Where Giants Lay Buried

Isaac Newton said he’d seen further
‘By standing on the shoulders of giants’
Then William Smith took his shovel
And scratched the surface of the land

He painted vibrant new colours
Across this green and unknown land
Smith saw deeper, and
He knew where those giants lay buried

The giants that had spent 3 billion years
Pulling and pushing, growing and grinding
To carve and polish this Emerald Isle
This chalk-white isle,
This coal-black isle
This red-sandstone isle,
This glistening-ore veined isle
He laid these colours bare
And changed our world forever

His whole life was devoted
To leaving ‘no stone un-turned’
Un-recognised, un-catalogued,
And un-appreciated

And still Smith’s stones lie,
Laid out like jewels
Preserved for the nation
In a great vault of knowledge
‘Subterranea Britannica’,
Was ‘Terra Incognita’ no more

This low-born Cotswold farmer,
This seeker of buried treasures
Undreamt of by lesser,
Perhaps more pampered minds

He took upon himself the role of anatomist
Peeling back the flesh of foliage and soil
Presented Britain’s bare bones for all to see
Like a surgeon before his eager students

In mine and road-cutting
Canal and drainage ditch
With his feet and with his fingers
He teased out the secrets
Long hidden by Mother Nature

From Cornwall’s rocky toe
Dipped in the stormy Atlantic
Across the gentle honeyed stone
Of fertile Midland vales
To the soft sandy shores
Of Norfolk’s rounded rump
Up the craggy Pennine spine
Blackened by those Satanic Mills
To the lofty heights
Of Scotland’s peaks

And 200 years on
Every mine and road and tunnel
Every water well and reservoir
Mankind’s reading of the
Great history book of the rocks
The piecing together of the mighty
Jig-saw puzzle of Earth-time
Folded and faulted
Baked and eroded

It all owes a debt to this great
Man of the soil
Sprung from a ‘dust whom England bore,
Shaped, made aware’

His life’s work that was worth
A King’s Ransom,
And was finally rewarded by
A King’s Pension
Before he was laid to rest
In Northampton town
Under a slab of English sandstone
Down amongst the Giants
That he had awoken

Lewis Entwistle