

# Our beautiful island

The jigsaws I did as a kid were big and bold:  
The Mighty T Rex, The Age of Steam, Saving Lives at Sea –  
but these days I'm drawn to altogether softer scenes  
like the lightly brushed cottage in Somerset.

Picture it:  
thatched and chocolate-box,  
400 rose-tinted  
pieces of England

remembered  
with hollyhocks, daisies,  
windows wide open,  
kids playing

and me  
poring over this rural idyll;  
assembling a pastoral perfection  
that may never have existed.

But here's what really puzzles me:  
that stone-walled and lushly framed  
cottage could still be there –  
a family

filling the space I'd be tabling,  
joining the tabs and blanks,  
putting together a picture  
of their design.

Is that how life is for them? Today?  
In that 14½" x 19½" slice of this changing, bordered land?  
All fresh air?  
All flowers?

I hope so.  
I hope –  
whoever they are, wherever they are –  
the pieces fit.

*Tim Relf*  
*October 2021*



Jigsaw puzzle featuring cottage in Somerset (MERL 2012/283).

## About the poem

This poem was written in response to a jigsaw puzzle held at The MERL. The writer, Tim Relf, had been involved in *51 Voices* earlier in the year, writing about the project for the magazine *Farmers Weekly*. He was invited to respond to an item from the wider selection and chose the puzzle.

His poem alludes to the possibility that this cottage might exist somewhere. The object itself comes from a larger collection of over 300 rurally-themed puzzles. [30 or more of these feature images of rural cottages](#), often thatched buildings, which are reproduced in a range of media including illustrations, paintings, and photographs. Sometimes the same examples of vernacular architecture appear on different jigsaws. They are often celebrated and well-known examples of this rustic form.

Perhaps the cottage pictured on this puzzle and described in the poem is familiar to somebody. We would love to know where in Somerset it might be.

## About the poet

Tim Relf is a Leicestershire-based poet, whose work has been widely published. He is also a journalist, specialising in writing about rural topics for such titles as *Country Life* and *Farmers Weekly*. His most recent novel – *What She Left* – was published by Penguin and has now been translated into more than 20 languages. You can talk to him on Twitter at [@timrelf](#).



Jigsaw puzzle, box, and accompanying flyers. This is just one of many examples of rurally-themed jigsaw puzzles in The MERL collection (MERL 2012/283).