

The Society of Civil Service Authors

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Diary

Membership Renewal

1st January 2001

New Year Party

20th January 2001

The Society's Annual Competitions

Closing Date: 28th February 2001

PW Weekend

15th-17th 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.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Howard W Frost

This will be the last time I address you as Editor of your magazine. For various reasons, including the prospect of a difficult Trade Union election campaign early in the New Year, I tendered my resignation on 21st October.

Since that date I have heard nowt – zilch, nada, nothing, from the Committee in acknowledgement of my letter. So! I hope they received it and are acting on it, or this announcement in the pages of "Author" will come as a bit of a shock.

Now, by way of a confession, I fear I have also failed to announce the wish of our Treasurer Adrian Danson to relinquish office and have been asked to make a bold insertion in this edition of "Author" to that effect, so here goes –

SADLY, OUR TREASURER ADRIAN DANSON NEEDS TO RELINQUISH THE OFFICE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND THE SOCIETY NEEDS TO FIND A REPLACEMENT FOR HIM AS A MATTER OF URGENCY. WOULD ANY MEMBER WILLING TO TAKE THE POST PLEASE CONTACT OUR CHAIRMAN ALAN WATTS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

There, that should do it. Anyone wanting to take over as Editor of "Author" should probably write to the same address. I can assure anyone who is interested, that the job of Editor is interesting and not particularly time consuming, although it has its own "peaks and troughs", which may or may not coincide with the other things going on in your life and which any prospective Editor would do well to discuss with Alan and the Committee.

Having the latest technology at one's disposal is also not a requirement, I only had an old WP at my disposal when I first took on the job, but some means of producing typescript for "Editor's Notes" and to answer correspondence would be an advantage.

A third announcement to make up the set would probably not go amiss at this juncture. There has been discussion as to whether the current name of the Society is a factor which is limiting the growth of membership (does the word "Author" not chime with the writing aspirations of possible new members?).

AT THE NEXT AGM OF THE SOCIETY THEREFORE, A PROPOSAL WILL BE MADE THAT THE NAME OF THE SOCIETY BE CHANGED TO "*THE SOCIETY OF CIVIL AND PUBLIC SERVICE WRITERS*".

The Committee hope that as many members as possible will attend the AGM to debate and vote on the change.

There are other announcements in this edition from Waliye Gondwe about "VINJERU" education concern and "The Dickens Magazine", of which Alan Watts is the Editor, and I commend them both to members.

Right, that's the announcements out of the way, what about the usual "editor's message"?

I don't think I've got a lot to say this time, except to urge you all to "own the muse".

I know I'm preaching to the converted here, but, so often, I talk to people who tell me they would "love to write, but don't think they are good enough". Rubbish!

Of course we all want to be better at our chosen form of writing, BUT, and it is a big but, we'll never get better if we don't start, and continue to, produce work to whatever standard we can manage and learn by our mistakes as we go along.

I never cease to be amazed at the shades of meaning and aptitude of phrase produced by untutored writers willing to "just have a go".

Please continue to inundate my successor with your work, thank you for the reading pleasure you have given me and Season's greetings and best wishes to you all.

Howard



Awayday at Beckenham

The awayday was held at our Chairman Alan Watts and his wife Marjorie's home at Beckenham, which is now only yards from the direct fast Croydon tramlink to Beckenham, on the 9th September. It was a very useful workshop of members work with Alan chairing the group and Marjorie providing the hospitality. We had very helpful advice and discussions on many varied aspects of writing. I count this day as one of the highlights of the year.

Ethel Corduff

Market Information

Gordon E Gompers

The Lecture Trail

My favourite saying is undoubtedly “nothing is all there is”. So many fellow members have agreed with me and no one has disagreed that I can only regard this as an accepted fact. Also the importance of photography, especially to the travel writer, has unquestionably been accepted. Let us think of something else.

Even more than writing or photography I enjoy public speaking. In 1957 I joined Morley College. Among my first classes was one for public speaking. All my life until then I had had an impediment. I realized that the only way to cure it was to do what I feared doing most: face an audience. When I addressed the class I was so scared of making a fool of myself that I just did not. When I led a debate in the packed Holst Room and got a great ovation I knew that I was ready to give talks to outside groups.

At that time I was heavily involved with tape recording. I had had a very successful series on this subject in *The Meccano Magazine* and had been appointed Chief Feature Writer on tapeology for *Hobbies Magazine*. I approached tape recording clubs offering myself as a speaker. I hardly set the Thames on fire. I had three engagements. The most successful was writing on tapeology. The other two were on the work of the audio engineer and effects man in the amateur theatre did not go down too well. I began to give talks on a number of subjects for the Lambethan Society.

When I retired from the Inner London Magistrates’ Courts Service I was immediately made a life member of the Civil Service Retirement Fellowship and soon established myself as a speaker at the various branches. I had some good subjects such as the law and freelance journalism. A lot of successful writers address branches of the Women’s Institute. I have not been so honoured but I have twice been engaged to speak by the local Union of Catholic Mothers. One of the subjects that was specially requested was the Anne Shirley books.

I doubt if having a qualification for Public Speaking really interests groups engaging speakers. I found getting medals worth while because it built up my own self-confidence.

Of course, there are many writers' circles needing speakers. I strongly recommend *The Directory of Writers' Circles*, compiled, edited and published by:

Jill Dick, BA,
Oldacre,
Horderns Park Road,
Chapel-en-le-Frith,
High Peak,
SK23 9SY.

At only £5 it is a good investment for any would be lecturer.



THE SOCIETY'S 2000/2001 ANNUAL COMPETITIONS

Closing Date 28th February 2001

THE LEWIS WRIGHT SHORT STORY COMPETITION

Maximum length 3,000 words. Manuscripts must be typed double-spaced on A4 paper. They will be returned if accompanied by a S.A.E. ENTRY FEE:– £3.50 per story. Judge and prizes to be announced.

THE HERBERT SPENCER POETRY COMPETITION

No restriction on theme or form, but a maximum of forty lines and one poem to a sheet of paper. (Humorous verse might be more suitable for the George Farley Prize.) Entries will be returned if accompanied by a S.A.E. ENTRY FEE:– £2.0 for the first and £1.50 for each subsequent poem. Judge and prizes to be announced.

THE VINCENT BRENNAN TRAVEL ARTICLE

Maximum length 2,000 words. ENTRY FEE:– £2.50 per item submitted. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced on A4 paper. They will be returned if accompanied by a S.A.E. Judge and prizes to be announced.

The following competitions are sponsored competitions and no entry fee is necessary.

THE GEORGE FARLEY PRIZE

For light humorous verse only. Judges – The sponsors – Pamela Farley – Aline Shee – Jean Squires (Daughters of George Farley). The judges look for qualities their father valued in humorous verse – “wit, clever construction, and interesting language”. The entries will be returned if accompanied by a S.A.E. Prize to be announced.

THE PATRICIA CHOWN SONNET

For a traditional sonnet. Entries will be returned if accompanied by a S.A.E. Judge and prize to be announced.

NOTES FOR ENTRANTS TO ALL COMPETITIONS

1 – Entries must be the original work of the entrant and must not have been published at the time of submission. Entries which exceed the stated number of words (or lines) will be disqualified.

2 – JUDGES’ COMMENTS: There can be no guarantee that the judges will be able to comment on every entry (some of the competitions attract over 70 entries) but they will do what they can.

3 – All entries should bear only a pen-name (which should be changed frequently to avoid identification of the entrant) and a separate sheet should be enclosed showing: –

TITLE OF ENTRY PEN-NAME – COMPETITION ENTERED – REAL NAME AND ADDRESS – DEPARTMENT – RETIRED OR EMPLOYED – STAFF OR RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION*.

(*Entirely optional but useful for publicity).

4 – SEND ALL ENTRIES BY THE 28th FEBRUARY 2001 TO: –

The Competition Secretary, R. C. Jeffreys, 186 Lewis Flats, Lisgar Terrace, London, W14 8SQ

(Please note: Entries for the above competitions should be sent to the Competition Secretary (address above). Cartoon quiz entries should be sent to the Editor. No entry forms required for any of these competitions.

R. C. Jeffreys,
Competition Secretary

BRONTË COUNTRY

by Brian Jones

‘An instant they held asunder; and then how they met I hardly saw, but Catherine made a spring, and he caught her, and they were locked in an embrace from which I thought my mistress would never be released alive. He flung himself into the nearest seat, and on my approaching hurriedly to ascertain if she had fainted, he gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog —’

They don’t write passages like that in modern romantic novels. “Wuthering Heights” by Emily Brontë has long been my favourite novel. It is one of the world’s greatest tragic love stories, told with all of Emily Brontë’s vivid imagination and passionate originality. Set in the dramatic landscape of the Yorkshire moors, this poetic masterpiece created two legendary characters: Heathcliff, sullen but dangerously irresistible; and Catherine — a ‘wild, wicked slip’, lovely and untameable.

I have always been curious to understand how a shy, reclusive spinster like Emily Brontë could have written a romance so far from her own painfully limited experiences of life.

For years I have wanted to see the Yorkshire moors and visit the Brontë home and a brief visit to Haworth, West Yorkshire, fulfilled all my expectations.

Haworth is not a pretty, picturesque village but I was not expecting one — it wouldn’t have been appropriate for the Brontë works. The Brontë sisters — Charlotte, Emily and Anne, unlike Jane Austen, didn’t write pretty novels and it is not so surprising that the strongly realistic ‘Jane Eyre’, ‘Wuthering Heights’, ‘Villette’, etc. caused some outrage in the prim and proper 19th century.

Haworth is situated in windy, bracing, semi-rural, industrial surroundings. Visitors will discover that it has one of the steepest high streets in Britain and is full of Victorian character. How the horses and donkeys must have toiled years ago. There are a lot of cobblestones and the high street is lined with brown, gritstone cottages and houses. It doesn’t take a great deal of imagination to people these dwellings with gentlemen in top hats and ladies in bonnets and crinolines. We pass the ‘Black Bull’ inn, a favourite watering hole, of the Alcoholic Branwell Brontë, and then, near the gaunt old church, is the Brontë Parsonage, with churchyard gravestones crowding near on two sides.

A plain Georgian house of two floors, the Parsonage has become the Brontë Society’s Museum. A wrought-iron sign near the entrance shows one of the literary trio — Charlotte, Emily or Anne — writing at a pedestal table. The door that admits visitors once admitted the Brontë family and all their friends — parsons, curates, school-friends, and an occasional literary celebrity.

Imaginatively, there is a noisy hubbub on the threshold, and if one adds the growl of Emily's dog, Keeper, and the fussy attentions of Tabitha, the servant, the past soon takes command. This process is aided by the chief downstairs rooms having been arranged as Mrs Gaskell described them in her biography of Charlotte.

On the right is the parlour where the widowed father Patrick Brontë studied, wrote his sermons, and ate his meals in complete solitude. Some of his belongings are carelessly disposed around the room in a way that suggests he is just about to enter. The dining room, opposite, vividly recalls the three sisters and brother, as children, as they marched around the table in the evenings, reciting some of their little tales and poems, though some of the pictures and furniture here are of a later date. The stone staircase has not materially altered since Patrick Brontë used to stop at the half-landing, on retiring each night, to wind the grandfather clock and tell his children not to stay up too late.

Of the various rooms reached from the stairs perhaps the most nostalgic is the sparsely furnished nursery, later Emily's bedroom. Beneath the wallpaper of this room were found many tiny drawings on the plaster which clearly testify to the imaginative world created for themselves by the little Brontë children. Equally evocative are the Victorian toys found beneath the floor-boards.

Another room contains the Apostles' Cupboard, described in 'Jane Eyre'. Branwell's room is lined with several of his paintings, none of which indicate any great original talent.

The guide book tells us the story of this strange household. The father, Patrick Brontë, was an Irishman who married a Cornish woman. He became rector of Haworth in 1820. His only son, Branwell, was weak and dissolute, and died young of drink and drugs; two daughters died in childhood.

The three remarkable sisters were Charlotte, Emily and Anne. All were highly imaginative, living much in their own fantasy world, bounded by the walls of the dull parsonage. The family was poor, Emily and Anne became governesses; later Charlotte and Emily went to Brussels to study languages. After this, the 'dauntless three' planned to open a school. This was unsuccessful, so the sisters published their collected verses under the name of Bell. Only two copies were sold.

In spite of much adversity the sisters pressed on. Emily wrote her only novel 'Wuthering Heights' and in the same year Anne's novel 'Agnes Grey' appeared. Charlotte's 'Jane Eyre' (written in secret and by candlelight) was an instant and tremendous success.

Unhappily there was little time for rejoicing in the Haworth parsonage, for Branwell and Emily died in 1848; Anne the following year. Charlotte had barely time to complete 'Shirley' and 'Villette' before she passed away, shortly

after marrying her father's curate. Thus, old Patrick Brontë was left to mourn the loss of his children, including the three daughters who had earned lasting fame.

Some Victorian critics condemned the Brontës' works for 'coarseness' and 'grossness'. What shocked their contemporaries was their frank depiction of women's emotions and their needs for happiness and fulfilment. Charlotte suggested that even small, plain and apparently insignificant females, like the governess heroine of 'Jane Eyre' required affection and respect. The Brontës helped to pave the way for the feminists of today.

Just beyond the Parsonage is thirteen miles of moorland, lonely, dark and sombre. Here and there a ruin of a farmhouse or cottage breaks the monotony of the wide expanses. They may well be the original of a place immortalised by Charlotte or Emily.

Two miles away is the Brontë Waterfall, which hardly compares to the famous ones of Austria and America. At its foot is curiously shaped rock known as 'Brontë Chair', this was a well loved spot for the sisters. Nearby is an old stone bridge, known as the 'Brontë Bridge' and spans the Sladen Beck.

There is a track up the moor that leads to the so-called 'Wuthering Heights'. In the old days the moorland valleys were dotted with lonely ancestral homes, whose fierce, unsociable owners were liable to shoot at strangers. Thus a faithful 'Keeper' would be an escort for Emily in her walks up this pathway.

'Top Withins' is the goal of lovers of 'Wuthering Heights'. Here the ground rises to almost 1,400 feet. It is a barren place; half its roof has been blown away by powerful winds, but the view is stunning. According to Brontë experts this ruined farmhouse indicates only the location of 'Wuthering Heights' — High Sunderland Hall, near Halifax (now demolished) was the original. Emily made the building bigger for dramatic purposes, but on a wild and misty day in autumn or winter, it is easy to inhabit it with the entwined ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff.

Not far away, on lower ground, is the well preserved grey stone mansion, Ponden Hall, on which the Thrushcross Grange of Emily's work is based. A tea room is provided for visitors.

Of these local surroundings Charlotte wrote: 'My sister loved the moors — she found in the bleak solitude many and dear delights; and not the least and best loved was liberty. Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils; without it she perished.'

The above is true of all three sisters.

COME BACK MILLS AND BOON ALL IS FORGIVEN

By Elvira Bridges

Bartholomew Worthington's smouldering dark brown eyes were pinpoints of light as he helped the gorgeous blonde to her feet. "I've seen you here before, such a lovely creature, please tell me who you are."

"My name's Clarissa Wedgewood-Smythe."

"How delightful. Are you sure you are all right?"

"Yes, thank you, Mr Worthington. It really wasn't my fault. Really it wasn't."

Clarissa Wedgewood-Smythe's long, thick, lustrous lashes swept her soft cheeks as she lowered her baby blue eyes for a fraction of a second before raising them to Bartholomew. He felt as if he were drowning in the deep pods of violet. He dragged his eyes away from her as he addressed the subject in hand.

Speaking in a soft voice he murmured, "It was an accident waiting to happen, my dear. If you had not been standing where you were and my horse and I were not on the bridle path you wouldn't have been knocked over." He flicked a black curl from his forehead.

"Dear Mr Worthington. It really wasn't my fault," she said again. Wet tears of self pity tumbled down her delicate, child like cheeks. "You do believe that, don't you." Taking a minuscule, delicately decorated, lace trimmed, lawn handkerchief, she dabbed her eyes.

"Of course I do, my dear young lady, or may I call you Miss Wedgewood-Smythe?" He took her tiny fingers in his strong masculine hand.

Blushing, the young woman replied, "Ooh, Mr Worthington." Her blush deepened and she gasped, "You may call me ...". Shyness overcame her and she turned her head away prettily. She tossed her blaze of fair hair, shining in the sunshine and put her hand to her full red lips, "You may call me Clarissa." Dropping her head she lifted her gaze to the handsome man, coquettishly adding, "If you wish."

"Are you crying, Clarissa?" Bartholomew drew her sylph like figure to him. "Please don't cry, I can't bear to see you cry." His strong arms enfolded her, "Are you hurt?"

Gentle, heaving sobs engulfed her, "I am such a silly girl, making all this fuss ... but my arm and here ..." She pointed to her side, "It hurts a little."

"I'm such a brute. Sweetest Clarissa, let me look." Bartholomew drew open her coat. His heart beat a passionate tattoo against his broad chest as he gazed at her. Her voluptuous body cried out to be caressed and Bartholomew was more

than willing. His strong hands wanted to fondle and love the breasts pushing through the thin silk shirt. His body responded to her beauty with an urgency before only hinted at. He'd watched Clarissa Wedgewood-Smythe from afar for months while out riding. He'd wanted to speak to her, wanted to get close to her. She was the most beautiful creature he'd ever seen.

Overwhelmed by desire he felt a lump in his throat which threatened to choke him, "Darling," he whispered breathlessly.

"Please, Mr Worthington."

"Call me Barty."

"What are you doing?"

"Can't you see I love you, dearest Clarissa. I want to take care of you, I want you to be mine for always."

"But ... but ... Mr ... Worth ... Barty, we've only just met." Clarissa hung her head shyly, hardly daring to hope. Here was Mr Bartholomew Worthington, the man of her dreams standing straight and tall before her, the man she'd wanted and loved from afar.

She'd walked out to the bridle path each day, hoping, always hoping for a glance from the man she knew she wanted to spend the rest of her life with. He'd never seemed to notice her, not spared her a glance and now ... at last.

This morning she saw him riding Toby, his noble stallion. As he galloped towards her she 'accidentally' moved near him.

The pain from her arm and body were little compared to the pain of the unrequited love she'd felt for Barty. She rolled the name around her tongue, savouring it. Darling Barty. She now knew he wanted her as much as she'd longed for him. She'd felt his desire as he held her and knew that at last she was his. Not even in her wildest dreams had she thought he would return her love.

Barty ran his fingers through her light, tumbling locks, "Can I hope?" He spoke through lips thick with passion. He gazed hotly into her face for an answer.

She nodded.

He pressed his searching mouth to hers, his body melting in the joy of the moment. "Precious Clarissa, will you marry me?"

"Yes, my darling." Cissy Higginbottom closed her eyes and sighed, dreaming of the mansion on the hill, the stables and the millions that dear Barty had just inherited from his father.

BILLY OR ME

By Julian Baldwin

It was four in the afternoon when the planes flew over and dropped their bombs on the company position. The ground shook and the air filled with dust and earth, sharp hand-sized lumps of twisted steel shrapnel. 'Flying death' they call it, and they're right. I survived only because I was on latrine duty and had to clear the waste from the far huts, close to a small ravine. Far better to be alive and smelling the stink, than being one of the dead causing it.

I looked out from my hiding place at the remains of what was, just a few minutes earlier, a vibrant community of tents, code named fire base 'Blue Bird'. Soldiers dressed in green fatigues running about on duty. Others stripped to the waist playing volley ball on a rough, hastily marked out court. The smoke and flames obscured my view, but I could still make out some details. Gone were the three lines of tents, and the small shack, which the company commander had taken as his office and home. Gone too were the shouts of 'mail call' and the hesitant laughter of men relieved that they had made it through another jungle patrol. The line of jeeps and a fuel tank, now like broken toys on a child's playground.

Smoke and dust clogged my eyes, and screams battered my ears. I wished I wasn't seeing this. Wasn't here facing the obvious pain. I had survived and now had to help clear up the mess. I was tired of this war. Tired of the fighting and tired of the people around me. I was 'short' a comical term meaning I had less than one hundred days to go before I would be ordered out of Nam. Imagine being ordered out of Nam. I doubt if any of the soldiers going home were ever ordered to go. They probably broke all records trying to get themselves on to the transporters. Not even caring about their kit or rifles. I knew I'd break the record in 96 days finding my seat on the plane out. No damned order was needed for me to leave this hellhole.

My eyes quickly found where the volley ball court had been. Now there was a large crater in the hard dark ground. Scattered corpses littered the area, but I was looking for just one. There he was, half buried by loose earth. That should have been me. He'd drawn all-day latrine duty. I swapped it with him for a couple of cans of beer. They tasted so good this morning, but now the taste in my mouth was completely different.

Billy 'Smiles' Bridges, from Texas. A tall farm boy from a little town with a forgettable name. I saw Billy get off the plane a year and a half ago, a broad grin on his naive face. He looked so young and foolish in his new kit and polished boot. Standing out on the hot tarmac of the runway. I saw him cry with fear in his first jungle contact with the VC. He lost his innocence that day. Saw him mess his pants when a grenade landed close by us, but didn't go off. The lieutenant just picked it up and tossed it back towards Charlie. I laughed, but it was my own fear I was hiding. I saw Billy once make it with two big-eyed Vietnam girls in a back street brothel in downtown Saigon. He came away with a broad grin on his face and two notches on his belt. He had a great smile. Clear bright teeth that he kept polishing with his tooth brush, or with fresh twigs when he was in the jungle.

I once saw him charge up a hill, while Charlie was throwing everything he had at us, shells, grenades, bullets, the works. And not one piece of metal hit Billy. He just kept on charging up that hill till he got to the bunker at the top and threw a grenade in the dark slot. The bunker blew and we were able to advance a bit further north. They gave him the Silver Star for that one, but he posted it to his mother back home for safe keeping or sentimental reasons. Maybe it was for luck? I was with Billy 'Smiles' Bridges when they opened the new bridge over the Brown Piss River. Not its real name, but hey we didn't know its name and the waters looked like it. That was the day the lieutenant copped it on a land mine. Silly brave sod stood there for ten minutes, knowing that the moment his foot came up an inch the mine would go off. He shouted at the platoon to get away from him and we ran. I gotta write to his folk to tell them what happened.

I saw Billy fighting hand to hand with Charlie in a foxhole tunnel. He loved that tunnel work like nobody else. One man, one touch and one pistol. He just stripped off his jacket, slipped into those holes and flushed out Charlie like an enema. Out they popped and the rest of us just picked them off with our armalites. Billy was real good at that work, he had a knack for knowing when a short ladder led to a floor panel covering deadly spikes, or if the tunnel ahead was booby-trapped with grenades or explosives. Now I could see Billy 'Smiles' Bridges not too far away with the skin burnt off his face and upper body. His eyes black holes, and his lips gone. But not even Charlie could take it away from him. He still had a great smile.

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

The Bill Barnes Poetry Competition 2000

The results of this competition, now re-named after our founder, Bill Barnes, and open exclusively to members of the Poetry Workshop, are now known. The prize winning poets will be announced and the winning entries printed in the Winter Newsletter.

Details of the 2001 Competition will appear in the Spring Newsletter.

PW 2001

The annual get-together of the Poetry Workshop will take place next year over the weekend of 15-17th July 2001 at our usual venue of Chamberlain Hall, University of Birmingham.

The cost of the Weekend, which includes full board and conference facilities, is not yet known, although for 2000 it was £105. We can expect a similar cost for 2001. Provisional bookings can be accepted until the full cost is known. Payment can be made by deposit of £30, with the balance due by the end of next May, or by instalments by prior arrangement with the Treasurer.

Contact Mike Boland, at the address above, for an application form.

Subscriptions

Subscription fees for 2001 will become due in January. The cost of membership to the Poetry Workshop remains unchanged yet again at £3 for Society members. For this small sum, membership of the Poetry Workshop gives you:

- ⑩ three lively Newsletters each year, expanding to four in 2001
- ⑩ the chance of publication in "Waves"
- ⑩ access to Postal folios
- ⑩ eligibility for the Bill Barnes Competition
- ⑩ 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.

PW Dates

31 March 2001	Closing Date, WAVES submissions
30 April 2001	Spring Newsletter
15-17 July 2001	PW Weekend
30 September 2001	Autumn Newsletter
30 September 2001	Closing date, Bill Barnes Competition
30 November 2001	Winter Newsletter



Annual Lunch 2000

The Annual Lunch was held on 21st October at the Civil Service Club London and attended by 44 members and guests. Our President Charles Neilson Gattey had the unenviable task of arranging the speaker, no mean task as he contacts some of the most illustrious literary figures in the country, until he finally hits the jackpot. This year he struck particularly lucky with the choice of the witty, entertaining Marina Warner, biographer, novelist, historian and critic. Among her many acclaimed works are *Alone of all her sex Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, *Joan of Arc*, *The image of female heroism*, *From the beast to the blonde* and *No go the bogeyman*. Marina is also the daughter of the famous cricketer Pelman Warner.

The other speaker Alan S Bell Chief Librarian from the London Library was unfortunately unable to come because of illness. His place was taken with only 24 hours notice by Paul Chand to whom we are extremely grateful. Paul started training as a doctor but changed to his great love, music. He worked as a music critic, he was the drama critic of *The Stage*, is a playwright. Worked for *Titbits* and became a full time author after being made redundant when the magazine folded after a hundred years.

Members and guests came from London, Kent, Surrey, Middlesex, Essex, Bournemouth, Devon, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire, Buckinghamshire and Newcastle on Tyne.

Ethel Corduff

POETRY PAGES
Editor Joyce Thornton

WINTER

Andrew Millican

The bus
crawls to the top
of the hill
where the terminus
stands.
There it will
stop.
From its warm interior
we will alight.
In the sudden chill
of the winter night
we will glance
up and
for a millisecond
feel inferior
at the tiny dance
of distant stars.
But the ochre glow
of the town
way down
below
beckons.
The snaking lights
from streets and cars
will steal
our gaze
from the freezing sky.
And as we stare
the cold will glaze
over our eyes
and tint our hair
as it did last night.

WAFFLE HOUSE BLUES

James Roderick Burns

Waffle House, I mourn your passing,
Not from the truckstops, interstates
or arteries of America, but from
my own impoverished life.

Somewhere, still, you serve
your crisp omelettes, with
or without side salad, your slim
sizzling cheese sandwiches.
Somewhere you serve your hashbrowns
smothered, covered or chunked.

On some lonely moonlit road
your waitresses stir, handling
the coffee pot carefully, like a reliquary.
With your customers, at the still point
of night, they solemnly discuss
carburettor problems or the capacity of silos.

In the silence of the highway
beats your tremulous heart:
the two truckers in caps,
the nervous fellow lighting a smoke
from the embers of the last;
the older couple who don't say a word.

Waffle House, I mourn your passing.
Not from the truckstops, interstates
or arteries of America, but from
my thin and watery life.

THAT BLESSED HOUR

Doreen Fay

It's the hour before the hour that was.
It's the time before the time that was.
We have that straight, then just
as we adjust, to taking tea
and cake at three
instead of four,
on the hour that was
before the hour that was,
time passes, and the hour that is,
is now beyond the hour that was

FLAT COUNTRY

James Roderick Burns

From my desk at the window I can see the flat countryside of Cleveland spread out before me. Today, a warmish day at the tail end of summer, it wears a slight sheen in the afternoon light, a sort of corn-coloured trim shining up the fields and ditches, twinkling here and there till it leeches into the pale blue sky. In the winter everything looks longer and flatter; the dips and rolls of ditches fill in with snow, the bare trees struggle out of whiteness like lines in a sketch. It's a good view – honest, I think; it has very few pretensions. I usually watch it for a moment before starting to work.

My writing's finished for the day, except for jotting down these thoughts before evening. Four o'clock, a good time to finish. I'd better take a couple of pills, while I think on, or I'll leave myself high and dry like I did the other week. Anne had to prise me out of the chair when she got home. Never again; just a couple with the dregs of that lukewarm tea. I'm not sure how I'd get on without her, even excepting all the usual wifely stuff they get thanked for in the dedications of books; just the discomfort, I mean, and that sense I get sometimes of sliding down towards water – rather pleasant at first, but then my legs slip in and everything turns cold, and I need something to get hold of before I go under.

It's funny, really. I'd always thought of myself as quite a capable person, strolling along in the world without much of a care, picking my way like a mountain goat through the rocky passages, but never really threatened. Certainly I never felt I needed someone. And then when she came along, right about the time this whole thing started, it was as though there was a ragged sort of hole notched out inside of me that something had to fill, and it seemed she could do the job quite nicely. When she's away for a while, or when the writing isn't coming, that hole seems to open up again, like someone's flaking away at the edges with a penknife. Not a very nice feeling. I try not to be aware of it if it can be helped. Still, today Anne's just out till evening; she should be back before ten. I think I'll finish up with this, then get off downstairs for a quick game of snooker and some telly.

We had to have the legs sawn down to the height of the chair, but I can play almost as well as I could before things developed. Better even, in some ways. I don't have the stretch I did, and it's harder lining the cue up underneath my chin, but on this level I have a real feeling for the balls, a

balls'-eye view, you might say: when I knock that white into the back of a long red I can almost feel it racing across the felt, turning over and over with no idea where it's heading till it explodes into the back of the red ball and sidesteps into the cushion. I'd never really felt that space before, or that long spin across the slate. I suppose it's added something to it, alongside everything that's gone.

There are other places, though, where it's harder to see the benefits. Sometimes I dream about when I was young and had the use of my legs without thinking. Me and the boy next door, the one with the gappy teeth, would climb up the giant hay bales stacked in the barn and slide down them one by one, the glossy surface of the straw whispering under our thighs. I remember landing with a thunk on the furrowed concrete of the yard. I remember it sometimes just after I wake, and it seems the most natural thing in the world to spring out of bed and land my bare feet slap on the floor. Other times – though as I sit here writing, I can feel the power of memory, and all that it brings – that recollection is painful. I remember walking the land with my father, striding round the edge of the big field and down through the stream to the pastures on the other side. And later on doing it myself, with wellingtons and an old stick and the dog shooting ahead of me and racing back. Just memories, really, fluttering round like butterflies.

When I think on it it's quite a while since I've been in the fields, even in the chair. Anne usually takes care of business, and the farm almost seems to run itself. These last few weeks I've found myself wondering how the ground felt, or whether the yard had been properly scrubbed and washed down after the cows passed through. Not that I really mind or have any stake in it, one way or the other, but rather for the feeling of being able to catch at the land with the soles of my feet and stick to it, somehow. I miss that. I was on the verge of telling her about it this morning, before she left.

'This plateau thing, you know,' I'd begun, feigning that impractical man's ignorance of the details, but she cut me off with a sharp look and a hand raised from the table, almost as though we had children and she didn't want them to hear. She closes herself up like that sometimes. Then the school bus honked for the Thompson children at the end of the lane, and she didn't have to answer. She gathered up her handbag and her keys from the dresser, shrugging on a jacket.

'I'll be back later on, usual time,' she said, kissing me on the cheek. 'There's stew in the fridge if you want to heat it up, and bread in the oven. Get something done.' Then she smiled and left the house, the engine of the car firing a moment later and dwindling away down to nothing. I wheeled

over to the sink and got the dishes washed off and racked up in the dishwasher, then made my way back to the lift and came up here. The day's gone alright, I suppose, in terms of work. I've turned out three more pages, and that seems enough. I'm not all that interested in this latest book, to tell the truth. It seems a bit lumpy, then flat in places, and I'm not sure where it's going. I suppose I'd better just keep plugging away till it's finished. That's one of Anne's favourite phrases – 'you never can tell' – and she nudges me with it at the first sign of any dissatisfaction. I'm not so sure. I think I should know what's coming, and take some action to get the course straightened out if I don't like the look of things. Anyway, I've put it away for the day, so there's no use arguing.

The light is rather nice out there. It's moving on towards six, and the sun's dipping towards the head of the valley, trailing a yellowy cloth across the fields. Nothing much ever moves through this landscape, but I like it that way. When I want to see people Anne takes me to town. Out here, even through glass and from a few floors up, there's a grace to that emptiness, an orderly calm that sets my insides to rights. Occasionally a dog bounds across an open field, or the cows bunch together and move as a herd towards a different pasture, but mostly it's motionless and empty. That seems to correspond to my current state. I'm hungry, thirsty too, but I haven't done a great deal. I'd like another couple of pills, just to be on the safe side. I really can't be bothered to go downstairs. I'll just take them with water.

Now where was I? Not that it matters, in scratchy old notes like these, but they might turn out to be useful. It's rather nice just to let it spill out, to unravel what's there till the spool runs dry, rather than watching for the lie of the land and mapping it out with sharp little taps at the keyboard. I'd almost prefer it this way, day in and day out. It seems a funny thing to me, organisation. The having to plan, and try, and scratch out, till the shape of the thing becomes apparent. My father never had much of it and he got along fine his whole life. There were the episodes with mother, of course, and that long silence that started on a Sunday and lasted till goodness knows when, at least till I'd taken to staying outside as much as I could, afraid to come into the chill. But mostly things just sort of ran themselves. I'd see him heft his great muddy boots from the fireplace after breakfast, fasten on a scarf or a light cap if the weather was better, and then I wouldn't see him for the rest of the day. He'd be out on the land, off to market, or round and about doing all the little jobs he occupied himself with. If I wanted to see him I'd have to go out and look.

'Dad,' I'd say, finding him in the barn or at the feeding trough, tugging on his arm, 'what're you doing, our dad?'

'Nothing,' he'd reply. 'Least nothing you need to concern yourself with, lad. Why aren't you indoors working on that homework, or helping your mother?' I think he felt he had to be a bit gruff with me, for the farmhands' sake. There were five of them back then, all tall and beefy with ruddy pockmarked faces and broad hands. When they turned away he'd ruffle my hair, lean down and whisper:

'Go on, son, I'll see you later. You can show me what you've been up to, that's a good lad.'

Just thinking of him, and glancing up out of the window, brings back that summer day in the cornfields like it happened a week ago. I'll never really understand it, not from his perspective anyway, getting down underneath the wide friendly mask he wore to what shook and turned underneath. Nor does it fit into the smooth passage of his life, or what I've sketched of it, what comes back as I think on. Still, it happened, and over there, in those fields not far from the stream that's catching the evening sun.

I was young, certainly not school-leaving age, and he still seemed like a giant in his working gear, with that long knobby walking stick and old flat cap. I didn't mean to come across him in the fields, but school had let out and I was bored inside the house. It was one of those crisp summer days where the sun seems to pack the air with heat, and everything stands up tall and quiet, with a shimmer to it. I wandered out into the farmyard, but there wasn't much going on, so I got my bike out of the shed and pedalled down the driveway to the end of the lane. Our land reached past the road and down to the other side of the valley, so I could lean my bike against the fence and walk on as far as I wanted. I hooked the handlebars on the barbed wire, then pulled two strands apart and hopped through into the end field.

I found a long stick at the foot of a tree. It had a nice heft to it, and a flattish bottom that would serve nicely as a handle. I walked down the field, in the direction of the stream and the cornfields on the other side, thrashing at tall grasses with my homemade sword, buckling my knees and gallantly swishing the blade through them in a passable display of swordsmanship. Here and there I chopped the heads off dandelions and thistles, satisfied by the solid snap of their stems and the thin whistle of bristly heads sailing through the air. When I reached the stream I ran along the bank and flung my stick as far as it would go. It turned a few looping somersaults before landing flat-side down in the water and sinking to the bottom.

I waded through the shallows to the other side. The sun sat near the middle of the sky, and I wasn't sure what time it was or where I wanted to go. I perched on the bank and trailed my feet in the sparkly water. I was considering doubling back when I heard a faint noise float over from the cornfields. Low but urgent, a kind of muffled squeaking, it sounded flattened out, like a cat or a puppy trapped in a shoe box. I stood up and walked towards the sound. Over to the far side of the field, along the bald paths at the side of the corn, I tracked it to the hedge, then beyond to the other side, into the biggest corn field. Here it was louder, and accompanied by a sort of flat stamping on the ground, like shoes striking a road. I got down on my hands and knees and inched towards it.

About twenty feet away was a crushed spot in the corn. Tall stalks of it were waving frantically back and forth, and the noise erupted now and again, harsh, like a cry, then was stifled. I crept up to the edge of the clearing and peeped through.

At first I couldn't make out what it was. A higgledy jumble of legs and clothing, an arm flapping on one side, clutching at cornstalks, and a man's backside shunting up and down. Then I saw the moleskins, the flat cap cast off to one side. My father! And who else? With a heavy twist he turned away, and her face showed for a moment, his dirty hand clamped across her mouth, blood trailing down her chin. Katie, one of the farm girls! I almost jumped up and shouted for them to stop but at that moment he lost his grip and she screamed, long and high and jagged, and he beat her face with the back of his hand. I scrambled away and got to my feet, running down towards the stream as fast as I could. As I splashed back across the sun slid behind a cloud, and my wobbly shadow threw itself up onto the other bank.

And now, letting this fallout onto the page, that's what returns most – the shadows. But they always need sunlight to make them happen. Just thinking of him brings to mind all manner of things, both good and bad, but mostly good – good aside from this. Another day, later that year I think it was, he'd gathered in all the grain from the harvest and piled it up in the big barn. He bought new knee-high wellingtons to wade through the corn, and took me hand in hand across the farm yard and into the high-roofed store. While he sat down to pull on the long green boots he let me walk up and down the shifting grain. At some points it reached half-way up the walls, at others was only a few feet deep, and from side to side it sloped up like dunes in the Sahara. Each of my footfalls sent a river of pearly green corn running down to the floor. I romped around, planting my legs in the cool grains up to the hips, scooping up corn and broadcasting it in sweeping handfuls. When he

had the boots on he strode up the mountain and lifted me above his head. I swung into a sunbeam stealing through the roof, and the shiny corn in my hand fell down through the light like rain, catching in his hair, and we laughed and laughed till we fell on our backs in the yielding corn.

I don't know. Shadows and sunlight, good things and bad – I'd like to ask Anne about all this, see what she has to say. I know the contours of her childhood like the back of my hands, but I don't know how she felt them or whether they've stayed with her. I feel a bit creaky thinking like this, and the pain's stealing back into my legs. More pills, I think, and a little water. Down they go.

Where are you now, Anne, by the way? You know where I am – I'm always here – but what are you doing? Are you driving, out there in the sunny lanes, or are you finished for the day and settling down on a shiny barstool with one of your friends? I suppose I shall find out when you get home. I seem to have rambled on for pages, and not really reached any conclusions. I hope she doesn't read this. I'll lock it away in my drawer. She'd only think me sentimental for strolling down memory lane, then point out how my legitimate work had suffered for the day, was lacking that certain polish or depth or direction. She seems happy to shape me like this, and I can't complain. Where would I be without her, after all? When the pain comes she's the only one who stops me slipping away.

I need another, I think, just for safety's sake. The bottle seems a little reluctant in my hand, but I'll get it. These things always take time. There we are. The sky's almost dark. The sun seems to have taken its time retreating, at least till I had my back turned. All that's left is an orange band and an encroaching wash of charcoal. I had the same sense that time Bill Mason took me up in his crop-plane. A perfectly ordinary scene, as you climbed up and above the fields, the little things petering out below you till they became outlines. Then at a certain point, I couldn't tell when, everything rearranged itself into new colours and I hadn't an inkling of the pattern anymore. Just the air rolling round to a deeper blue, the line of the land curving away beneath me. Perhaps that's the way it's meant to be, as things wind down; you lose a sense of the details. I don't know. Sun's almost gone now. Orange into black, and my legs feel thin and watery. I'll have one last one, for the road.

AN OXFORD EDUCATION

James Roderick Burns

1. Radiant Dawn

When radiant Dawn, with bright eyes, saw the first touches of light reflected in the windows of the Cowley motor works, she was happy for the first time in weeks. She couldn't really explain it. She'd been surly and tight-lipped with him over breakfast, same as she'd been every morning since he told her, and nothing had happened to lighten her mood. But still, there it was. Those few little twinkles just cheered her up.

For the first time since last week, too, she didn't sit huddled over the same old thoughts as the bus rattled into Oxford. She could see the weak November sun stealing over the houses, and the trees by the river shifting against a papery sky. She didn't even think of him till the bus turned into Cornmarket and she caught sight of the day's first bleary-eyed students, out after coffee and cigarettes. Frank was a good boy, really, only this new thing had changed him in her mind till he seemed like a pasteboard version of himself – okay on the outside, still young and friendly and shiny round the edges, but with all the marrow sucked out, somehow, a bit empty and odd. As she let herself in through the college gate his face popped back into her mind. Didn't like girls, he'd said, never really had. Fellers were the thing. And all the time gesturing with a Rothman's, smoke pouring through his fingers like wine.

Dawn exchanged her parka for a housecoat and got her hair up into a net. She rattled the Vim container and sloshed around various bottles of cleaner to see if they had a morning's worth left in them, then undid the tangles in her mop and grabbed a couple of stiff-dried rags from the rail. On the quad she met a couple of the other cleaners crunching their carts across the gravel.

'Dib dib,' said Diane. She did the first two staircases on the quad and had come up with the joke. All the other scouts traded it back and forth like a secret password, something small and warm to keep them going through the long hours in the raw air on the cold stone stairs.

Dawn smiled. She didn't really know Diane, or any of the others, but there was an unspoken sympathy between them. After five years of cleaning she had precious little of it for the students. An uncouth lot, she thought, though most of them came from posh homes. One morning she'd been faced with a sinkful of slick chocolate vomit, the product of the previous night's promotional bingeing, no doubt. When she poked at it the rippled skin wobbled like custard.

At the first of her doors Dawn paused. She thought she heard the occupant stir in bed, then make a muffled yawn. She knocked twice, and after another silence entered the room with her key. It was empty, the bed crisply made and the window half-open to freshen the place up. Smiling, Dawn wheeled in her cart and set to.

She made good time, vacuuming carpets, swabbing out sinks and emptying rubbish bins with very few interruptions. Most of them had left for the morning by the time she arrived, and by eleven thirty she was almost done, half an hour ahead of schedule. With two more rooms to go Dawn stuck her cloths under her arm and lugged the Hoover up to the third floor. When she knocked on the right side of the landing she was answered by a loud groan and the thump of a pillow being thrown at the door. Fine, then. She wasn't obliged to turf out slugs. Let him stink away. She crossed over to the other side with a clear conscience.

Dawn delivered three sharp raps to the thick oak panel. Nothing. She rapped again, and assuming he must have gone out, light-heartedly slid her key into the lock. In half an hour she would be out of these clothes and on her way home. Frank would be wanting his lunch, and the thought of his long face all sharp with hunger touched a soft spot in her chest.

At first she thought the room was empty. The green curtains were closed and the bedclothes rucked up in a heap. There was a heavy odour in the air. Then she noticed a foot hanging off the edge of the bed, and an arm moving about under the covers.

'Oh sorry,' she said, reaching for the light. 'I'll just do a quick run round and I'll be out of your way.'

The hundred watt bulb threw light into every part of the room – onto the armchair strewn with clothes, the pairs of shoes kicked off and upended on the carpet, the torn wrappers on the coffee table and the two young men lying in bed. One of them groaned and rolled over towards the doorway. She'd never seen him before. As his eyes came into focus the look of sleepy contentment drained from his face. He quickly drew his leg under the blankets and pulled them up over his chest. He looked away.

Outside, Dawn hurriedly packed her cart and scuttled back to the storeroom. Diane had just finished, and tried to start a conversation as they wrung out their cloths, but she didn't want to talk. She finished up quickly, her mind a whirl of jarring, blurry pictures. She pulled on her coat and stepped quickly out into the quad.

As she left the college, the chapel windows caught her attention. The sun had lifted into the middle of the sky, and was glinting in small diamonds of polished silver on their surface. The morning's windows came back to her, and with them the look on that boy's face before he'd realised she was there. She remembered it was calm and natural, just like he would always look, not embarrassed at all. She thought about her son, and instead of the wince came a strange feeling of calm; not peace exactly, but a glimmer of it, like sunshine behind glass. At the bus-stop Dawn felt a small smile start to tug at the corners of her mouth. She wondered what Frank might like for lunch.

2. John Smith's Christmas

I pushed open the heavy gate and stepped inside. Pausing in front of the notices – some curling their plastic edges in the damp, others drooping limply off the corkboard – I knocked the snow off my boots and shook out my overcoat, popping open the fat buttons on the duffel-coat with the clumsy ends of my fingers. Through the archway the rest of the college was silent. Over in the next quad the chapel bell bonged one o'clock, and a single light winked out in the library alcove. Christmas Eve, almost Christmas proper. For some reason John Smith, the night porter, didn't seem to be in his wood and glass booth, and the empty staircases and frozen lawn took on a rather melancholy aspect in his absence. I stuck my wet gloves in my pocket and headed for my room.

Just as I was about to turn the corner I heard a sharp little tap on the glass and turned back.

How're you, laddie? John said, sliding back the panel and letting out a puff of silvery breath into the night air. His broad chest and stomach were stacked up on the counter, and he was smoothing over his salt-and-pepper hair with an idle hand. I wis jist out the back lookin somethin out for yeh.

His voice had a sharp Scottish roll that I liked a great deal.

Oh yes? I asked. What's that?

He didn't answer, but dug down underneath the counter and came up with a small electric fan-heater with a fraying cord.

Yeh said it wis a bit nippy up there, wi'out heat and all, so I thought this might come in handy. He propped it up on the ledge and reached the plug back round to a socket inside the booth. As he plugged it in the heater growled and clanked with the sound of a restless child running a spoon along

a radiator, but after a couple of minutes' effort managed a reasonable stream of warm air. I pulled my sleeves back and toasted my hands in front of it.

Smashing!

Aye. Nae problem.

John spent his nights, from just before twelve till eight in the morning, when the first porter dragged himself in, sitting on a high-backed battered stool keeping watch over the comings and goings of the college. Or that was what he was supposed to do. In reality he steamed through the daily papers and news magazines, photography journals, books on birds and architecture, *Mayfair* and long tracts of British imperial history, with his tinny little radio squawking in the background and a bank of dead security screens flipping from one deserted scene to another. Lately he'd been teaching himself Spanish from a thick pink hardback he'd propped up against the phone.

For my retirement, yeh know, he'd say, vino and a nice little casa and mebbe a woman, yeh nivir know.

Tonight he seemed a little subdued. Perhaps it was the season.

What're you going to do for Christmas, John? I asked.

Well, I'm nae rightly sure, but I don't suppose it'll be mich different tae last time. A decent bottle and a guid book and the telly. How about you? You'll be out wi that wee cracker ye're always hanging round with, I bet, am I right?

No, no I won't be. She's gone, John, there's just me. I'll probably study, exams and that, you know.

Aye well, it's overrated anyhow, I say. Still, 's a shame ye'll no be wi that woman – I've seen the way yeh look at her.

A key rattled furiously in the lock and a wet student crossed the flagstones behind us. He wove his way unsteadily across the lawn and disappeared. I didn't have anything to say.

After a minute I managed, How's the Spanish?

Oh, great, actually. 's only four years till I'm done, yeh know, then I'm off. Talked to the pension people and everythin. I can just get me pension zipped across in pesetas, and I'm away. Vino and all that, sunshine, just sitting back wi a book an a glass and that's that. I cannae wait.

I hope you get there sooner than that! I said, but the smile I forced felt as plastic as the Santa taped to the inside of the window. Well, I think I'm

going to head on up. Goodnight, and thanks for the fan. I'm going to need it up there.

Oh aye, ye're welcome. See yeh tomorrow.

As I left he slid the glass back into place, and I heard the radio start up and holiday music begin to play.

On the dark stairs I wrapped the cord around the heater so it wouldn't trip me up, and trudged up each flight feeling gloomier than ever. On the turn of the third flight a dim bulb was casting a pool of light on the handrails. I suddenly imagined John back at home in the morning, his large frame stuffed into a comfy chair, his ornately tartan-slipped feet propped on an overstuffed stool. There was a plate of meat and vegetables at his elbow and a glass in his hand. The dirty city slush slapped, miles away, against a thick window. Harry Secombe was singing carols on the telly. His book was a rich feast of words and warmth and pictures. As I reached my door I realised I was smiling.

I set down the heater on the floor near the bed, laying out my duffel-coat and gloves on the floor in front of it. I popped in a tape and uncurled my frozen toes into the carpet, reaching down to plug in the heater. It coughed out a handful of orange sparks, and the room went black.

SOLUTION TO LITERARY BIRDS from issue 151

compiled by Karen Lowe

ACROSS:

2 Jackdaw 7 Hen 8 Rook 9 Tolstoy 12 Pen 13 Sell 15 Beak 18 Ale
20 Ivy 23 Air 24 Digit 25 Owl 26 Kai 27 Egg 30 Tree 33 Rise 35 Jay
36 Mocking 39 Swan 40 Off 41 Martins

DOWN:

1 Geese 3 Ado 4 Kes 5 Wry 6 Doves 9 Toll 10 Lob 11 Tea 13
Swan 14 Lark 16 Eagle 17 Kite 19 Edit 21 Yogi 22 Flee 28 Grog 29
Raven 31 Roc 32 EDI 34 Swift 36 Mam 37 Kit 38 Nun

GOD OF SURPRISES

Alana David

Along with all my school friends, I was evacuated during the Second World War to Charminster, a small village in Dorset. My teacher took my class to the local church on Sundays. Sometimes the service seemed so long. My personal testing time came during the Harvest Festival season. Each girl had to bring a gift; my mother was unable to visit that weekend, and I had no pocket money left. An eleven year old, I felt I would be shamed before all my classmates, whose mothers would undoubtedly procure gifts for their progeny. Sending out a desperate cry for help to God, I went for an exploratory walk, by myself, which was strictly against school rules. I continued in my prayerful petitions as I prowled around the countryside.

Suddenly I espied a garden; graced by several apple trees. The fruit looked so temptingly ripe; the skins blazing with colour. It seemed like an answer to all my pleas, particularly as the enclosing fence was low lying. Surreptitiously I sneaked over it, and scrumped some of the delicious looking apples, secreting them within my school satchel. I polished them within the sanctity of my bedroom, thinking my gift to God would make a perfect presentation. It was with pride that I paraded with my friends on the following Sunday, clutching my apples. Laying them before the altar, our Minister gave each girl a blessing as their gift was proffered. I wondered why his hand lingered for so long upon my head as I gave mine; why his eyes gazed so very earnestly upon those apples; and why he smiled at me so warmly.

The Minister invited all my class, along with our teacher, to tea. We had never been to his house before, and looked forward to the event with excitement, since we had to rely upon our parents for these kind of excursions. The sun was bright that day. The tea was laid out in his garden ... *the very same garden from which I had stolen the apples*. The trees, the bareness of their lower branches near the fence, gazed at me accusingly.

Why, I had wondered, did the Minister seem so especially kind ... to me? He served me with such an enormous dollop of scrumptious strawberry ice-cream. Finally he gave each girl a bag of his own apples to take home. Mine was the largest. 'Especially for *you*.' He had whispered, his eyes twinkling, laughter lines crinkling his skin. Only then came the sudden realisation. Our Minister not only knew I had taken his fruit, but had also forgiven me. My teacher was to be kept in blissful ignorance.

I shared my secret with my close friends. We giggled happily. It seemed to us that our God had surely answered my prayers in a most unexpected and surprising manner.

ANOTHER VIEW ON WRITING

Ms Betty Westcott

I would like to reply to Jan Jefferies who wrote in Civil Service AUTHOR No. 151.

I have a writing problem and I think it is a big one. I've always been a "scribbler" since my school days. Stories, articles, poems, novels – I've tried them all. I've had some things published but have never written that best seller. I also write in my diary every day.

I'm too old now to become a well-known writer but maybe one day my diaries will become important as social history. It doesn't help that they are written in a kind of shorthand, for example in 1962 I mention being very upset when KM and AL met somewhere or other and did something or other. I can't remember what all that was about but it will be up to the historians to crack the code. Samuel Pepys wrote his own shorthand and his diaries are well read. Why not mine – in time of course.

So here I am, happy to think of my writing as a hobby. Or rather I was until last week when I had problems with 14 down in the crossword. It necessitated looking up the word "hobby" in the dictionary. It said:

"A favourite subject or occupation which is not one's main business."

That can't be right – writing *is* my main business. I'd rather be writing than doing anything else, especially housework or shopping or gardening. I will pick up my biro or pound the typewriter keys at the slightest provocation. I can't live without it. I'm addicted to writing. Oh dear, oh dear, I'm beginning to think I have a problem. I looked up "addicted" in the dictionary. It said:

"Dependent on as a habit. Unable to do without, or give it up without incurring adverse effects."

So there it is. I haven't got a hobby at all, I've got an addiction! Perhaps I should contact a Help-line like Alcoholics Anonymous. Nothing in Yellow Pages though about a counselling service called Writers Anonymous.

It would seem I'm a hopeless case. I need my regular fix and I get quite high on it. I feel very concerned. I think I must take myself in hand and get some professional help. I'll do it tomorrow. Can't do it today because I have a few things I want to write and besides I haven't filled in my diary yet.

INNOCENT A BROAD

In London vernacular!

Terry Rickson

“Maise.”

“Wot?”

“Can yer come out ’ere a minute?”

“Can’t, got a punter wiv me,” came the reply.

Trace glared at the be-suited, bespectacled little man standing before her, in the garish pink lit room. Allowing herself a rare moment of emotion, Trace felt rather ridiculous, suddenly, in bra, black suspenders and fish-net tights.

“Why don’t yer piss off?” she said defensively, “go on, piss off.”

“Your card, Miss,” the man said quite unperturbed, “which I selected in a telephone box, offered services appropriate to the furniture and antiques trade, one of which was, namely, french polishing ...”

“’ere, you winding me up!”

Before the man could reply, Maisie appeared.

“Wot’s up?”

“’im.”

“’im? Won’t ’e pay, then?” Maisie said, advancing on the man menacingly, “Know your sort, yer litt’l toe-rag ...”

“Madam,” the man began, appearing not in the least intimidated by the figure of Maisie planted in front of him, arms akimbo, “I came here to make a legitimate enquiry regarding your business, ‘Stiff, Woods,’ I believe it is called, a rather unusual name for an antiques enterprise, I must say. You are ...”

“Antiques!” Maisie screamed, “I’ll give yer antiques. The only antique rahnd ’ere, mate, is you!”

For one of her bulk, Maisie moved quite swiftly.

“Trace, givvus ’and an’ git ’im aht of ’ere.”

With that, the two women seized hold of their visitor, shoved him through the bead curtained doorway and precipitated him down the stairs towards the street entrance, to a stream of obscenities.

The racket, as it always did, aroused the owners of the Italian restaurant, whose kitchen backed on to Trace and Maisie’s ‘establishment’. Their reaction took the form of beating on the thin partition wall, with kitchen utensils accompanied by a voluble flow of observations in Italian.

Maisie heaved herself part way down the stairs and responded in kind.

“Sod orf!” she yelled, beating her fists on the wall, “bloody Eyties!”

These sentiments only served to enrage their neighbours further.

“Ignore ’em,” Maisie said, then jerking her thumb in the direction the man had been sent so unceremoniously, “yer learnin’ but yer ’ave to get wise to ’is sort.”

Trace nodded, wiping her nose with the back of her hand.

“Remember,” Maisie added, “the boss can turn nasty; time’s money and ’e means it.”

“Yer, I know. Ta, Maise. Fancy, comin’ in ’ere, the litt’l bleeder.”



SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL ARTICLE

Gladys McDonald

Robert McDonald, known as Bob, was born on 21st March 1923 and died suddenly on 8th July 2000.

Upon leaving school he joined Ealing Post Office until he volunteered for the Royal Air Force in 1941. He qualified as a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner with Bomber Command and crash landed in Denmark in February 1944 on a Berlin raid.

He then became a prisoner-of-war finishing up on the borders of East Prussia from where he and his crew were on the notorious Long March across 350 miles of Germany for 29 days before being liberated in April 1945.

After demobilisation he married and settled in Northolt having rejoined the Post Office. It was at this time that he took up short-story writing and during the 1950s had several stories published.

He pursued his career through various Government Departments including Bankruptcy, the DTI and the Office of Fair Trading until retirement, still writing in his spare time. After his retirement in 1983 he completed his first novel, based on his wartime experiences. Unfortunately, this was never accepted for publication in spite of many submissions and some favourable criticisms.

His last published story “Spirit Of Christmas” under the pseudonym of Robert Peters won first prize in your magazine’s competition in 1998.

VINJERU

Education Concern Malawi North
201D Arlington Road London NW1 7HD
Telephone/fax 44 (0)20 7284 0529
Email: hawi@hgondwe.freeserve.co.uk

Dear friend

The object of VINJERU is to advance the education of young people generally under the age of 30 who are resident in the northern region of Malawi. We desperately need your help and you can give this help by

- ⊙ Becoming a member of Vinjeru at £5 per annum;
- ⊙ Becoming a supporter by donating any amount of money, however little; or
- ⊙ Donating any kind of school material or equipment, however small or large, new or old, as long as it works: a pencil, notebook, typewriter, computer/printer, or anything that you would probably normally throw away, including some toys. To the children in Malawi these things would be new and most valuable. Very few children in Malawi, if any, have toys to play with, let alone those that also help to stimulate their minds.

The following is a true story and is a typical example of what life is like for most children. These are the children that VINJERU is mainly concerned with, although we aim to work just as hard for all the young people generally under the age of thirty.

Chiwundeni was a 12-year old Malawian boy from a neighbouring village. He worked for my sister looking after her cattle. My sister provided him with board and lodging, with the occasional jumble from Britain. Chiwundeni was so proud of these that Sunday, his free day, could not arrive soon enough for him to dress up for church and show off his "new" clothes and shoes. Chiwundeni received the equivalent of £1 per month, which was more than the going rate at the time for that sort of work. With this small amount of money Chiwundeni supported himself and his widowed mother.

Needless to say Chiwundeni was illiterate, as he and his mother could not find even a few more pence for his school fees. He was the only child living in our village that did not attend school. Saddened by his illiteracy, he often lamented to his playmates: "If Malawi made a law that those who

can't read and write should be killed I don't know what I would do. Then I would just be killed!"

The good news is that primary school fees have since been abolished in Malawi, giving thousands more children a chance to attend school, although it is too late for Chiwundeni and others like him. However, the bad news is that school buildings and facilities have not increased proportionately, if at all. Most of these children are so eager to learn but are unable to fulfil their dreams. Education materials such as pencils and notebooks are so scarce in Malawi. Often children are advised to cut their pencils in half as insurance against the risk of losing the whole pencil. While the possession of such tiny little items is taken for granted in other parts of the world, this is not the case in Malawi.

This is why we have set up an education charity to try and alleviate the hardship. We need to buy and collect – including second-hand – school materials and equipment to send to northern Malawi where, being predominantly rural, resources are much harder to find. Your donation may be an amount of money, a notebook, a pencil/pen, a textbook, even a redundant computer or typewriter. Children's dictionaries are badly needed, as are atlases. English is not the children's first language, yet it is the most important subject. The majority of the primary school textbooks are published locally, so your financial donations will be extremely useful.

Chiwundeni is now a family man, thus handing his legacy down to his children and, no doubt, in time to his grandchildren, assuming luck of survival on their side. For, let us face it, public good health cannot be guaranteed without the existence of at least the basic education.

Secondary education places in Malawi are so scarce that almost every secondary school has students from everywhere in the country. So, in reality, the charity will benefit the whole population of Malawi and not just those in the northern region.

"Vinjeru" is Chitumbuka, my language, for knowledge, wisdom, intelligence, academic brilliance, and so on.

Attached is a pledge form and we are very much looking forward to receiving your support.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely

Walije Gondwe

Co-ordinator

CHARITY TRUSTEES:

*Chairman: Nick Winterton Secretary: Robin Richardson Treasurer:
Alan Elliott Sally Collins Zsuzanna Ardó Nigel Hawker Rupert Jones-
Parry Thasya Elliott Co-ordinator: Walije Gondwe*

VINJERU

I pledge a donation of £.....*OR I enclose my donation of £.....

To: VINJERU EDUCATION CHARITY MALAWI NORTH

Name:

Address:

.....

Signature: Date:

(* Please make your cheques payable to VINJERU)

Please return to:

Walije Gondwe

Co-ordinator

VINJERU EDUCATION CHARITY Malawi North

201D Arlington Road London NW1 7HD

Thank you very much indeed for your support.
