973). Poetry readings were held in rooms above the Town Arms pub in Leicester from 1968, a venue also used by Toni Savage for one of his folk clubs. This is where he met Toni Savage who was very influential in encouraging him to start printing. Through Toni Savage he published his first booklet of poetry under the title of *For a Parson* in 1968⁽¹⁾. Taken from the collection *Lapsus Calami* the booklet was actually set and printed by Toni Savage in a one off *Private Parts* imprint at Duine Campbell's address in Connaught Street.

Lichfield taught himself the rudiments of printing on a new Adana flatbed.. Printing was not completely new territory for him as his Grandfather had been a colour machine minder at Claridge's in the pre-war years and his brother a compositor with Claridge's and Waterman's of London. He named his press Transican Books as, just after he got his press, he noticed a van parked outside his house in Kimberley Road, Leicester. The van had the words 'Trans African' on its side. The letters A-F-R had faded and it appeared to him from a distance as 'TRANS I CAN' – something he thought appropriate.

His pressmark is a lych-gate. Under this imprint, he published books of poetry using handmade paper, some of which was specially imported Japanese paper. The first three books from the press published from 26 Kimberley Road were *The Dissolving Cuckoo*, *Old Man in a Garret* and *The Letters That I Didn't Read*. Used to gain composing and typographical experience, these were books of Lichfield's own poetry.

There were only twenty-three copies printed of the second title in 1970, which 'explores an octogenarian's life whose faculties are still sensitive to the world about him'. Working for and thanks to Ron Gartree, he was able to print a second edition in a very different format, increasing the output 1200 copies in 1972 by the Gartree Press of Leicester at about the time that he moved to a small stone cottage in Newtown Linford on the edge of Charnwood Forest close to Bradgate Park.

The first Phoenix Broadsheet published by Toni Savage in 1971 was a poem by Lichfield entitled *For Brian Patten*. This was written in response to a request to him from Toni Savage for a poem to start off the series. Lichfield had invited Patten to a poetry reading in the Town Arms in early 1969. They became friends and in 1972 he published some early poems by this poet under the title *Walking Out*. Patten did not want his early work to be published in great numbers a commercial printing would involve, preferring the intimacy and feel of a limited edition by private press.

The volume was case-bound in black leather and was illustrated by Pamilar Kindred, an art student at Leicester Polytechnic. Booksellers such as Bertram Rota and Bernard Stone of London bought a few copies and the book slowly but surely went out of print. Other volumes were planned after *Walking Out*, including an illustrated volume of poems by Edward Lucie-Smith - and the Brewhouse Press even got so far as to prepare two specimen bindings of them, but publication never materialised.

Besides his Transcan Books publications he had his poetry published in a number of little magazines such as *Converse*, *Ripple* and *Poetry Workshop* and had work broadcast by the BBC Night Ride. He experimented with 'concrete' and 'sound' poetry and he presented Reading Concerts at The Phoenix Theatre, Leicester. The *New Broom Press* published two books of his work in 1969 and 1971 during the time he was living in Leicestershire, the second being a commissioned work to celebrate the opening of The Phoenix Theatre.

A further title *He Played With Himself A Lot* was published in 1985 after he had left Leicestershire. Rigby Graham, writing on the press in the *American Book Collector* in the Aug-Sept issue of 1973, said that 'It is, as a press, wayward and unbusinesslike and rarely answers letters, and its productions are ethereal and odd. It is not unlikely that it will cease as quietly as it began, and its productions

will eventually feature in some bibliographical note as a Leicestershire oddity, which produced strange little books of poems by Brian Patten, Boyd K. Lichfield and Edward Lucie-Smith. I hope I am mistaken'. He was right about the press ceasing in Leicestershire as Lichfield left for Denmark in 1973 and his Adana press was sold to Toni Savage who used it at 78 Cambridge Street. In August 1973, when Lichfield was living at Newtown Linford, he printed a book of his poetry entitled '*Opus Four*' on Sheepstor paper with illustrations by Chris Bartram. He took the unbound copies to Denmark but it was not until 1983 that he was able to find a bookbinder.

The book was published in a striking edition of 43 copies bound by Per Svendsen, the Danish bookbinder. He lived in London between 1985 and 1996 but then returned to Copenhagen where he has lived since. In Denmark he has continued to write and publish over a dozen books of his poetry under the Transican Books imprint. His latest publications, reflecting his work over forty years with the form he has called 'pome' which have the collective title '*The Forget-Me-Knot*'.

1. Private Parts Press. Only one title was published under this imprint that, as a reference to private parts, was a typically humorous press name invented by Toni Savage. *For a Parson* was written by Boyd K. Lichfield for inclusion in his collection of poems that was published in 1969 as the New Broom Press booklet, *Lapsus Calami*. One Saturday afternoon in 1968, Boyd Lichfield visited Toni Savage and Duine Campbell to see how the printing of *Lapsus Calami* was progressing. Printing had reached *For a Parson* and, with the enthusiasm that Toni Savage was noted for, by the end of the evening the poem along with an apt illustration by Duine Campbell relating to the press imprint, had been produced in booklet form. The colophon states 'Set and printed for distribution among the intimate friends of Jean Roberts, Duine Campbell, Toni Savage and Boyd Lichfield'. Toni Savage went on to publish several further broadsheets and booklets by Boyd Lichfield who, shortly after *Lapsus Calami* was published, established his own press (Transican Books).

2. Pome: Two verses. 1st verse *Haiku*, 2nd verse *Tanka*. Fusion of *Haikai Renka* and *Sonnet* techniques and traditions. For example:

<http://yorsearch.york.ac.uk/ABLYork/?q=boyd+lichfield>

Other collections:

The British Library

The Royal Danish Library (*Det Kongelige Bibliotek*)

Aarhus University Library, Denmark . . .

Boyd K. Lichfield
The Dissolving Cuckoo
1970, 20pp, 120 copies

Boyd K. Lichfield
Old Man in a Garrett
Illustrated by Marlene Staniforth
1970, 41pp, 23 signed and numbered copies
Second edition printed at The Gartree Press (Leicester), 1973

Boyd K. Lichfield
The Letters that I Didn't Read
Illustrated by Peter Oakley
1970, 10pp, 45 copies

Brian Patten
Walking Out
Illustrated by Pamilar Kindred
[1972], 57pp, 100 signed and numbered copies

Transican Broadsheet (titled)
Ann O. Lichfield, *Keys*, Illustrated [Boyd K. Lichfield], 1972

