

A Lament for Lost Words

for SATB voices (divisi)

Christopher Churcher

(2026)



Composed December 2025 - January 2026

First performance: 14 March 2026 by The Delius Singers, conducted by Alexander Pott

A Lament for Lost Words

for SATB voices (divisi)

To graceful names and lovely woods farewell
To *acorn*, *adder*, *ash*, to *beech* and *bluebell*,
Farewell old friends I name you in my sonnet
Buttercup, *catkin*, *conker*, *cowslip*, *cygnet*
Farewell, your fields are brick, our books are barren
No *dandelion* or *fern*, *hazel* or *heron*
We'll go no more alone, no more together
The mountain *thyme* is gone and gone the *heather*
The clinging *ivy*'s gone and soon to go
The *kingfisher*'s blue bolt, the *mistletoe*
Nectar, *newt*, and *otter*, *pasture*, *willow*
To their last rites my muse comes footing slow
We'll hear no more the heaven-scaling *lark*
We'll all go down together in the dark.

Malcom Guite (b.1957)

Total duration: ca. 5'30"

A Lament for Lost Words sets a poem by Malcolm Guite, written in response to the removal of a number of nature words from The Oxford Junior Dictionary. Words such as *catkin*, *acorn*, *cowslip*, *otter* and *meadow* were taken out to make room for newer terms like *broadband*, *chatroom* and *celebrity*. Guite's poem presents these lost words in alphabetical order, creating a quiet elegy for the names, sounds and images that are slipping from our everyday language. It prompts us to think about the loss behind these vanishing words: a deeper grief for the plants, creatures and places we are losing through our neglect of the natural world.

My setting takes on a simple, slightly folk-tinted language. The lower voices move in slow, hymn-like phrases, as if singing a funeral dirge, while the sopranos pick out the lost words in lightly ornamented lines above them. I wanted the music to feel like a gentle farewell, but also a way of cherishing these words, and keeping them with us a little longer.

Christopher Churcher

A Lament for Lost Words

for The Delius Singers

Malcom Guite
(b.1957)

Christopher Churcher
(b.2004)

With quiet sorrow ♩ = 54

Soprano

Fare - well, fare - well, fare - well

Alto

fare - well, fare - well

Tenor

Farewell,

Bass

Farewell,

5

S.

fare - well

A.

fare - well

T.

Farewell, Farewell,

B.

Farewell, Farewell,

9

S. *pp* *p semplice*

A. *pp* *p* *mp* *p dim.* to

T. *p* *mp* *p dim.*

B. *p* *mp* *p dim.*

to grace-ful names and love-ly woods fare - well

12

S. *p* *3* a-corn, ad - der, ash to beech and blue - bell

A. *p* *3* ad-der, ash to beech and blue - bell

T. *p* *3* Farewell, Farewell,

B. *p* *3* Farewell, Farewell,

16

p *pp*

S. fare - well

A. fare - well Fare-well old

T. Farewell, Fare-well old

B. Farewell, Fare-well old

21

p

S. But-ter-cup, cat-kin, con-ker,

A. friends I name you in my son-net cat-kin, con-ker

T. friends I name you in my son-net

B. friends I name you in my son-net

25

S. cow - slip cyg - net_ *p*

A. cow - slip cyg - net_ *p*

T. Fare-well, your fields are brick, our books are *p*

B. Fare-well, your fields are brick, our books are *p*

28

S. fare - well fare - *mp* *mf*

A. bar - ren_ fare-well, your fields are brick_ *mf* *mp* *mf cresc.*

T. bar - ren_ fare-well, your fields are brick_ *mf* *mp* *mf cresc.*

B. bar - ren_ fare-well, your fields are brick_ *mf* *mp* *mf cresc.*

31

f *mp*

S. - well fare - well

f *mf* *p*

- well fare well

A. our books are bar-ren our books are

f *mf*

T. our books are bar-ren

f *mp*

B. our books are bar-ren

34

mp

S. our books are bar - ren *n*

mp 3 *p* *pp*

our books are bar - ren *n*

A. bar - ren *n*

mp 3 3 *pp*

T. our books are bar - ren *n*

p *pp*

B. *n* *n*

38 *mp*

S. No dan - de-li - on or fern,

mp

No dan - de-lion or fern,

p *mp*

A. or fern, *n*

T. *n*

B. *n*

42 *p* *p* *p* *pp*

S. ha - zel ha - zel or he - ron

pp *p* *pp*

n ha - zel or he - ron

p *p* *p* *p*

A. ha - zel ha - zel or he - ron, fare-

pp

T. *n*

pp

B. *n*

47 rit. *p* *pp a possible*

S. fare - well

A. *p* fare - well

A. well

T. *p prayerful* *più f* We'll go no more a-lone, no more to-

B. *p prayerful* *più f* We'll go no more a-lone, no more to-

B. We'll go no more a-lone, no more to-

51 *p ethereal*

S. the moun-tain thyme is gone and gone the hea-ther

A. *p ethereal* the moun - tainthyme is gone and gone the hea - ther

A. *p* ge-ther *mp* The cling-ing

T. *p* ge-ther *mp* The cling-ing

B. *p* ge-ther *mp* The cling-ing

54

S. *mp cresc.* the king - fi - sher's

A. *mf* and soon to go the king - fi - sher's blue bolt

T. *mf* i-vy's gone and soon to go the king - fi - sher's

B. *mf* i-vy's gone and soon to go

58

S. *mf* blue bolt the mis-tle - toe *p*

A. *mf* blue bolt the mis-tle - toe *p* *mp* To their last rites my muse comes foot-ing *mf dim.*

T. *mf* blue bolt the mis-tle - toe *p* *mp* To their last rites my muse comes foot-ing *mf dim.*

B. *mf* blue bolt the mis-tle - toe *p* *mp* To their last rites my muse comes foot-ing *mf dim.*

62

S. *p* Nec - tar, newt, and ot-ter, — pas - ture wil - low —

A. *p* Nec - tar, newt, and ot-ter, — pas - ture wil - low — *mp* We'll hear no

A. *p* slow *p* newt, and ot-ter, — wil - low — *mp* We'll

T. *p* slow — *pp* slow — *mp* We'll hear no

B. *p* slow — *pp* slow — *mp* We'll hear no

65

mf sempre cresc. *f*

S. the hea - ven - scal - ing lark —

A. *mf* more the hea - ven - scal - ing lark — *f*

A. hear no more — the hea - ven scal - ing lark — *f*

T. *mf* more the hea - ven — scal - ing lark — *f*

B. *mf* more the hea - ven — scal - ing lark — *f*

69 *mf risoluto* *p* rit.

S. We'll all go down to - ge - ther____

A. We'll all go down to - ge - ther____ in the

T. We'll all go down to - ge - ther____ in the

B. We'll all go down to - ge - ther____ in the

72 *A Tempo* *p* *poco rit.* *p*

S. fare - well, fare - well, fare - well.

A. dark. fare - well

T. dark.

B. dark.