

## The Ballad of Blind Jack Metcalf

---

(1717-1810)  
By Ian Duhig  
October, 2011

Verse by the numbers, numbered years  
summing up loved dead;  
small fingers feeling headstone faces -  
all young Blind Jack read.

A man, he read behind their words  
how men and women felt,  
like faces, suits and numbers stamped  
on tavern cards he dealt.

Sharp dealer, traffic was his gift,  
in fish and flesh he'd trade;  
a soldier, smuggler, fiddler, guide -  
roadmaker, when that paid.

He spun his tales then webs of tar  
as dark as all he saw;  
some swore Jack trailed a sulphur smell,  
who laid down his own law.

Still dark in bronze on Market Square,  
he hears the traffic snarling:  
some might sing of Bonnie Princes -  
this song is Jack's darling.

His waywiser beside his bench,  
around his metalled hat  
his secret tale's a road of braille,  
and what it tells is that...