

STONEY LITTLETON LONG BARROW

12 lines

poem beginning with a line of Michael Longley

He would have been a hundred today, my father,
who only reached two-thirds the way down the barrow's
passage, before the stone-slabbed ceiling got too low
for comfort, the inner dark too dark to see.

On one entrance portal, a fossil ammonite
of such a size, masons six thousand years ago
thought it fitting, emblematic, lucky even
to blaze it there in pride of place: a limestone sun

whose whorls would talisman the real one down inside
and light each year for one brief moment, the chamber
few if any reach, and where today twelve petals
from an undone rose, ring a tea-light's tiny flame.