

The Society of Civil Service Authors

Former Presidents:

Humbert Wolfe (1935-40)
Lord Vansittart (1940-57)
Sir George Rostrevor
Hamilton (1957-67)
Bernard Newman (1967-68)
James Laver (1968-75)
Lord Snow (1975-80)

President:

Charles Neilson Gattey

Vice Presidents:

Richard Adams FRSL
John le Carré
Iain McIntyre

Chairman:

Alan S Watts

Vice Chairman:

Victor D Negus Moore

Membership Secretary:

Joan M Hykin
4 Top Street
Wing
OAKHAM
LE15 8SE

Meetings Secretary:

Ethel Corduff
10 Malcolm Road
Woodside
South Norwood
LONDON
SE25 5HG

Treasurer:

Adrian Danson
38 Cumberland Road
BROMLEY
BR2 0PQ

Competition Secretary:

Ronald C Jeffreys
186 Lewis Flats
Lisgar Terrace
LONDON
W14 8SQ

Publicity Officer:

Bernard Stanley
29 Stanley Green West
Langley
SLOUGH
Berkshire
SL3 7RE

Diary

Closing date, Bill Barnes
Competition 30th September 2000

Annual Lunch
Saturday 21st October 2000

PW Weekend
15-17 July 2001

DATA PROTECTION ACT
Members' names and addresses are held on a computer database which is used for mailing copies of the Civil Service Author.

DISCLAIMER
The views expressed in the Civil Service Author are those of the contributors and are not necessarily those of the Editor or of the Society.

Poetry Editor:

Joyce Thornton
129 Whitechapel Road
CLECKHEATON
West Yorkshire
BD19 6HS

Editor:

Howard Frost
'Denefield'
Bradford Road
Tingley
WAKEFIELD
WF3 1QN
0113 252 6970

ISSN 0959-0064

The Civil Service Author

Number 151

Autumn 2000

CONTENTS

- 3 Editor's Notes
- 4 Letters
- 7 Market Information *Gordon E Gompers*
- 8 Competition Results
- 13 Degree of Confusion *Peter Rolls*
- 21 Blackpool in Blanes *G Clark Robinson*
- 26 Poetry Workshop Page
- 28 Poetry Pages
- 30 Always Archie *G E C Webster*
- 33 Solution to 'Literary Works' Crossword from 150
- 34 The Saturday of the Alumni Weekend *Ann Pegler*
- 36 Read, Write and be Published *Val Whitmarsh*
- 37 Creative Writing *Elvira Bridges*
- 38 'Literary Birds' Crossword *Karen Lowe*
- 39 Annual Literary Luncheon

EDITOR'S NOTES

Howard W Frost

I don't have much to say this time friends, for which I dare say you will be grateful. Thank you for the bumper response to my plea for Articles and Stories, Alan may have to leave some on the spike when he comes to deal with the layout, but we will use contributions in due course.

This summer has been, despite my very best endeavours, as busy as any other period in the last eighteen months, and, having just completed a new Summerhouse, I should like more than anything to have the time just to sit in it and let the World drift by without me for a while, whilst I just jot down the odd piece of poetry.

Instead, I'm hunched over the computer, both at home and the office hacking away at the Stress Survey I'm trying to complete for both the Day Job and the College Course. Quite the most stressful task I've ever been foolish enough to allow myself to be talked into.

You are all serving or retired Civil Servants, so I am sure you have had the opportunity to observe the attitude of colleagues and Departmental "Customers" as we now have to call them to the job of answering questions. It really is frustrating when one asks a fairly simple question and requests that it be answered "yes" or "no" to be told that:—

- a) The wrong question has been asked, or
- b) It cannot necessarily be answered with a simple positive or negative response.

I never knew the Inland Revenue had so many Professor Joad impersonators on its staff — you know what I mean — "It all depends on what you mean by" (yes I really am *nearly* that old).

As to the current Civil Service fashion of calling our Public "Customers" — consider my Department — where else can our "Customers" go? Can you picture it? "Sorry H. M. Treasury, but I'm paying *Dutch* Income Tax this year. Their State Pensions are a lot better."

But enough of all this jollity, what, if anything, did I actually find time to do this Summer?

Well, quite a lot of New England passed beneath my gaze, or in front of it as I strove to avoid all those big "trucks" that people its roads (sorry Vermont — maybe next time), and I did visit the Robert Frost Place.

Aren't writer's houses funny places? Never quite what you expect, even when you've seen photographs.

This Edition we have an article on the Brontë Country by Brian Jones, and what I find interesting about the article (as someone who drives past — well not Haworth Parsonage — but Hartshead church and the Red House every week) is how well Brian avoids the usual “peaty, heathery, consumptive, millstone grit and hard times” rhetoric about the family, whilst still giving a flavour of the influences that affected the three Sisters at least.

I think having just penned a seventy three word sentence, it’s time I “printed and saved”.

’Bye for now — Howard



Letters

Reference:- The George Farley Prize

I hesitated a long time before writing this letter lest it be thought to be sour grapes. This is not so, honestly! However, Pamela Farley did say ‘let us know what you think’. So here goes:-

There were only 20 entries for the competition, maybe some were put off by last year’s comments about lack of humour, etc. What is humorous to one person may leave another cold. Could we have an example or two of George Farley’s humorous verse please? Yes, a cleriheW is ‘short, witty, comic or nonsensical verse’, but a limerick too is defined as a ‘kind of humorous verse’. I am sure some of us could have had a field-day with limericks, had we realized they too would have qualified! No, we are not losing our sense of humour, many of us find it essential in life today. Please Pamela, let us know what you really, really want!

Several years ago the S.C.S.A. held ‘The Humbert Wolfe Centenary’ Competition, set and adjudicated by Ann Wolfe, who quoted some lines from her father’s work ‘UNCELESTIAL CITY’. We were then asked to write ‘a similar epigram, on any other profession’. So we knew exactly what was required. There were many delightful entries, plus helpful comments from the adjudicator, which encouraged and cheered competitors instead of deflating us all.

There once was a poet who said,

alas, I’m not very well-read.

I feel a real Charlie!

Don’t know dear George Farley.

On his works I would like to be fed!

Whilst finding the courage to write this letter, I am daring to mention two other matters which I've wanted to air for some time. (Not specifically related to the above competition, though there is a connection.)

1 Can somebody tell me what happens to poems sent in for competitions and never returned?

2 Why cannot poems be returned, if, and only if, a stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed?

The George Farley competition stated that entries could not be returned. So it was pointless enclosing a stamped, addressed envelope in that case, but why was such a statement made? If, as we are told, modern technology is saving so much time, surely time could be found to place a poem in an envelope and post it? (Self-sealing envelopes could be requested!)

The above questions are raised because many moons ago, I wrote a poem based on questions raised by my, then 5 year old, niece, about the night-sky. The poem was entered in a competition. It would certainly be amazing, to say the least, if another 5 year old girl had made exactly the same comments to an aunt, who then put those comments into verse! No more was heard about the competition, again no entry was returned.

Several months later, whilst leafing through a magazine at the hairdresser's, there amongst readers' letters was my poem, exactly as I had written it! Somebody had sent it in to the letters page of the magazine and received money for it! I do not blame the magazine Editor, who had no way of knowing it was not the sender's work. Since that time I have rarely entered a poetry competition apart from any in my own locality, or the S.C.S.A. of course!

It could be said that for some competitions there are a large number of entries, and envelopes get separated from them. In that case why not number entry and matching envelope when received? This would help unite entry and envelope after competition judging has taken place. Hope springs eternal!

Thanks Mr Editor, for a chance to send out a few waves from the lovely seaside town of Lowestoft.

Kathleen L Barber (Miss)

There used to be a section in “The C S Author” for members’ successes, from which I remained absent for the duration of its existence! So now that a minor success has come my way I thought I’d let you know in case it may be of interest to other members.

I recently came first in the national poetry competition of HASSRA — the sports, social and recreational association of the Departments of Social Security and Health. I also came second in their short story competition. I had won both categories in the Regional competition which automatically qualified me for entry into the national. Not exactly the Booker Prize but it brought a smile to my face!

Neil Shuttleworth

A View on Writing ...

Okay, so it is said that stories should have a beginning (preferably one that grabs the reader), a middle and an end, but must they? Who says there *has* to be a plot? Or a twist at the finish?

My one real problem with writing stories is that I invariably have a beginning, a middle but then fizzle out miserably. Unfinished stories reside beside my computer to bear witness. Far better for me to write what I call “Incidents” or “Moments in time” that need none of the above. They help to keep me writing which is the important thing. They are not articles, essays, verse or poem, or even extracts and not stories as such. They don’t have to be added to or incorporated into something else, are quite capable of standing alone as a piece of writing and are sparked off by pictures. Often, I (and others who also write in this frame), receive comments that the work would do better lengthened into a story or could be a base for one. This could spoil the work and, should I attempt it, place myself in the very situation I try to avoid. The beginning, middle, end, plot and twist scenario.

It would be interesting to know of members who have writing problems — there must be some out there. We can’t *all* be geniuses.

Jan Jefferies

Market Information

Gordon E Gompers

Use Your Libraries.

No matter where you live you are likely to have a library within easy reach. Most have a reference section which can be mines of useful information. Unquestionably the most useful books are Willings Press Guides. These are stocked at most libraries and consist of two volumes: one for the UK, the other for Overseas. I found the Overseas volume invaluable for finding out the addresses of in-flights. These are magazines especially published for the consumption of flight passengers. There are also on-boards that are for sea going passengers. Of course, Willings is more orientated towards advertisers than freelance journalists but most depend on freelance contributors for their content and while the address given might not be the right department the letter of enquiry will inevitably be passed on to the right one. Typical of my success with in-flights found via Willings Overseas volume is an article on The Tower of London in *Ahlan Wahsalan* (Saudi Arabian Airline) and an article on Cambridge in *NDEKE* (Zambian Airlines).

Willings also lists circulation figures. It might be harder to get an acceptance from a high circulation publication but once you have an acceptance there is far less likelihood that the publication is going to fold up before your piece is published. In any case it is not so hard to get an acceptance from a large circulation publication. *The Universe*, which has published four of my articles, has a circulation of about a quarter of a million; and *The Lady* (65,000 approximately) has accepted many articles from me.

Many reference libraries; also stock *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook* and *Writers' Handbook*, both directories for freelancers.

I often use libraries for subject research. Staff are usually helpful. Most libraries have tables where one can take notes in comfort.

Some libraries (Croydon's is a good example) have a good stock of magazines. One can judge what kind of stuff they publish.

Of course, some libraries are good subjects in themselves. I once had an article published on the Altenburg Gardens Reference Library (off Lavender Hill) in *SW Magazine*. The management was very co-operative although I must have seen a bit of a nuisance. My Yashica camera disintegrated during my first photographic session.



Competition Results

THE SOCIETY OF CIVIL SERVICE AUTHORS
ANNUAL COMPETITIONS 1999/2000

The Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition Results.

Number of entries received for the competition was 71. The judge was Mike Boland, Secretary, Poetry Workshop.

First Prize £100:— THE MODERN PTERODACTYL
John Colmans, London, N12. Dept. Parliamentary Commissioner for Admin.
(Empl'd.)

Second Prize £50:— LE RETOUR
Joyce Thornton, Cleckheaton, W. Yorks. Dept. DSS (Retd.)

Third Prize £55:— THE STRANGER
R. N. Harvey, Wilton, Wilts. Dept. C. E. (Retd.)

HIGHLY COMMENDED (In no particular order)
HAPPINESS. William Wood, Etchingham. Dept. British Council (Retd.)
FRENCH CHALK. Joyce Thornton, Cleckheaton W. Yorks. Dept. DSS (Retd.)
WINTER AND SPRING. Andrew Page, Sheffield. Dept. ESEA [Empl'd.)
GREYHOUNDS RETIRED. Heather L. Young, Northumberland.

R. C. Jeffreys, Competition Secretary.

The Herbert Spencer Competition The Judge, Mike Boland's Report

Judging any poetry competition has to be a subjective exercise, and raises the question of how can poems compete against each other? I'm not sure that they can, and consider competitions to be somewhat like Crufts dog show, where judges don't select the best breed, but the dog that is the best example of its breed. To translate to poetry, a judge shouldn't choose between rhymed/unrhymed, traditional/modern etc., but must look at each poem and select the one(s) that represent the best of their type, and the look for that elusive "other" that makes a poem a poem, and not just verse.

I'm not a critic, nor am I interested in critical theories, so I don't look at a poem as a text to be deconstructed, I look at it as a piece of art, and to succeed it must work as a whole, as well as satisfying all the criteria of technique, effect

and so on. Basically, I look first for the technical skill with which the poem has been built — whatever the style, be it free verse, ballad, sonnet or blank verse, there are always rules governing that style, and the poet must demonstrate his/her skill and awareness of the chosen style. Next, there is the question of subject matter — this should be original, and worth doing, or if not original, it should be treated in an original way, making us see it anew. Finally, there is the use of language, “the best words in the best order”, as Coleridge said. Poetry is a literary art form after all, and the words used need to have been chosen with care to work with the first criterion I mentioned in order to satisfy the second.

I was a bit daunted at first when confronted with 71 poems to judge. However, I was pleased to find that there were few “turkeys” among them, and overall the standard was very high. It didn’t make my task any easier, though! I read all the poems several times, then sorted them into 3 groups; probables, possibles and unlikelys. Then I read them again to ensure I was happy with my choices. I then read the probables several more times before making my final decision. Many of those that failed to make the probables list were technically flawed, or used weak or clichéd language at crucial points — or were well crafted but tacked any real point to them. So to the winner:

First Place: *The Modern Pterodactyl* by John Colmans

I liked the imagery here, the use of words evoked a slightly uneasy feeling in the reader, and there was a point to it all over mere descriptiveness, which made it a satisfying poem.

Second Place: *Le Retour* by Joyce Thornton

This too is an impressive poem, full of atmosphere and a sense of mystery well-handled, with a satisfying conclusion. Well crafted and worth doing, it was just edged out of first place, although it was a hard choice, because I liked the other poem more — I did say it was all subjective.

Third Place: *The Stranger* by R. M. Harvey

I liked this on first reading and it remained a favourite throughout. Not an original idea, which kept it from the top spot, but the rhyme is well handled and unobtrusive, and there is a real sense of the power and vitality of life.

Mike Boland

THE MODERN PTERODACTYL

John Colmans

At low tide, London's river
caressing mud and gravel,
reveals itself.

An ancient pier of cobbled stone,
once a bearded merchant's private mooring:
a breakwater rotting in the salted wind,
fixing wooden stakes in the river's heart;
a glass bottle,
opaque but unbroken by the high embankment wall.
They show little but say much,
whispering our past,
playing simple melodies
which fade into private places.

Cormorants ride the gentle swell,
beaks tilted at the windmilling sky,
then dive the darkness.

Before embankments were fen and reed
and before men
there were huge creatures,
lumbering and bellowing towards an extinction
unimagined, uncomprehended.
Pterodactyls tore the clouds on leathery wings
and fed in blood and anger
in the high trees by broad and lazy Thames.

Cormorants now, stiff-winged
and black as hate,
dry spread feathers in the weak winter sun
and patrol the ancient waters,
awaiting newer evils.
These we can imagine, and will them not,
but come they will
unless we learn to turn the towering tide.
What will we leave the river then?
Only wet bones,
and a smell of foolish, festering decay.

LE RETOUR

Joyce Thornton

The beach was easy to find
simply signed 'Plage'
not Omaha or Utah or Gold; where
in the sun's dying rays, some of the day's
visitors beachcombed or explored
remains of the dinosaural Mulberry harbour
high and dry on a neap tide.

You were waiting for me as planned,
by the beach huts, your knapsack
holding your broad shoulders back,
your battle dress neatly fastened,
your boots shining ebony.
There was no need to speak
we took no cognisance of time or place,
or of the sun sliding into the steel grey sea,
and tired children dragging back their hauls
of bladderwrack and shells to parked cars.

Your grave had been easy to find,
simply marked 'Unknown'.
Each day, visitors comb the rows
of simple stones, for servicemen
they might have known
and seeing your headstone
are satisfied you have a place
to lie. Then from the cliff top
they watch the sky light up,
the sun sink into the swell,
and peace drop everywhere.

THE STRANGER

R. M. Harvey

The deathly silence
of sunlit back-street afternoons:
a quiet intense
that the motionless air consumes
each movement, every sound.
Nosing the gutter a limping dog
hugging the ground.

So — nothing has changed
since patch-arsed days of long ago;
like a scene arranged
that old discarded memories grow
out of a past forlorn.
He stands and stares at the tiny house
where he was born.

The same faded blind
shading a door from blistering sun;
at least the same kind
or, surely, a similar one
to that his mother hung.
Nothing has changed. All utterly changed
since he was young.

He moves in a trance,
haunting again the silent street;
a revenant by chance,
this pilgrimage a fond conceit
on an impulse unplanned.
He leaves like a thief: a stranger in
a foreign land.

DEGREE OF CONFUSION

Peter Rolls

Winner of the Lewis Wright Short Story Competition

Distractedly, Barbara flicked through the book. There was no sense of pleasure, no information absorbed; she was simply fingering a 300-page string of worry beads. If one's External Examiner has written a major work, one is well advised to thumb through it, however dumbly. Especially when waiting, as humble Sociology student, next-but-one-in-line for *viva voce* interrogation by a Panel including the said External.

The name — Ülríke Ülfsdóttir — was terrifying enough. And the title of her work completely numbed the brain: '*Capitalism and Crime: causality and control. A critique of contemporary constraints*' — commonly known as the 7-Cs. Yesterday afternoon, Barbara had been first in the Library queue for the thing. But, at present, she would gladly have swapped it for a stiff drink.

Her fellow interviewee, Miriam, appeared to be in even greater need of nerve-balm. Dark-haired and pinch-faced, she sat as though on living coals, biting her lip and endlessly twisting a handkerchief. Barbara tried not to look at her.

The room served as the outer office for the Dean — the Head of Faculty. Its dark-brown, mock-Jacobean ambience — oak panelling, polished floor and leaded lights— strove for academic gravitas at the expense of daylight. Which was all very well — Offa University putting on Oxbridge airs — but unhelpful to those suffering from a morbid, pre-*viva* crisis.

The sense of oppression was due in no small part to Miss ffolkes, the Dean's Personal Assistant, who sat — tall, hook-nosed and menacing — as gate-keeper to the inner sanctum. Her 'ff's might be small, but she cast a long shadow in the Faculty. At her displeasure, Lecturers quailed, Ancillary staff quavered and mere Undergraduates quick-marched out of range.

Barbara looked up, taking a momentary breather from 7-Cs catatonia. Miriam caught her eye and unloaded a worry. 'Rupert's been in there for ten minutes. Is that normal?'

Barbara shrugged. 'I should think so. Could be longer, much longer.'

'Oh, dear. This *viva* thing — it's wicked, isn't it? People quizzing you, going *on* at you, raking over the year's work. Just because you're on some sort of border-line.'

'Absolutely,' said Barbara, trying to disengage herself.

‘Which border-line are you on?’

Privately, Barbara thought she was on the lower edge of a 2.2. But she didn’t want to push her luck. ‘No idea. They don’t tell you.’

‘But Rupert’s so brilliant — Bishop’s son and so on — he must be up for a First. I think I’m on a 3rd — if I’m lucky. My last thing on ‘Poverty’ was a bit skimpy ... Anyhow, Mummy said to make an impression. “Wear the pretty dress with poppies,” she said, “and your high heels.” But now it seems a little ... bold.’ Miriam looked uncertainly at her strident orange dress and at Barbara’s blue sweater and jeans. ‘I see you’re just in ordinary ... D’you think that’s best?’

‘What?’ Barbara’s mind was elsewhere, quagged in the mire of Chapter 12. ‘Yes,’ she hazarded. ‘Yes, very likely.’

‘Oh, dear! And of course your hair’s always so neat and blonde. I washed mine, but it’s ...’

Miss ffolkes, rattling away at her keyboard, hissed across the room. ‘For Heaven’s sake. Please be quiet ...!’

Silence. Then, within the sanctum, voices were raised: sharp and disputatious; male and female. There was a scraping and clumping. Poor Rupert, thought Barbara.

Poor Rupert, indeed. The Dean’s door was flung back on its hinges. A blinding light shafted the outer office and a silhouette stood, fists clenched, red hair erect. Rupert the brilliant.

Barbara and Miriam overcame their initial shock. ‘Oh, Rupert,’ they chorused. ‘What was it ... How did it ...?’

But, as the door closed and the room darkened once more, their welcome tailed off. Rupert the brilliant looked more like Rupert the Early Martyr — freshly escaped from a session of stoning by the ungodly. His face worked and his teeth gritted: ‘Bloody, bloody academics.’ He clumped, unseeing, between the two girls and out of the door. His refrain: ‘Bloody, bloody ...’ echoed up the staircase.

‘Good heavens,’ said Barbara. ‘I’ve never seen him like that before ...’

Miss ffolkes twitched a slit-smile. Standards must be maintained.

Miriam sat transfixed. Rabbit before the snake-pit.

The PA’s intercom squawked a small electronic knell and Miss ffolkes translated. ‘You can go in now, Miss Mote.’

Miriam's face, already wan, drained to a deathly white. She stood and made her way, *clip-clip-scrape* in the unfamiliar high heels, to the Dean's door. She knocked and, stretched a robot smile into place. The door opened and the inner light blazed out to consume her. The floral dress shrivelled in the cruel, revealing ray.

From her seat, Barbara could see little of the sanctum itself: there was no clue as to its occupants, or their mood. But there were clearly dragons and devils to be faced. As if to ward off a hex, Barbara clasped the 7-Cs to her breast. 'How long,' she thought. 'Dear Lord, how much longer ...?'

Not long. Less than a minute. The door was wrenched open and Miriam swayed in the doorway. She clutched a handkerchief to her face and gave a low, keening cry '...Oooh, oooh!' With moaning breath and unsteady, high-heeled step, she clattered from the room and away down the corridor. Moaning echoed ever fainter: '... Oooh, oooh!'

The intercom squawked again and Barbara froze. This was it. The Big Drop.

Miss ffolkes answered crisply. 'Certainly ... On the way.' She delved into her cupboard and brought out two shiny packets. 'Extra Bourbons,' she said darkly, 'and OatBiks. They're chomping well this morning.' Her eyes glittered as she whisked into the sanctum.

Hell's teeth! fumed Barbara. Biscuits! People were stuck out here, going through several sorts of Hell. While the Panel, taking pause from its main diet of raw student, munched its way through the Huntley & Palmers.

Miss ffolkes swept back to her seat. 'You're next,' she said spikily. 'They'll call when they're ready.'

Barbara flipped a wodge of the book, making a raspberry-noise with the pages.

The 7-Cs heaved in front of her eyes. She felt nauseated. Could you have *mal-de-mer* on dry land? Very likely. She put down the book. How long ...?

Next! The squawk commanded.

'Ms Prynne. Go in.' Miss ffolkes prodded the last Christian into the den.

Barbara put down the 7-Cs and shot to her feet: clearing the throat, licking the lips, brushing non-existent crumbs from the jeans. Light-headed, she stepped to the door, knocked and entered.

The Dean's office was a different world. Big windows, white walls, spotlights glaring from the ceiling. The contrast with the dark-panelled ante-room could hardly have been greater.

Barbara's pupils contracted painfully. Her smile, rehearsed to combine the freshness of youth with ageless wisdom, collapsed in a spasm of squinting. It was like walking from the 17th Century to the 22nd; from a soft, womb-like past to a sharp-cornered, sheet-glass future. Hard and hurtful. There would be no obfuscation in this room. Nowhere to hide.

In the centre of the room, behind a long table, four shapes hardened into human form. It was an ill-assorted group: large blonde female; thin grey female; spindly balding man and small smooth man. Their faces tightened; their lips pursed; their eyes were upon her.

It was unnerving to the object of so much attention. She had the feeling that she was an interruption to something. There was tension in the air, as before a thunderclap or missile launch.

To avoid direct eye-contact, Barbara took a look at the room. Large and airy, its Arctic decor was complemented by pine furniture and chrome fittings. A white-board filled the side wall. At each end of the table, giving rare splashes of colour, stood bottles of mineral water, green and fang-like.

The grey woman spoke. 'You are Barbara Prynne?' A claw-like hand waved steel-rimmed glasses. 'Please take a seat.' The voice was metallic, the gesture prosthetic.

'Yes.' Barbara's voice was small and uncertain, the palest of flames in this fiercely glittering room.

'Make yourself comfortable.'

Comfortable? The seat was wrought iron, a knobbed, slatted device that played hell with the thighs. It sloped forward and her legs strained in order to avoid slipping off. Already, she felt the onset of cramp.

'Let me introduce you to the members. I am Diana Trubshawe-Lee, from Senate House here at Offa. Acting as Chair of the Panel.'

Barbara acknowledged the Chair with a silent 'Good morning.'

'On your left is one of our External Examiners: Doctor Ülfsdottir, from Pennine University.'

Barbara exchanged glances with the Nordic presence that flowed in a smoke-red gown across one end of the table. So this was the author of the 7-Cs ... cheeks flushed; blonde hair unruly. Pieces of OatBik were scattered, lava-like, on the table: evidence of recent volcanic activity.

The Chair's introductions continued. 'And, of course, you will know Mr Mullis, the Internal Examiner.' The words 'Mister' and 'Internal' were precisely inflected to draw attention to Mullis's lack of status. Barbara looked tentatively at Finbar Mullis. They weren't exactly bosom pals, but he was her only link with the real world, the only half-familiar thread to which she might cling. There was no reaction: the Internal was keeping his head down in present company.

'And, on your right, our second External.' The metallic voice softened into a coppery tone. 'Head of Sociodynamics at Mendip University: Doctor Grebe-Fish.'

The small man smiled thinly and steepled his fingers. A receding forehead and toothbrush moustache gave him a suave, stoat-like look. His eyes popped slightly, as though caught in mid-chase of some small, furry animal.

Grebe-Fish!! She knew that name! The reference flashed into her brain, the recall uncanny in its precision: 7-Cs, page 156, top left-hand corner. Here it came, word for word. Quote: '... The contrary point of view has been advanced by Grebe-Fish (1994), but his work can be dismissed as the product of extremist ideology and flawed methodology ...'

Oh, God! The crucial words emboldened themselves across Barbara's inner vision. '... extremist ideology — flawed methodology ...' In Ülfsdottir's published view, the man was a Grade-A nutter. Judging from the flushed cheeks and the popping eyes, the two of them had been skirmishing all morning. So here she was — Prynne, B., humble undergraduate, innocent party — occupying the space between two warring nations. To the left were the Vikings — large, flamboyant, all crunch and thrust. To the right were the Bourbons — smaller, smoother, but equally deadly.

The Chair made a brittle, bionic attempt at a smile. 'Now then, Ms Prynne — Barbara — please feel at ease. This is a completely informal occasion — an interview convened to meet the requirements of the University Ordinance, section D, para 5. I take it that you are familiar with its provisions?'

Barbara searched the Chair's face, but there was no trace of irony. Provisions of the Ordinance? This was language from another planet. 'Oh,

silly me,' she thought savagely, 'all those seconds wasted cleaning my teeth, when I could have been boning-up the Ordinance.'

The Chair sought to convey re-assurance. 'There is, of course, no need for concern. But, having reviewed your work, the Panel felt that it would like to give you an additional opportunity to expand on some of your — er, ideas ...' She looked along the table, seeking to include her colleagues in this overture. There was little sign of interest in the Chair's proposition. Grebe-Fish constructed a battlement of chocolate Bourbons. The Nordic Queen snapped OatBiks between large, Polar teeth. Mullis, seemingly glad of gainful activity, struggled to open a green fang.

Barbara's gaze became fixed on the page laid in front of the Chair. It was presumably the final Mark List. She couldn't read details, but her eyes, working upside-down at Warp 10, noted a red-inked column at its right-hand side, presumably giving the agreed degree classifications. Sure enough, about three-quarters of the way down the sheet, was a blank square, with a pencilled squiggle. That just about summed up her status; a squiggled blank. She drew a deep breath and tore her eyes from the List. Just in time to catch the end of the Chair's opening gambit.

'Doctor Ülfsdottir, perhaps you would care to begin ...?'

The Nordic voice was brisk and surprisingly deep.' Good morning, Ms Prynne. I was interested to read your paper on Work Ethic.' She tossed the essay on the table. 'You appear to be taking a positive Functionalist view of the work-impulse — its associations with self-fulfilment and so on ...' She tapped the paper. 'However, there is relatively little here on aspects of Alienation. Is it not possible, for example, that your 'fulfilment' is an illusion? A capitalist construct ...'

Barbara's heart sank. Alienation? Illusion? She might be able to manage the odd 'Yes' or 'No', but something more cogent seemed to be required here.

Help came from an unexpected quarter. Grebe-Fish burst into the discussion. 'No, no. That is complete, neo-Marxist nonsense.'

All heads swivelled. Doctor Ülfsdottir's eyes blazed at the invader. 'I'll thank you, sir, to wait your turn.'

'I'm sorry, madam. But I cannot sit here while you pose such leading — indeed, *misleading* — questions ...'

‘Misleading! Perhaps I should remind you, Doctor Grebe-Fish ...’

Swords were unsheathed. Language sharpened.

‘... fallacious ...’, ‘irrelevant ...’

Dark versus Light. Right versus Left. Hot versus Cold. The individual standpoints switched with bewildering speed.

‘... tendentious ...’, ‘arrogant ...’, ‘absurd ...’

Barbara sat speechless and grateful for the diversion. Her head turned to and fro at the bombardment raging along the table.

‘... spurious ...’, ‘sterile ...’, ‘simplistic ...’

Mullis leaned back in his seat, shrinking from the warriors’ line of sight. At all costs, he must avoid being asked for an opinion.

‘... perverse ...’, ‘petty ...’, ‘pedestrian ...’ The original point was long forgotten, fresh hobby horses were mounted for the charge.

The Chair raised an eyebrow, a finger, a hand — all to no avail. She stood and whirled her arms. ‘Please, please! ...’

‘No, no ... Let me show you ...’ Grebe-Fish strode to the white-board. With a blue felt-tip pen, he drew four boxes. ‘Look. A simple chain ... I assume you are familiar with Kleinsdorf’s notation ... Alpha-1, Gamma-2 and so on ...’ He added Greek symbols to his boxes.

Úlfsdottir pounced upon a red pen. ‘Don’t talk to me about Kleinsdorf. A complete idiot. As I told him last week in Minsk ...’ She drew a red E and a set of arrows to press down on the blue boxes. ‘There, do you follow ... E for Environment. Omni-present.’

‘Yes, yes. But ...’

‘Surely you can see ...’

The Externals wielded their felt-tips like broad-sword and lance. Across the board, symbols stretched and lines looped. Arguments encircled one another. No surrender. They waved their arms and wrangled. They bickered over the eraser. They were in their element.

Barbara looked at the Chair and at her squiggle. It seemed even more inconsequential. The Chair muttered an apology and made for the white-board. She clutched at elbows and tried to impose herself on the situation. ‘Please, please ... we have a *viva* to conduct.’

The Externals turned upon her. ‘Not now,’ snapped Grebe-Fish. ‘Go away, woman,’ thundered Ûlrike, daughter of Ûlf the Axehead.

It was all too much. Its authority challenged, the Chair folded and became D. Trubshawe-Lee, small grey person with silly battleship hair. She burst into tears and ran from the room.

Mullis sprang after her, fang in hand, squeaking sympathy.

Barbara thought she might as well follow. But maybe ... She leaned across the table for a quick look at the List. She turned the sheet and scanned the last column ... Ah, yes ... Her blank was pencilled ‘?’ Checking the action around the white-board, she took up the Chair’s red pen and inked in the magic cipher: ‘2.1’. No point in being greedy.

Now for the tricky bit. Deep breath; purposeful strides to the white-board. Into the mine-field; into the Valley of Death. Barbara stuck out her only protection — the List — and pointed at the bottom. ‘Sign here, please.’

The belligerents scarce drew breath. With swords of Dayglo Pink and Green, they slashed their marks on the page and returned to the white-board. Fresh armour was donned, new stratagems deployed.

On her way out, Barbara shoved the List into Miss ffolkes’ hand. ‘They’re a bit busy just now. You’re waiting for this, I believe.’

‘Of course,’ snapped the dragon. ‘The Exam Board meets at 2 o’clock.’ She turned to the keyboard and opened her sacred spreadsheet. Her fingers tapped and, having tapped, moved on. Clearly, as Omar K. might have put it, neither Examiner’s wit, nor Senate’s tears could now wash away a single mark.

Barbara floated down the stairs and out to the College garden. Inexplicably, she found a Bourbon clenched in her hand. Breaking it into pieces, she cast them upon the lawn. Birds dropped from the roof and fought over the brown fragments.

Upstairs, behind the Dean’s lighted window, the two figures were still locked in arm-flailing dispute. Beside her, the birds pecked and scuffled on the grass.

‘*C’est la vie,*’ thought Barbara, ‘they’re all at it.’ And she strode away to do something about Life and the Inner Cities.



BLACKPOOL IN BLANES

G Clark Robertson

It was a wet and windy night when Jimmy hurried out of the rain into the warmth of his local for a well-earned drink. He'd spent most of his Sunday looking through a mountain of holiday brochures with his wife, discussing, rejecting and re-discussing endless, possible destinations — and still not getting anywhere fast. He'd had enough.

His children had thrown in their tuppenceworth, wrongly assuming that their father had pots of dosh that would pay for any holiday of their dreams and choice. Jimmy had wished he'd been as poor as a church mouse, allowing him to inform his demanding spouse and off-spring that he couldn't afford to take them anywhere.

Jimmy was glad it was Jaime who was behind the bar. He was always prepared to chat to the customers. This helped him to improve his English and teach him more about the people and their somewhat, peculiar customs and drinking habits.

JIMMY: A pint of best bitter, please, Jaime — I'll have the usual. Would you like one, yourself?

JAIME: Not now, thank you very much.

JIMMY: It's unusually quiet in here, tonight. Rain to blame.

Jaime, d'you remember the last time we spoke? You said you were going back to sunny Spain. Any word, yet, of when it's to be?

JAIME: Soon...end of next week — I hope...maybe after. Will you and family be there for holiday, again?

JIMMY: Not bloody likely! You can stuff your Costas. I've finally realized, after all those years, that they're a load of old rubbish! Take away the sun and sand and what have you got: nothing, sweet nothing. I tell you this: English resorts do things a lot better.

JAIME: Why you say that?

JIMMY: Here's why. It's time that all true Brits took a stand and went elsewhere. Let them forget the bad experiences that go under the misnomer of Summer holidays in Spain.

I'm not getting at you Jaime. It's just that I'm fed up with being one of the herded masses. Get it.

JAIME: You still not give good reasons. There's nothing wrong with my country.

JIMMY: O no. Then hear this, Pal. Your weather is far too hot — blistering at times. I hate sunburn.

I detest those horrible, high-rise hotels. Tables in the dining room are often laden with dirty dishes. Food is usually lukewarm half-way through breakfast, because some clown forgot to switch on the hotplates. Teenage swimmers come in from the pool, dripping wet, and queue up for lunch and dinner. Who wants to see half-naked bodies during meal times? The...

JAIME: Please, Jimmy. Hold it for one moment. Many of your complaints are made against your own people.

JIMMY: The sullen barmen and waitresses are Spanish ...

JAIME: ... and the time share touts and lager louts are all British. Holiday resorts in every country tend to attract the wrong people. Not so?

JIMMY: OK. But there's more to it than that: airport delays, missing buses, expensive taxis and ... and hassle! Hassle, hassle and more hassle! I've had enough!

Jimmy failed to recognize that the frustration from the day's events was now beginning to be off-loaded onto Jaime.

JAIME: Trouble with you British is your fascination for car, sun and the need to impress people back home.

I see it in Spain. After breakfast, you all walk around streets in the heat looking in shop windows, getting your new holiday clothes all sweaty. You wish for car ... same every day ... expression on man's face tells me full story. How you say it again: 'he's bored out of his skull'.

JIMMY: I know what you mean. I've done it often — too often.

JAIME: Man has usually drunk too much, night before. Throat is sore from smoking and karaoke. I sick of hearing good song, 'My Way' being murdered by boozy, would-be baritones. Our man longs for lunch-time English beer with pie, beans and chips, taken in the coolness of Tommy's Bar. Then man has to go sleep in afternoon. Sensible. We Spanish do same.

JIMMY: Often there is nothing to do, because the hotel is out of town. We spend the morning writing postcards.

JAIME: What do British really want from a Spanish holiday? Tell me. You are all looking for Blackpool in Blanes, Filey in Fuengirola, or Torquay in Torremolinos.

JIMMY: That's a load of bull!

JAIME: In your haste to 'get away from it all', you end up with package you don't really want. By the middle of second week, you want to 'get back to it all'.

The man is missing his car and his golf; his wife is tired; the children want to get home to their friends. What a waste of money!

JIMMY: True — but what else is there to do in Spain? If you were in my place, what would you do, Jaime? Help me. Please suggest something.

JAIME: OK. The basis of any holiday is good living.

Read up during Winter months. Where would you like to stay and what would you like to visit?

Know the foods you think the family would enjoy eating. Sample Spanish wines, at home, so that you know what to buy on holiday.

Make travelling as easy as possible.

JIMMY: You are painting a beautiful picture. I can feel all the hassle melting away. Carry on, Amigo. You'll get me back to Spain — if you try hard enough.

JAIME: Ensure the children enjoy it. You can tell as many lies as you like about holiday, but it's the young ones' views that people, at home, will believe.

JIMMY: Yes. I've been caught out before on that one.

Jimmy was enjoying his exchanges with Jaime and was starting to unwind. He ordered up another pint and waited for the barman to return from serving the courting couple in the corner. He'd had a brief chat with them, then thought about how he would handle Jimmy and what to say to him.

JAIME: Right, Sir. I've got suggestion for you to think about. Try this. You live south of M4 and own People Carrier. Take ferry to Northern Spain, then drive to your rented villa near Granada, Toledo, Cordoba or

Seville. Wonderful cities! Just imagine: you will have a swimming pool all to yourselves. The children will love it.

Hire a maid, who happens to be an excellent cook and reliable child minder.

Employ a local student, who speaks good English. He will be chauffeur and guide — maybe play golf with you as well.

You will soon get to meet the people. You will make many, good friends. Spain is rich in culture.

JIMMY: I'm excited. We could learn Spanish from the guide. I only know how to ask for a beer — and a rum and coke.

JAIME: I would be willing to help you fix it up. When would you be going?

JIMMY: Terrific! First three weeks in August.

JAIME: That's when I'm on holiday.

JIMMY: Then how about being my driver and guide? We know each other and I'll pay you well.

JAIME: Thank you, but no. I have made my plans.

JIMMY: And what will you be doing?

JAIME: I will be driving back to this country with two men friends. We will stay in Bexhill for a few days.

JIMMY: Bexhill! Why Bexhill?

JAIME: There are several English language schools along the South Coast. Many of our girls attend during Summer months. They are a lot easier to catch when they're away from their mothers.

JIMMY: Sounds good to me. What then?

JAIME: A few days in London, sightseeing. We will eat in the excellent Spanish restaurants in the city.

JIMMY: What's wrong with our fish and chips?

Where will you be heading after London? There is lots to see and do in my country. I would be willing to point you in the right direction.

JAIME: We drive to North of England and spend one week in a holiday camp.

We will sample your culture: steak and kidney pie, cool beer and we certainly hope to meet many of your friendly, blonde-haired girls.

We'll pray for a cool breeze and light drizzle to make us forget home.

JIMMY: You're making it sound very interesting. I would join you — if the wife would let me away on my own. Maybe all of us should holiday in our own countries from now on and save ourselves a lot of money ...

JAIME: ... and hassle.

JIMMY: Come to think of it: it's not such a good idea.

We once spent a rainy fortnight in a cold, dingy flat in the North of England. My wife would throttle me if I put her through that again.

What you have suggested in Spain sounds just great and you have offered to help me plan it.

Would you like a drink now, Jaime?

JAIME: Yes, thanks. I'll have a half of bitter. Jimmy.

JIMMY: Make mine a rum and coke this time, please, Jaime. It reminds me of Spain.

By now, Jimmy was sold on Jaime's idea and was keen to get home to tell his wife all about it. He was pondering in his mind's eye: sitting around his own rented pool watching his wife and children splashing about in uncrowded sublimation; eating and drinking the Spanish fare prepared by the lovely, local maid; golfing with the student; enjoying many musical evenings in the bars. Jaime studied Jimmy's face, wondering if he'd sown the seeds of something spectacular.

JIMMY: I've been thinking about what you've proposed, Jaime. If I follow it up, I'll have to start practising for their karaoke nights. Listen to this: 'Grana-da, I'm falling under your spe-ell'.

JAIME: O no! Stop it! You British haven't a clue, have you.



Chairman: Liz Rowlands, 19 Arkley Court, Maidenhead, SL6 2YR
Treasurer: Terry Rickson, 48 Marlborough Road, Ashford, TW15 3QA
Secretary: Mike Boland, 11 Boxtree Lane, Harrow Weald, HA3 6JU

PW 2000

The Poetry Workshop's annual Weekend get-together took place this year at the University of Birmingham. The programme followed the usual pattern of poetry readings, workshop and impromptu writing sessions, talks (on Jorge Luis Borges and Christina Rossetti) and an imaginative and entertaining Quiz. A mini-competition with the theme of "Rain" had been set prior to the Weekend. The three equal winners were Marjorie Bradley, Liz Rowlands and Bill Douglas

A full report of the Weekend, plus the three winning poems in the mini-competition, will appear in the next PW Newsletter

AGM

The AGM was held during the Birmingham Weekend. The meeting accepted reluctantly the resignation of Howard Frost as Chairman. Liz Rowlands was elected as his replacement.

Several important and radical decisions concerning the future of the Poetry Workshop were made. Details of these and the rest of the proceedings will be published in the Autumn Newsletter.

The Bill Barnes Poetry Competition

The closing date for the annual Bill Barnes Poetry Competition, open exclusively to PW members, has been extended to 30 September 2000. Terry Rickson has agreed to judge the entries this year.

Entries are £1 per poem, maximum of three poems. Please send all entries to Mike Boland (address at the top of this page), who will also provide full rules on request. Please make any cheques payable to The Society of Civil Service Authors Poetry Workshop Account.

Subscriptions

Subscription fee for 2001 will remain unchanged yet again at £3 for Society members. For this small sum, membership of the Poetry Workshop gives you:

- three lively Newsletters each year
- the chance of publication in “Waves”
- access to Postal folios
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Competition
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend at Birmingham University

If anyone is interested in joining the Poetry Workshop, please contact Mike Boland at the above address, who will be pleased to provide further details.

Dates

30 September 2000	Autumn Newsletter
30 September 2000	Closing date, Bill Barnes Competition
30 November 2000	Winter Newsletter
15-17 July 2001	PW Weekend



POETRY PLEASE!

I felt very honoured to be asked to take over the editing of Poetry Pages following the sad death of John Ward and I will endeavour to be as balanced in my judgement as he was in his editorship. Without poems though, my hands are tied — no poems — no poetry pages, so please send me your poems for publication on your pages. I will be happy to consider long poems providing they do not exceed forty lines (one page) but I would also like short poems which can be grouped together, like haikus, tankas, limericks and sonnets — rhymed or unrhymed, or even concrete poetry and will welcome anything innovative or avant garde.

Poems will be held in reserve for a year unless you request an early return with the customary s.a.e.

Joyce Thornton
Poetry Editor

AFTER SINGAPORE

Chris Heyworth

(In honour of E. W. Swanton and his comrades in 18th Division)

Conveyed by clanking cattle trucks, out of
Singapore, up the sweaty spine of Malaya
To the railhead in Siam, from there we were
Force marched too many, far too many days
To and into the jungle wilderness, that
Heart of Man's darkness where, they spat —
Their railway must be built to snake
Beside the River Kwai.

Our misery, it might be thought, was so
Complete, and yet you find a limit to unhappiness
Where men are thrown together in misfortune,
As we discovered midst that fearful march.
No sooner were the men enclosed by jungle,
Greens and yellows, hanging sage and dun,
Than it began to pelt, raining cats and dogs:
Instantly drenched to the skin, but cooler,
We slipped and slithered on, forever on and on.

The heat, such sapping, fearful heat,
We'd barely borne with ugly curses, but
In the downpour and spontaneously, each man
Began to sing: flattened hair, streaming faces, shirts sodden,
But our spirits rose as cheerful souls we grew.
Did each of us, soaked, feel, somehow, he was back home?

And on the blank face of our unparticular guard,
Mystification fearful: beyond his comprehension,
As he was beyond ours. Survival glimmered in me.
I hope all of us grew up, becoming less self concerned,
And can pass it on, heart of our inheritance:
Humbled humanity is what we slogged our guts out for.

SUMMER RAIN

Terry Rickson

Through the open window comes
the gentle steady cadence
of summer rain.
A pungence of lawn refreshed,
drifts into the room
and the scent of old roses.
Carnations, like drops of blood,
splash the garden path with red,
in cruel beauty.
Beneath the window,
a watering-can drums to a light tattoo.

HAIKU

Joyce Thornton

My intended path
is strewn with dead leaves. Poems
I've torn from my book.

RAIN

Anthony Roberts

Whenever I get out my deck-chair
And sit in the garden again,
I very soon need to retire
Indoors for it's started to rain.

Whenever I hear the forecasters'
Bland optimistic refrain,
I'm always inclined to believe that
Tomorrow there will be no rain.

So I go for a walk in the country
Not taking my car or a train,
With no mackintosh, and discover
I'm soaked by a deluge of rain.

A long stay in bed with a headache
And torture by rheumatoid pain
Convinces me at last that I'll never

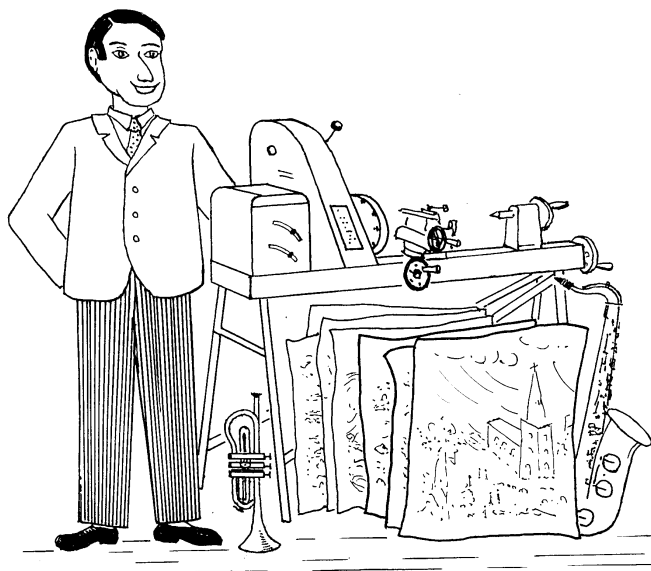
Repeat going out in the rain.

ALWAYS ARCHIE

A short story set 50 years ago in war-time Britain.

Written and illustrated by G. E. C. Webb

It was during the last War. Archie Bamford was one of those people who are good at anything they turn their hands to. Of the five machinists at the small engineering works on the edge of Southampton where he worked, it was always Archie who could be relied on to find an ingenious method to produce a particularly difficult piece of work.



Precision engineered parts (for a purpose not disclosed) had to be made to drawings, at a high rate of turn out.

Hours of work were long and Archie missed his motorbike for which, being war-time, no petrol could be obtained. It meant a long cycle ride to his home village at the end of the day.

Archie was a do-it-yourself man before the term DIY had

been invented. In spite of long working hours and firewatching duties, he found time for a variety of things including home decorating. He was also a hoarder, and although paint was in extremely short supply in the shops, he always had a number of partly used tins from pre-war to draw upon and make interesting colour mixes.

His wife Molly was a great help in this and favoured bright and unusual colours. “Make it cheerful to look at. It helps things along,” she was fond of saying. Her war time job was arduous to say the least. She was employed in a small new factory, no more than twenty minutes walk from home, where she did “something to do with rubber boots”.

The fact that the work was hard on the hands, worried her, for she also gave piano lessons to several local children. On Saturday nights, too, both

she and her husband played in the dance band that performed in the village hall, where the band's immense popularity among the dancers was largely due to the inspired leadership of Archie on tenor saxophone.

Of late, his performance was augmented by an occasional chorus on a wonderfully restored cornet that he had rescued, a battered mess, from bomb wreckage. All night presence at his factory on firewatching duties, allowed access to his lathe and other equipment. A miraculous straightening of several sections of tubing plus a new piece here and there, together with newly made valves, brought it to a state that could hardly have been called a musician's dream, but functionally was probably almost as it had been before the bomb. Archie was an engineer and craftsman of no small ability, and all these things were by no means a full measure of his skills.

The village, at that time, was famed for its Art Society, and membership extended to a radius as far as twelve miles around. The quality of work by the eighty-four members varied considerably, but talent certainly was not lacking. Among the variety of work shown at the monthly meetings, Archie Bamford's water colour landscapes and his pen sketches were always highly acclaimed.

Many members were able to attend only infrequently, owing to the many war-time duties pressing upon them. Long working hours, Home Guard, firewatching, first aid and the host of other things meant that free time was an infrequent luxury. Even so, ten or a dozen members usually turned up at meetings, bringing between them, sometimes as many as fifteen pictures, some of them the work of other members who could not be present.

Two regular attenders were the Marsh sisters, two ladies of mature years. Although twins, they were quite unlike each other. Mildred, the leader, of very ample proportions, was always ready with an opinion, given with an air of superiority. She would call upon tall, bean-pole Aggie to support her views. Timorous Aggie always did so.

On one occasion, a quite pleasing picture of a local scene, with the village street, cottages and the church was being shown. "What do you think, Aggie?" shop keeper Joe Collins asked, looking forward to what he knew would happen.

Poor Aggie stammered something unintelligible and looked at her sister. "Not bad," Mildred said, patronisingly. "Recession of tones, though ...

The church there ... Hmm. Perspective. Oh! Dear! What do you think Aggie?”

“Yes, Mildred ... Recession of tones ... AND the perspective too.”

“Of course, it’s merely photographic,” Mildred further opined. It was as well that the artist responsible was not present. Nobody in the Society could remember seeing a picture by either sister. When asked about their activities, they would give members to understand that there was a picture almost finished. “Maybe next meeting,” Mildred would say. And Aggie would nod her head and echo, “Maybe next meeting.”

Following Mildred’s “merely photographic” remark, talk turned to surrealism. Several members present admitted that this was something they did not understand. But Mildred, it seemed (and as might have been expected), was well versed in that branch of art. Then Molly Bamford spoke up. “Archie’s done a good surrealist painting,” she said.

There were murmurs of interest around the room and Archie looked at his wife in surprise. “Alright, Archie,” she said. “I know you didn’t mean to talk about it just yet, but you have almost finished it, haven’t you?”

Archie managed a non committal smile.

Once outside the hall and on the way home, he turned to his wife. “Whatever were you talking about in there? Surrealist painting?”

Molly laughed. “You’ve already done it. It’s on the back of our garden shed door.”

Archie stopped still. Then he burst out laughing. “You mean all the different colours where I’ve worked out my brushes from time to time? Oh! I couldn’t ... Could I?”

“Why not?” Molly replied. “I can’t wait to hear Mildred explaining it to Aggie.”

At the next meeting, no fewer than nineteen were present, including a young man in the uniform of an R.A.F. corporal, who Mildred introduced as her nephew who was on leave.

Archie’s painting — The Shepherd’s Dream, he called it — was standing against the wall. Hinges and fittings had been removed, screw holes puttied up and painted over with the dregs of the same orange paint that graced the Bamford’s lounge. Everybody viewed it but was loath to

admit to not understanding it. After all. Archie was good at everything. It must be good!

“Good brush work,” somebody volunteered, feeling that this was safe ground. Timidly at first, others ventured a word or two until with gathering confidence, everybody seemed to be anxious to get into the act. “Those orange strokes now, just overlapping the green.” “That black. So powerful! Then it vignettes off, really skilfully.” “And just look at that blue! Just sort of peeping through.” “And the pink. So delicate yet with such powerful strokes.” “Yes, and white overlapping, so delicate, like morning mist.”

And so it went on for some time, Archie and Molly sitting back and struggling to hide their amusement, until Mildred interrupted to say that Nephew Herbert in civil life, was a commercial artist! A professional! The words struck them like a blow. A professional! Archie would be unmasked. What had started as a joke among friends was going terribly wrong.

Herbert began to speak: all about shepherds (and their flocks), hurdles (to be surmounted), sheep (to be counted), folds, and much else. Archie sat and listened. Any moment now, he thought, he would be unmasked. Herbert drawled on to a final climax. “A most interesting piece of work, but there is something about it that nobody seems to have noticed.”

This was it, Archie thought.

Herbert looked across at Archie. “You’ve been holding out on them, haven’t you?”

“Alright. I admit ...” Archie began.

Herbert held up a restraining hand. “Say no more,” he said. “I’ve had an excellent evening, and thank you all for having me. And the picture ... Wonderful. Just fancy. Nobody noticed ... Nobody noticed. IT’S UPSIDE DOWN! Good night!”

Solution to ‘Literary Works’ crossword from Issue 150
compiled by Karen Lowe

ACROSS 1 Tinker 4 Sailor 7 Ace 8 Wit 9 Disuse 11 Mary 14 Sis
16 Lambs 17 Rye 19 Wed 21 Inter 22 Map 24 Corn 26 Tailor 27
Vet 28 Spy 29 Rarely 30 Scorer

DOWN 1 Trades 2 Nurses 3 Race 4 Seam 5 Lawyer 6 Rattle 10
Soldier 12 Austria 13 Smith 15 Ice 18 Yea 19 Weaver 20 Doctor
22 Miller 23 Porter 25 Nasty 26 Toys

The SATURDAY of the Alumni Weekend.

Ann Pegler

Do you remember the smell of your primary school? Milk, chalk — and something else; something that made one feel good; made one feel comfy? We're all in this together smell; it's raining outside, but we're all cosy and warm in here? It can't be found in other schools, of course — no, just in our own.

Well, I smelt it again, last week. My daughter and I were invited to an alumni weekend at Greenwich University, and there it was — that smell. Was the feeling evoked one of belonging, and therefore, safety? Whatever, everything seemed to feel just right. I read things that made no sense, but I fully understood them. I recognised people that I'd never met before, and, regardless of age, race, and all that stuff, we all spoke the same language. Yes, we all spoke the same language.

The tutors, who, anyway, had always been so really, very nice now treated us as equals. Equals? Us? I wish, I wish! The thing was, we were no longer their aggravating, pestering, time consuming students; we all wore mufti.

Anyway, we strolled around looking at this and that; new equipment, future projects, the Stephen Lawrence Gallery, fresher's work, and so on, and finally found ourselves in the Post-grad room. It was an unspoken agreement between us that this would be left to last, because, we were longing to see what was on offer, and wanted to take our time in reading it, sniffing it, feeling it, and completely soaking ourselves in it. So there we were, and as my daughter made off to the Gender section, I saw it. There it was; a lovely little booklet entitled, *The MA in Literature and Criticism*. Well, I was knee deep in this stuff when I felt myself being watched. I looked up.

“Found something to interest you?” asked a familia, unknown to me tutor.

“Oh, this is gorgeous,” I whispered. I don't know why I whispered.

“But —?” he queried.

“Oh, you know — £2,400 each, and then we still have to eat.”

“Ah!” he'd heard it all before. “Try to find a sponsor,” he urged, “but don't try the Government; would be sheer waste of time.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t,” I assured him, “not at my age. That’s for the youngsters.”

“Not even them,” he sighed.

Well, he let me keep the booklet, although I knew I’d just torment myself by reading it over and over, but there!

A lovely barbecue in the campus courtyard followed, where we both enjoyed succulent chicken legs, whilst trying not to drip grease down our sappy, but trendy T shirts that bore pictures of Irish writers. And then — that was it for Woolwich, because a mini-bus was waiting to take us along to the Maritime campus at Greenwich.

The Maritime Uni. is situated alongside the river Thames, and housed in the Queen Anne Court. We were shown around this magnificent building, and found that, although still in its original state outside, the inside has been completely transformed. It was explained, however, that everything new could be lifted out without any damage to anything, or any upset to anyone.

The Uni. had also been given permission to show us around all of the old Naval College, so we saw the Painted Hall, the Chapel of St Peter and St Paul, and there could have been more, but we ran out of time. A quick look at the Dreadnought Library, and promising ourselves to visit again soon, we rushed off home to decent ourselves for the dinner/dance that night.

The evening event was held in the Trafalga Tavern, which is five minuets away from the Maritime Uni. Upstairs was a large room laid out for our meal, and just to the side of this was a small bar; this room looks right out onto the river. This was so lovely. All was quiet on the water. Oh, joy! Feelings swelled within me, and words filled my head, but — where, oh where was my notebook and pencil? “Oh, don’t let this depth of feeling slip away. Must grasp the moment! Get it down — get it down now.”

No, we were there to mix, so mix we did. And — it was all great, but — I have to say, the only smells there were those of our noshy food, and the sparkling river. Yes, all very nice, but not that smelly thing that I was on about. That as I said, was only at Woolwich, where we’d studied.

The funny thing is though, no one had used chalk to write with or given out any milk. Oh, the mind, (and the nose?), is a funny thing.

The only disappointment that day was that there could have been a lot more post-grads there. So — where are you all? Even Colin (Fancy — your friend and mine), was noted for his absence. Never mind, perhaps they’ll all attend next year. The call of academia can be very loud and persistent, and cannot be ignored for long. Even we did not go to the Union disco, on the Friday evening, or the Dome on the Sunday, as had been arranged by the Uni. We promised ourselves that we shall go to the Dome another day.

This means, of course, that we still have it to look forward to, and, if it's as enjoyable as our Alumni Saturday, then we'll be more than satisfied, for I can truly say, we both had a marvellous day. I shall, I know, remember my first Alumni with much pleasure, and continue to remember my old campus with sweet nostalgia.

‘Old students never die, they just lose their faculties.

READ, WRITE AND BE PUBLISHED

Val Whitmarsh

An enjoyable way to read, write and be published is to review newly published books.

I became a reviewer nearly ten years ago with books written by members of this Society and the Society of Women Writers and Journalists. Now I review for the Historical Novel Society's magazine *Solander*.

I don't get paid. I get to keep the novels and what I like with them — give them away, sell them, or put them on the shelf to read again. I have only once rung my editor to say that a book was unreadable, and then I'd tried it out on my daughter and son-in-law first.

Reviews must be fair, and you need to keep in mind that even if you don't like the novel, another reader might. A flavour is required, not a synopsis, and, of course, you must never give away the ending! If you are like me and tear out reviews from newspapers, keeping them until you can afford to buy, you can appreciate that cravenly praising a book which is not worth £20-odd does your readers no favours. A bland review is pointless, and a vicious personal attack on an author unacceptable. It is always a challenge to get across your opinion within a strict word count.

Publishers do read reviews. A 'highly recommended' can bring a message of thanks. They also use your words for their own purposes! I once reviewed a novel in hardback. Some months later, when it came out again in paperback, I was amused to read part of my original review heading up the new press release thus: 'I enjoyed the well researched theatrical background immensely. Effortlessly readable.' The publisher had not included my previous sentence, which had read: 'I'm not fond of sexually explicit set-pieces but that is a purely personal preference and this is a deluxe bodice ripper.'

So if you fancy becoming a reviewer, look around and put your name forward; be professional (nicely typed double-spaced copy) and always keep to your deadlines!

[For further details of the Historical Novel Society, contact Richard Lee, Marine Cottage, The Strand, Starcross, Devon EX6 8NY.]

CREATIVE WRITING

Elvira Bridges

Always having a yearning to write, my first efforts as a small girl at school were, as I now realise, childish scribblings. Though one story stays in my memory. My tale of a small band of children, led of course by me, find hidden treasure after putting wicked pirates to flight. It ended, ‘Breathlessly I arrived home, tired but happy.’ I remember clearly my feeling of pride having invented that closing line. Who’s heard of plagiarism at seven years old?

I admit I still like to think it was my original, after all someone must have thought of it first!

A busy life, time filled as wife and mother followed, until many years later I had the opportunity to join the WEA, Creative Writing course in Harrow.

It has been a source of joy, inspiration and learning. Having had three tutors, each good but quite different in their methods, has given me food for thought ... especially in the rule of not using clichés!

We meet locally every Monday morning for two hours. Our teacher gives us several subjects. These don’t have to be adhered to but are often a trigger for stories, poems and even novels. We read our work aloud and the tutor gives his criticism or otherwise, then throws it open for discussion. The class at present numbers approximately 16.

When I started, I had little confidence in my efforts, stuttering and shaking, mumbling and speeding through the work. My self-assurance has grown over the years, thanks to the professional teaching and the chance to throw ideas between fellow aspiring writers. I’ve made many friends in the class over the past sixteen years and I never stop learning. So my advice to anyone who is not sure of joining a writing course is ... go for it!



ARTICLE FOLIO

At a meeting in May the Committee decided that a postal folio for article writers might interest members. If enough people respond to this note I shall organise such a

folio. The guidelines would be very similar to those adopted by Terry Rickson for the Short Story Folio i.e. about 6 writers to a folio, up to 7 days for perusal/criticism/sending on, manuscripts up to 1500 words, postage payable by each member when despatching, etc. This means that, ideally, manuscripts would take 6 weeks to return to the author, who hopefully will have the next one ready.

Would any interested members write to me at the address inside the front cover please.

Joan Hykin

CROSSWORD

LITERARY BIRDS

Compiled by Karen
Lowe

ACROSS

2 Barham's bird of
Rheims (7)

7 Chanticleer's
mate? (3)

8 Bird 'blown
about the sky' acc
to Tennyson (4)

9 Russian author(7)

12 She's an apt tool
for 13d! (3)

13 Vend (4)

15 Part of bird for
Dicken's

magistrate (4)

18 Beer (3)

20 Evergreen Ms

Compton-Burnett (3)

23 Habitat of birds (3)

24 Number - for finger? (5)

25 Wise resident of Hundred Acre wood (3)

26 ___*shu* Chinese writing - in Kaiser's
hand? (3)

27 Product of 7ac (3)

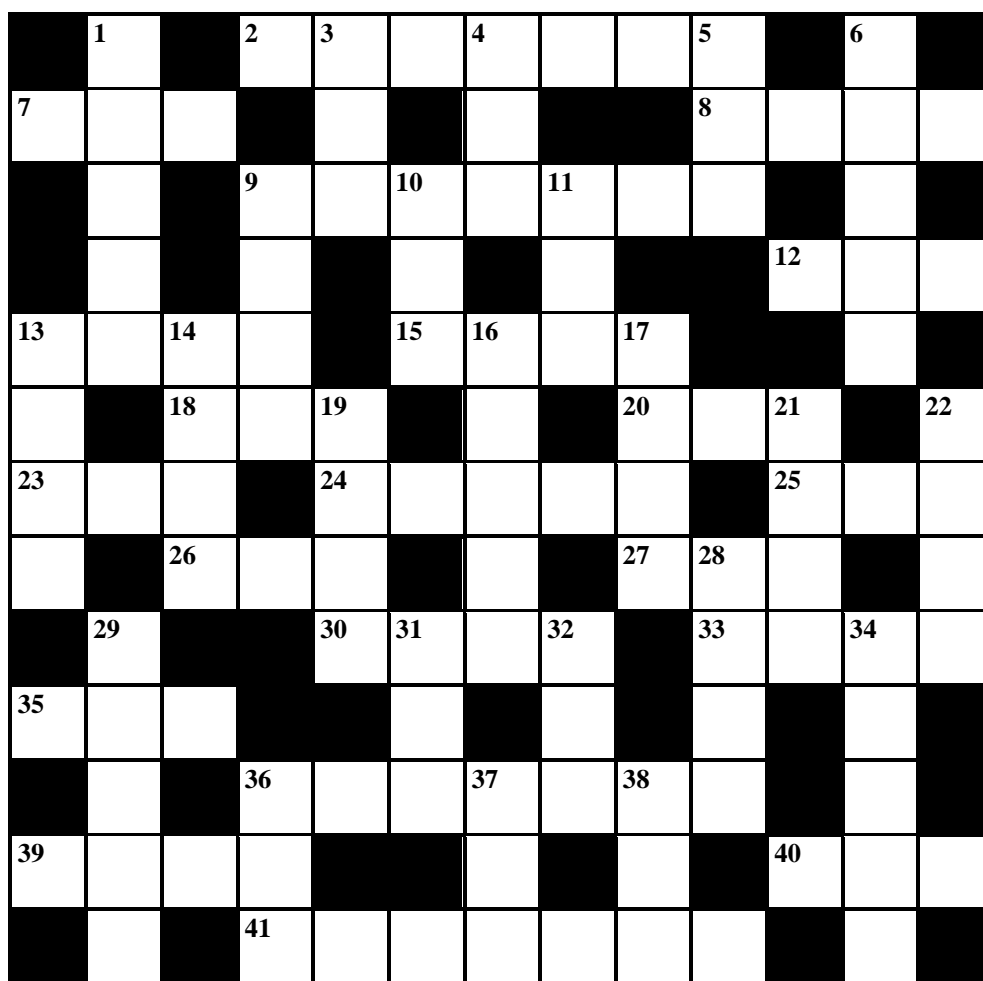
30 Home of 25ac? (4)

33 Get up with 14d (4)

35 Squawking bird (3)

36 Bird it's a sin to kill, acc to Harper Lee (7)

39 Courted by Jupiter as 13d (4)



9 Ring - for a fee! (4)

10 Throw (3)

11 Anderson play with '*sympathy*' (3)

13 Shakespeare - on lake? (4)

14, 33ac Start of Flora Thompson's journey
to Candleford (4,4)

16 This bird's landed, acc to Higgins (5)

17 High flier, maybe red (4)

19 Amend text (4)

21 Bear that's wise? (4)

22 Fly (4)

28 Rum (4)

29 'Nevermore' spoken by Edgar Allan
Poe's bird (5)

31 Sinbad's mythical bird (3)

32 Electronic data interchange (1,1,1)

- 40 Not on! (3)
- 41 Amis & Chuzzlewit akin to 34d? (7)
- DOWN
- 1 Fairytale layers of golden 27d (5)
- 3 Much about nothing acc to 13d! (3)
- 4 Film of 'A Kestrel for a Knave' (3)
- 5 Sardonic - as this bird's neck? (3)
- 6 Birds for Wordsworth's cottage (5)

The Society of Civil Service Authors

Annual Literary Luncheon 2000

AT THE CIVIL SERVICE CLUB

13-15 Great Scotland Yard

Whitehall, LONDON SW1

ON SATURDAY 21st October 2000

Guest Speakers

Alan S. Bell MA FSA, the Librarian of The London Library

Biographer Marina Warner



To: Ethel Corduff
 10 Malcolm Road
 South Norwood
 LONDON SE25 5HG

Please reserve.....places for me at £18.00 each for the Annual Luncheon on 21st October 2000 at the Civil Service Club. I enclose a cheque (*payable to Society of Civil Service Authors*) for..... and SAE for my receipt.

I wish to order.....meals – roast beef as the main dish

I wish to order.....meals – chicken as the main dish

I wish to order.....meals – vegetarian meals – (please say how many)

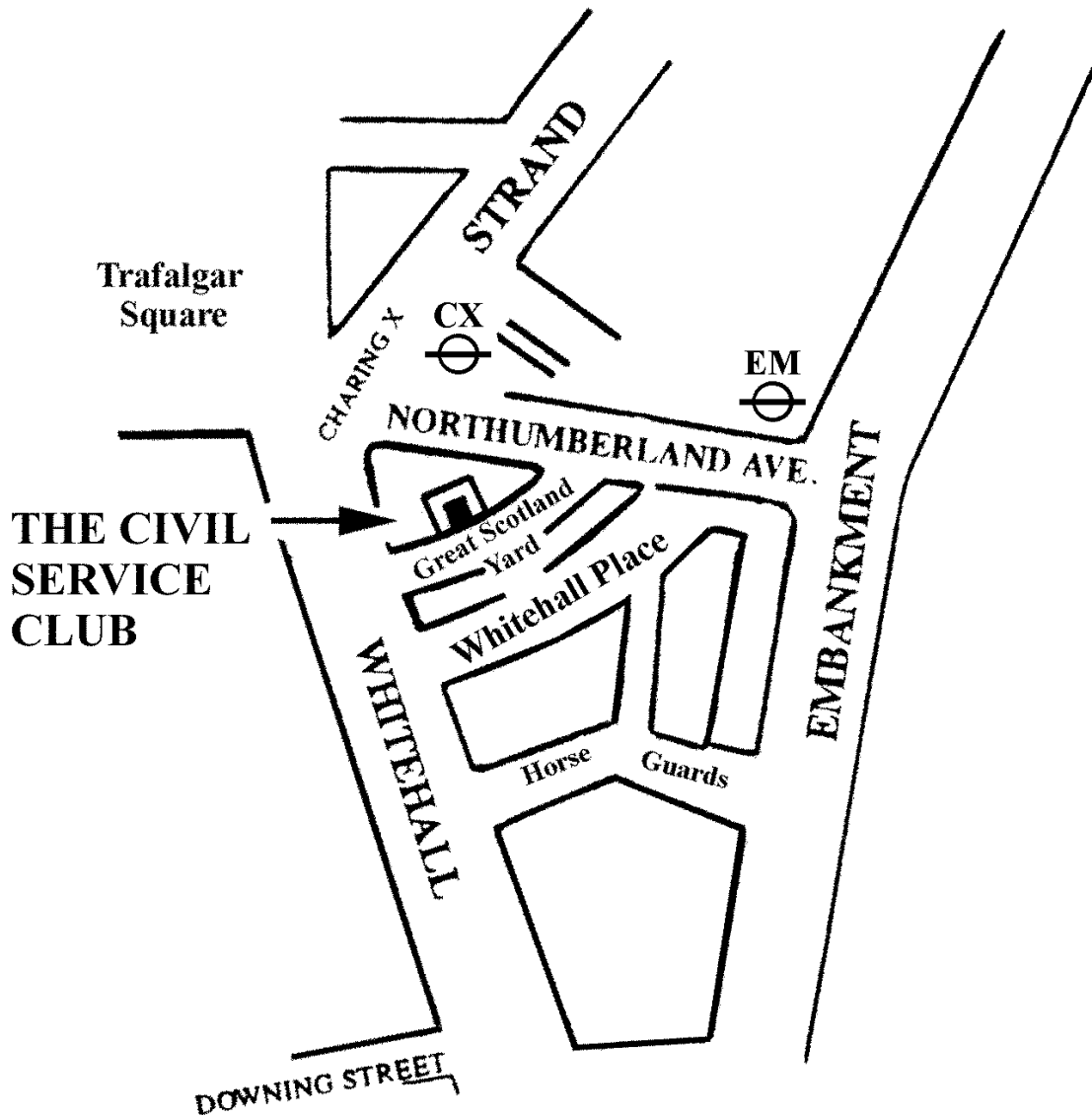
NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

.....

HOW TO GET TO THE CIVIL SERVICE CLUB



Nearest Underground stations:
CX (Charing Cross)
EM (Embankment)