

# Poem



## Gaol Door

The clock stops at the door. We're doing time.  
Beyond the door the town moves as before.  
Inside the clock the bells no longer chime.

Outside there's sun, a swan, a steeple climb,  
some windmills, boats. We carve them on the door.  
The clock stops at the door. We're doing time.

Inside we walk in circles, like a mime  
of earth around the sun. There's grief galore  
inside the clock. The bells no longer chime.

This door records our days and dreams while crime  
rewrites us hanged, or penitent and poor.  
The clock stops at the door. We're doing time.

A horse and rider, bridges, rigging—I'm  
the artist with a knife who carves the score.  
Inside the clock the bells no longer chime.

An X to mark our names forevermore,  
and names of months, like ships at anchor—for  
the clock stops. At the door, we're doing time.  
Inside the clock the bells no longer chime.

—Lois Williams

**About this poem:** Among the exhibits in the Wisbech & Fenland Museum is a gaol door from the Sessions House. The outside of the door is plain but the inside is carved with graffiti by prisoners awaiting their fate. The images are detailed and imaginative, also poignant and mysterious. I visited the door many times to make notes for the poem and to think about the lives who may have created these carvings. My poem takes the form of a villanelle, an old metrical form that features a rhyme scheme and repeated lines. The heavy restrictions of the villanelle seemed a natural fit for the confinement of prison life.

Lois is a writer and artist based near the Wash in Norfolk. She was an artist-in-residence at the Wisbech Arts Colony Frontier Zone Residency, September 2014. 'Gaol Door' is part of a series of poems that take inspiration from the Museum's collections. © poem and photograph, Lois Williams 2014.