John Geoffreys Gibbens was born on The Wirral in 1959; very much the youngest of three brothers. John’s father, Geoffrey G Gibbens, studied at Oxford before becoming an English teacher. After a spell in Wallasey, he moved to Germany to teach at British Forces schools during John’s early childhood before settling in West Cumbria, which provided the settings for many of John’s poems.

John met Armoreal Weston in the Lakes when he was 15. “When I met him he was all beauty and silent contemplation”, she has said. She later became his lifelong creative partner.

Having resolutely decided to become a poet at a young age, John dropped out of Wyndham School and in 1977 travelled in Europe, finding a home in Deia, Mallorca where he worked in one of the local bars, meeting Robert Graves and a community of creative musicians, artisans and writers.

In 1978 John returned to the UK, moving to London, where John and Armoreal set up home, sharing not only in the body of his art but John also helping in the raising of Armoreal’s children, Esme and John. His ability to reflect both the lightness and darkness of living came into John's poetry from his sensitive intellect as well as from the daily challenges of family life, and the struggle to survive as a poet.

John’s mother Elizabeth had taught Journalism at Wyndham Comprehensive School in Egremont and passed on her skills to John: he deployed them in London, working firstly as a typesetter and later as a respected journalist on numerous major magazines and papers, including Private Eye, The Oldie, The Times, The Independent, The Telegraph (for 12 years), Financial Times and, lastly, The Wall Street Journal.
In 1981 he became the youngest poet to receive an Eric Gregory Award. However, he remained aloof from the wider poetry scene, seeming to prefer looking out from the shadows whilst at the same time engaging with a wider community of artists, travellers and storytellers and always writing prolifically through the cycles of submissions and rejections.

Despite this, John’s poems were published in Poetry Review, Ostinato, Agenda, Fire and many other magazines, and anthologies devoted to Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Bob Dylan, Edward Thomas, bicycles and peace, subjects with which he was deeply connected. His visual poetry was included in The Reality Street Book of Sonnets in 2008 and the exhibition Visual Poetics at The Poetry Library (Royal Festival Hall) in 2013.

John’s Collected Poems were published in 2000 by Touched Press, “If you care about English language poetry and want to discover one of this generation’s best poets ahead of the crowd, buy this book,” Tony Grist wrote in New Hope International Review; and Michael Horovitz referred to it as “A magnificent book”, while John Mingay wrote in Stride, “I can do little else but heap praise on Gibbens for his impeccable diction and use of language which holds surprises round every corner and is never at ease with the easy.”

Smokestack Books published Orpheus Ascending in 2012. Like Rilke, Cocteau, Tennessee Williams, Salman Rushdie and Nick Cave, before him, Gibbens recasts the Orpheus myth in contemporary terms: this time in a strangely altered version of the London music scene in the late 1980s, a retro-future where violent unrest meets government backlash, and where pastoral idyll becomes a refuge from the currents of history.

John launched a series entitled The Inkjet Books in 2002, eventually numbering a couple of dozen titles; amongst them are several illuminated pamphlets.


The creative partnership with Armorel Weston resulted in the band The Children, featuring music written by John and Armorel, which they recorded and performed over 12 years. Their debut album was Play (1999), and subsequent releases included Come Aboard and Rockingham Street (2002), Love Walk (2003) Equals (2007) and the double album Memory of Grace (2012).

John’s only solo album, Songs from the Red Note Book appeared in 2014, and a recording of improvised music with Armorel and poet and clarinetist David Miller was released as Treetop Songs by The Mind Shop in 2008. Details and sample recordings can be found on www.touched.co.uk (a website built by John, with a Lay for each day till 5 days before his death, the last poem being a song from the first album Play: Meanwhile I’m Alive).

John has left a legacy of 15 years of poetry since The Collected Poems were published, and over 100 songs yet to be released.