The Count-House: Wheal Friendship

The count-house is collapsing. Each blank pane
no longer holds a sharp clairvoyant eye
that pierced into the darkness of the mine,
examining the actions of the men
that smoked across the best part of the lode,
dulled it with a candle, reeking slime,
or beat it with their saturated clothes
to keep the higher tribute. Now its doors
no longer catch each whisper, chance remark,
each clandestine agreement in the sett
to cheat upon the bargain, mix the stones,
to cache away the prills behind the rock
then shin up through the winze, or climb the rise
to trespass on the distant owner's stopes
and carry off the veinstuff. Warping, torn,
their ceilings damp with fungus, grey decay,
still heavy with suspicion, deep mistrust,
the offices no longer hold the books,
the scanning of the quick illiterate glance
examining the earnings on the page,
the details of the paybills, of the fines,
the statements of the richness of the pitch
disguised beneath the figures in the script,
to interrupt the contract, steal the ore.

John Gurney.