

# The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

## Former Presidents:

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

## President:

Charles Neilson Gattey

## Vice Presidents:

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Iain McIntyre

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Alan S Watts

## Vice Chairman:

Terry Rickson

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## Publicity Officer:

Vacant

## Diary

Closing Date, Bill Barnes Poetry  
Competition  
30<sup>th</sup> September 2002

Annual Luncheon  
26<sup>th</sup> October 2002

Poetry Workshop Weekend  
12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> July 2003

## 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 SCPSW Author are those of the contributors and are not necessarily those of the Editor or of the Society.**

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# The SCPSW Author

Number 159

Autumn 2002

## CONTENTS

- 3 Editorial
- 5 Annual Statement of Income & Expenditure
- 6 Letters
- 8 Minutes of AGM
- 12 Annual Competitions Results 2002-2002
- 16 Poetry Pages
- 18 Poetry Workshop Pages
- 19 Market Information *Gordon Gompers*
- 21 *Morwenna Clare Gaen*
- 25 *The Wondrous Giles Doreen Fay*
- 25 *Country Refrain Geraldine Smedley*
- 26 *In The Wake Of Odysseus Peter Stock*
- 30 *Wordmonger William Wood*
- 31 *A Sailing Episode! Pamela Hadman*
- 34 *Browned Off Andrea Wynne*
- 37 *The Two Loves Paul Williams*
- 39 Annual Literary Luncheon 2002

Editorial:

It is unfortunate that so many members live so far from London that cost and travel time deters them from attending our Annual Luncheon. It is no coincidence that this is by far the best-attended event, as the food is usually good (one might say excellent for the price) and the speakers are invariably entertaining. Then of course there is the company and what better company could one find than members of SCPSW? I hope we will see many members and their guests on October 26<sup>th</sup> and that the strain of early Christmas shopping will not spoil their meal.

Those using word-processors will have shared the joys of automatic spelling checks. Wonderful though this is, if I made reference to nun members, the spell checker would be no more likely to correct my error than if I had written none members. (See page 4 Summer issue) I saw the error when my copy arrived, but sadly missed it before sending it to our printers. Another reason for taking a hard copy periodically – if only I had taken my own advice!

As far as I am aware Charles Neilson Gattey, our President, is our only surviving founder member and such longevity and practiced literacy has obviously not been wasted. Alan Watts has provided a review of Charles' latest book, in which he has demonstrated how worthy he is and this is recognised by once more being voted our "Writer of the Year".

I hope Charles will be bringing a few copies for us to purchase at our Annual Luncheon, where we will also be able to buy copies of Paul Williams' book "As Handsome Does" that he is kindly offering at the reduced price of £6.95.

Space permitting, the letters column will include another opinion on English usage and abuse. Having raised this issue in order to stimulate correspondence, I think it is reasonable to end it now. The varying views confirm that we do not all agree and, as creative writers, surely that is as it should be. We may be influenced by our education; sometimes by familiarity, but we must also be aware that featuring in this issue are the views of those who judge us. We rarely know the identity of competition judges in advance, or their views on this matter. As they may be sticklers for tradition, perhaps we need to err on the side of caution. I did see a winning competition entry containing a sentence of only three words that

began with the word “and”. Proving that a good yarn can still win through – well sometimes!

The closing date for contributions for the next issue will be 14<sup>th</sup> October 2002.

## **THE W F & F G FROUD MEMORIAL COMPETITION 2002.**

Roy Froud has again sponsored this competition for members and the following details apply:

The subject is “**Life in the Services**”, but as this is fiction those who have never been exposed to such dubious pleasures should not be put off. Perhaps our old friend Julius Caesar might appear again, e.g. “I remember the day Julius came to my villa for tea, and me a mere Centurion...”, or “When the ship sank I found myself near starvation and in a strange land, but a young lady called Florence Nightingale gave me a job washing wounds and it was there that I met Charlie...”, or “Two years I served the Sheriff of Nottingham and I never once saw Robin Loxley – But no, the sponsor would probably object to that one. Of course it could be all about Blanco and bullets, for those who know what I’m talking about. Despite the sponsor insisting that entries relate to the Armed Forces, I hope the prize money of £150 will ensure this competition is well supported.

Entries should be a maximum 2,000 words, double-spaced and single-sided, plus £3 per entry. Send to Ron Jeffreys by no later than 31st October 2002. Please enclose s.a.e. if you would like your entry returned. The author’s name should not appear on the entry, but should be quoted on a covering sheet, which should also quote the title of the story. Results will be announced at the New Year Party in 2003.

### **Member's Successes**

Our congratulations to Steve Glason, of Diss in Norfolk, a prolific writer of successful work, including publication of:

Railway poems in the Railway Museums of York and London,

Modern warfare poems in the Imperial War Museum London, Duxford and other museums,

Newsletters, e.g. John Benjamin Society, Kingston Society and Samaritans

Evening Standard and Kingston Informer newspapers, Breathe magazine, Countryside Tales etc., plus at least 20 Anthologies of Poetry, by Avalon, Poetry Now and Peterborough.

We also congratulate John Bird of Solihull for publication of his play, A Sign of the Times.

He spent the early part of his career as a journalist with the Birmingham Mail, Gloucestershire Echo, Vancouver Sun etc., edited a bank employees newspaper in California and co-edited the British forces newspaper in Cyprus. After working in the Home Office, MoD and UKAEA, he retired in 1988. Then dabbled in a variety of writing, travel journalism (Birmingham Post, Globe & Mail, Canada, etc); poetry (mainly anthologies and small magazines and newspapers, e.g. Reality, Snippets, Peace News, Pen & Keyboard, Birmingham Post, Sunday Mercury); two non-fiction books, Careers for the over-40s (published by Northcote House) and another on Britain's treatment of enemy aliens in World War I. (Garland, New York); other bits and pieces, such as a sketch on the Russ Abbot BBC TV series and a short story read on BBC Radio Cambridgeshire

**Annual Statement of Income & Expenditure for the period  
1.4.01 to 31.3.02:**

	Income	Expenditure
Subscriptions	£2,668.00	
Subscriptions paid to Poetry Workshop		£216.00
“Author” printing & distribution costs		£2,426.55
AGM receipts	£67.00	
New Year Party receipts	£150.00	
Annual Luncheon receipts	£840.00	
Cost of room hire & refreshments		£1,360.72
Readings	£51.00	
Committee members expenses & stationary		£78.48
Bank interest & charges	£9.47	£19.22
Competition receipts	£336.00	
Competition prizes		£470.00
Competition sponsorship contributions	£10.00	
Gifts, reimbursements & advertisements	£471.00	£2.00
<b>Total receipts/expenditure per above</b>	<b>£4,602.47</b>	<b>£4,572.97</b>

Income less expenditure	£29.50
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	Balance @ 31.3.01	Balance @ 31.3.02	Difference
Treasurer account	£694.89	£304.92	(£389.97)
Moneymaster account	£856.34	£1,812.81	£956.47
Joyce Brennan account*	£537.00	nil	(£537.00)
Totals	£2,088.23	£2,117.73	£29.50

\* The Joyce Brennan A/c was closed on 20/6/01 and the funds transferred to the Treasurer A/c.

**Prepared by Louise Lloyd**  
**Audited by Alan Watts**

[As Treasurer at the time but unable to attend AGM, I can add that it was established that the Joyce Brennan account was opened in order to deposit the generous return of honorarium by Mr Gunasekera, an earlier Treasurer. With no merit in holding 2 deposit accounts, the committee approved my proposal to close the Joyce Brennan account. –Ed]

## Letters

Dear Editor,

I am surprised that our readers have made no reference to a popular style of writing: ‘poetry prose’. Perhaps they have never heard of it.

Its conception has been accredited to the Iranian author, Muktar Rashtzadeh, whose books of children’s stories are found in most homes in his country. Muktar won prizes at school for his fluent recitations of the works of the illustrious Persian poets, Hafez and Saadi.

Basically, ‘poetry prose’ is short sentences of rhyme inserted in a block of text. In one of Muktar’s tales about children looking for a lost cave of treasure in the Caspian Forest, he writes: ‘The bear was there to scare.’ This does not translate easily from the Farsi (Iranian word meaning Persian – Ed), but our readers should grasp the style.

I have re-read some of the submissions to our poetry competitions. In some cases, what the author has penned as ‘prose poetry’ is in reality ‘poetry

prose'. In future, our judges should pay particular attention to the entries. They must classify the works as 'prose', 'poetry prose', 'chopped-up prose', 'prose poetry' or 'rhyming verse'.

Yours sincerely,

George C. Robertson.

[I trust this will stimulate a response from our poets – Ed]

Dear Editor,

At our recent committee meeting, our hard working membership secretary Joan Hykin was congratulated on her recent wedding to Roy Lewis. I am sure our members will join in wishing the happy couple our very good wishes for their future together.

Yours sincerely

Ethel Corduff

Dear Ed.

Rereading my Spring issue of "The Author", I feel I have to respond to Jan Jeffries's letter concerning grammar and her complaint about a Training booklet on Effective Writing which makes the mistake, as she sees it, of allowing "and" and "but" to start sentences. Fowler's *Modern English Usage* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition as revised by Sir Ernest Gowers) has the following to say about the use of "And" beginning a sentence:

"That it is a solecism to begin a sentence with 'and' is a faintly lingering superstition. The OED gives examples ranging from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> C; the Bible is full of them."

And on the use of "But" beginning a sentence, readers are referred back to his comments for "and".

Alas, the superstition lives on!

Yours sincerely,

Clare Gaen (Mrs)

[Of course Fowler is not the sole arbiter – Ed]

Dear Adrian,

I would like to congratulate Stephen Bibby on his winning story, but it is more an excellent travel article good enough for the tabloids I would have thought.

I never got round to writing about judging which you raised in the Spring issue (157). I have made comments on judging before in the “Author” and hope you will introduce a revised method for at least some of the competitions. Those who have won a competition before must qualify and so would those that the editor feels are up to the required standard. We all read, some of us a lot, and we have our own likes and dislikes. Furthermore, I think it is a good education to have to judge between often very different themes.

I personally would like to see three judges, one as now of a published author, and two from members, the three judges co-ordinating among themselves. A bit of extra work for some but much fairer, and a one sentence comment on each from each judge would be extremely useful, as they often would not say the same thing.

Carry on the good work!

Best Wishes,

Les Fletcher

[We already use a panel of judges to facilitate variety. Our problem is in finding new judges who are willing and able to participate. Will any members who think they may fit the bill please write to me and we will see what can be done – Ed]

### **Minutes of ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING held on 11 May 2002, Civil Service Club, London**

Those present: Alan Watts (Chairman), Ethel Corduff, Terry Rickson, Joan Lewis, Vee Bradley, Brian Scott, Roy Froud, Valerie Whitmarsh, Ron Jeffreys, Gordon Gompers, Paul Williams, Steve Gasson, Vivian Edwards.

#### 1. Apologies for absence

The Chairman welcomed members. Apologies were received from Charles Neilson Gattey, Trudi Morris, Adrian Danson, Louise Lloyd and Barbara Stewart. Mrs Corduff was able to report that Trudi Morris had suffered no speech problem and was in good spirits but unable to walk easily and still in hospital.



2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 12 May 2001 were read, agreed and signed.

3. Matters arising

a. Gordon Gompers commented that he would have voted against the change of name had he been present.

b. Roy Froud referred to the possibility of applying for CSSC funds and asked for progress. Mrs Corduff said that nothing had happened so far but another attempt would be made.

c. Roy Froud asked if the press release he had prepared in 2001 to publicise his competition had been used. Mrs Lewis said Mr Watts had found it too negative and not used it, members of the Committee had publicised with posters where possible.

d. Mr Rickson pointed out that *Springboard* was a separate poetry magazine.

4. Membership Secretary's report.

a. Mrs Lewis reported that the current membership figure was 159, coincidentally the same figure as for last year at this time. Only 7 new members had been enrolled since January. The £5 entry fee for Roy Froud's competition for non-members had made a welcome addition to funds. She said the second prize winner, Pamela Hadman, had turned out to be a member of the Writers' group she attended in Stamford. She has now joined the Society. Mrs Lewis voiced the Society's thanks to Roy Froud for sponsoring his competition.

b. The Article folio is doing well, a second one should start soon.

5. Meetings Secretary's report.

a. Mrs Corduff reported that the Luncheon went well, also that Paul Chand, a recent speaker and guest, had been found dead. The date for 2002 is 26 October and suggestions for speakers should be put to President Charles Neilson Gattey.

b. The New Year Party also went well and proves popular towards the end of January.

c. Workshop 29 June, small take-up but still running.

d. Alan and Marjorie Watts kindly offered another 'Awayday' at Beckenham, date 10 August.

#### 6. Treasurer's Report.

Our new Treasurer, Louise Lloyd, had sent Statement of Expenditure and Income, which Alan Watts had audited. Discussion and comment followed. Roy Froud requested that last year's figures be shown as well in future. He queried the Joyce Brennan account: Joan Lewis explained that it had contained the honoraria due to Mr Gunasekara who had refused it, and that the President had agreed that there was no longer any need for the money to be held so it was released to assist the funds in 2001. It was agreed that an explanation would have helped. A request for separate figures for parties' costs was agreed. Mrs Lewis proposed acceptance of the Statement, Mr Rickson seconded, the meeting agreed.

#### 7. Publicity Officer's Report.

It was regretted no Publicity Officer could be found. New members present Mr Gasson and Mr Williams were asked about their departmental magazines. Mr Williams agreed to forward details. The Committee members would continue to try and handle publicity between them.

#### 8. Editor's Report.

Mr Danson had not sent in a report. He was warmly thanked for the good job he was doing.

#### 9. Competition Secretary's Report.

a. Mr Jeffreys reported that entries this year had been significantly down. He gave his figures and said the George Farley prize had been raised to £25. Ron was thanked for all his work.

b. Mr Froud said that he would continue to sponsor the W G and F G Froud Memorial Competition but did not want it combined with the Lewis Wright. 2002 would be for Society members only, for a Short Story up to 2500 words, theme 'Life in the Services', non-autobiographical. Roy might be able to provide a judge. He had chosen this theme as his father had been in the Royal Artillery.

#### 10. Poetry Workshop.

Mr Rickson reported a membership of 80. Their weekend had had the lowest number attending ever but it had gone well. The officers were re-elected and the subscriptions remain the same.

11. Annual Luncheon would be on 26<sup>th</sup> October and the menu had been settled. Mr Gompers suggested we aim high for a speaker by asking J K Rowling.

#### 12. Writer of the Year.

Mr Watts said that 2 nominations had been received, Charles Neilson Gattey and Paul Williams. It had been decided to make the Award to Charles in 2002 and to Paul in 2003.

#### 13. Election of President and Vice-President.

The Chairman proposed and the meeting unanimously agreed to the re-election of Charles Neilson Gattey as President and to Richard Adams, John Le Carré and Iain McIntyre as Vice-Presidents.

#### 14. Election of Committee.

The Chairman asked if any members would like to serve on the Committee but no offers were received. Roy Froud proposed re-election of the Committee en bloc, seconded by Brian Scott, and agreed unanimously

#### 15. Honoraria.

The Committee had decided that in our present financial difficulties no honoraria would be awarded. Mr Scott said that although no money available, all praise was due to the Committee.

#### 16. Lewis Wright Short Story Competition.

Dr Vivian Edwards gave her judge's report in detail and announced the winner as Clare Gaen and second Louise Lloyd. Sincere thanks were made to Dr Edwards.

#### 17. Any other business.

a. Mr Gompers announced a reciprocal deal on advertising made with *Freelance Market News* and advocated '*Writer's Markets*' a US magazine giving 4000 markets and costing £19.50 incl postage. The Author should offer as much market information as possible.

b. Terry Rickson made it clear that Springboard was an Internet publication.

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm.

## **ANNUAL COMPETITIONS Results 2001-2002**

### THE VINCENT BRENNAN TRAVEL ARTICLE 2001/2

1<sup>st</sup> PRIZE £30: *IN THE WAKE OF ODYSSEUS* P W Stock, Dorset.

2<sup>nd</sup> PRIZE £20: *A TASTE OF THE CEVENNES* Stephen Bibby, Silchester, Reading, Berks.

3<sup>rd</sup> Prize £10 *ON FEELING COLD IN THE TROPICS* William Wood, Etchingam, East Sussex.

Ron Jeffreys

Competition Secretary

### THE LEWIS WRIGHT COMPETITION

#### Result and Judge's Report

All these stories were deliberated over, being read with great interest. The standard was high. It was my pleasure to peruse them.

FIRST PRIZE is awarded to *MORWENNA* by Clare Gaen.

This being an outstanding entry. The story's somewhat mysterious quality gave it an element of wonder, making it an exciting story both to read ... and to re-read ... one that is readily recalled. [I've read that there was a Welsh saint of this name, of whom little is known; the name probably means 'seawave.'] Congratulations.

SECOND PRIZE is awarded to *BLIND DATE* by Louise Lloyd.

This is both an amusing and well contrived story, bringing a smile to the reader's lips ... a well deserved second place. Certainly it is worthy of entry to further competitions.

## FIVE THIRDS SELECTED

### 1. *NO MORE LULLABIES* by John Maugham.

This is a thought provoking well researched and sad little story, casting the reader's thoughts back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the horrors of the plague. It is a tale that will certainly be remembered. Enter for a further competition.

### 2. *THE OLD COASTER* by Beryl Jones.

Another thought provoking and unusual story, with forgiveness the main theme throughout. The author should feel encouraged to take this tale to another competition.

### 3. *MIND OVER MATTER.* by Beryl Jones.

A nicely written little story, with an original theme. In spite of its dramatically sad ending, it does induce a smile to the reader's lips. There is a lot of sympathy engendered for Fred, it is certainly worthy of entry to another competition.

### 4. *A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...* by R Stewart.

A trolley comes to life in this unusual little story, and the reader laughs along with the antics inflicted upon the teller of the tale, the long suffering supermarket trolley. Try another competition.

### 5. *THE WOMAN WHO COULD NOT SING* by William Wood

The reader's sympathy is rapidly evoked in this amusing little story where 'the woman who could not sing ends up as a star'. Try another competition.

*THE BUCKET* by William Wood. This is a well written story which came up to the final selection. It was not however given a placement. I think that if the story was shortened, it would be given a sharper edge.

Vivian Edwards

## THE GEORGE FARLEY PRIZE

There were nine entries for this competition and the Farley Family have generously increased the prize cheques to £20 for the winner and £5 for the runner-up. In her report Ms. Farley said that she wishes that they could

give a prize to all the entries and:- "... Once again this year there was a pleasing standard of entry, though fewer than usual. We hope this doesn't mean that the Civil Service is losing its sense of humour, or where will England be, perish the day we all take Government seriously. It's nice to see such a variety of styles in the poems. Please refer members to the piece I wrote last year – that every possible form is welcome, from 4-line cleriheW to narrative saga, formal or free, just so long as it's funny.

The winner is "*THE WONDROUS GILES*" by Doreen Fay of Portsmouth. A splendidly funny-sad poem, nicely constructed, and just the right length to tell the story and nothing spare. Well done.

Runner-up was difficult to decide, but it goes to "*COUNTRY REFRAIN*" by Geraldine Smedley, Habertoft, Lincs. This also is nicely terse, making its point sharply.

"*TASTING THE RAIN*" by William Wood ran very close for 2<sup>nd</sup>. Perhaps the free verse was a bit too free, but the idea was dare I say, delicious. Please assure Clare Green that the language of her poem was absolutely appropriate and very well chosen For "*RAIN RAGE*". Clare Gaen must also be congratulated for her "*PASSING OUT*" lovely word selection. William Wood also sent a neat little verse of "*HAPPINESS*". Maureen Mills took us nicely through her tale ("*OH – FOR A BIT OF CRUMPET*") in a loose verse form. C P D Elvidge sent a sad poem ("*PAYING THE PRICE*") so, alas, it didn't qualify, though beautifully written. Her "*DOGGEREL*" is also a smashing poem, but didn't quiet hit the funny button.

## THE HERBERT SPENCER POETRY COMPETITION 2002

### Judge's report

The dramatic drop in the number of entries for this competition (only nineteen this year) should have made the task of choosing the winners an easy matter but it was not so. Throughout several readings of each poem, most of the entries were placed 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> as each demonstrated a particularly commendable quality, either through judicious use of metaphor, intelligent handling of a chosen subject, or clear, sharp imagery. Eventually I had to employ the criteria of deciding which of the poems I would select for public gaze; either in an anthology or for a poetry reading

– the kind of poem which made me exclaim ‘hey – you must read this!’ or which read aloud particularly well.

Of course, this means that the final choice is arbitrary and personal and I think most poetry competition adjudicators would concur. I have heard the opinion expressed that such competitions are a lottery and if this can be upheld it must be a consolation to all the ‘also rans’ that they could have better luck next time. Contestants would stand a better chance though if they avoided using archaisms and poetic inversions purely for rhyming purposes. The adoption of a preaching tone also limits the chance of success; audience awareness is the essence of communication through poetry. Reading your poems aloud is useful for detecting technical faults such as rhythmic inconsistencies and arbitrary line endings which halt the flow. In certain instances the competition rules were not observed. Only pen-names should appear on your entries. It is advisable too to change the title of re-entered poems. One competitor was identifiable from the titles of poems previously mentioned in the ‘Author’.

The eventual winners which consistently came towards the top of the pile are:-

First: *WORDMONGER* by William Wood

An extremely entertaining poem which reads aloud very well using words to describe the business of words and their persuasiveness in an original way.

Second: *WINDSONG* by C P D Elvidge

An elegant poem, rich in sensuality with a clearly stated theme.

Third: *THE FINISHING JOB* by Andrew Millican

The consistence of the innovative seven syllable line structure emphasises the subject matter of a meandering car journey with a dramatic ending.

I also commend *LOTTERY* by Andrew Millican and *WHAT’S IN A NAME* by C P D Elvidge.

Joyce Thornton

All runners-up were recommended to enter their work in future competitions

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POETRY PAGES edited by Joyce Thornton

### **The State Prisoner In The Tower**

Allan Watts

Thank you, sir. You serve me well. The grating key  
Announcing how, a moment hence, the door  
Of this my cell will give you entrance here,  
Is no mere scrape on metal, but a joy –  
And – no, sir, do not think it is the food  
You bring – Ah, no, sir! What is food to me?  
What have I to live for? My doom is told.  
But to see you for a precious moment,  
To talk, exchange a word or two, and have  
Communion with a fellow being,  
That is the promise of your grating key.  
I know that in another day or two  
Before the sun has hardly left his bed,  
Your key will grate again and bid me leave  
This stone-girt cell and time-girt world for ay,  
I know the axe will fall,  
But place my food  
Upon the table, sir, and let us talk.

### **Gods**

Andrew Millican

Autumn break breakfast by the window  
in a Middle England hotel on the coast.

Outside on a manicured leaf-free lawn  
an ancient bird table stands angled to the ground.

A miniature shrine like a Shinto temple  
where gigantic gods deliver daily offerings



of bread, rind, nuts. And various worshippers  
wing in, snatch crumbs, seize snippets, squabble  
and fight over their free feast, then fly  
out, deserting the temple once again.

But not before they pay homage to and bless  
the gods with their mottled droppings

### **Tolpuddle Revisited**

Doreen Fay

The Martyrs Inn proclaims their fame  
Brave men, comfortably, long dead.  
Six names adorn the fire's hearth.  
Bright gold against black stone.

What if James Hammett should return,  
Roughly shod and crudely clothed?  
Would guests queue up to shake his hand?  
Soft against steely palm.

Would anyone jump up to buy the beer  
For Stanfield son and father?  
Thump their backs, hear their awful tale?  
Acute against deaf ears?

Would poor James Brine be found a chair,  
Midst daintily dressed tables?  
Dry auburn sherry, soup, fish, sweet.  
Ample against scant choice.

What would be the reception for  
Lovelace brothers, James and George?  
'Come in lads to a roaring fire'?  
Warm against freezing air.

Perhaps it's best they can't come back,  
For what would be their welcome?  
The Martyrs Inn proclaims their fame.  
Men comfortably long dead.

### **Cooking Cannelloni For Andrew Motion**

Terry Rickson

I thought this was a brilliant title;  
original, funny.  
I dreamed it up whilst supping soup,  
tomato and mascarpone, as it happened.

Then I remembered; something like it  
had been done before. Damn!  
I still quite like it though  
and he's done a lot for poetry and poets.

## **Poetry Workshop**

**Mike Boland**

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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

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## **PW 2002**

The annual Poetry Workshop Weekend took place on 12-14 July at the University of Birmingham. Members who attended enjoyed a varied range of activities. A full report of proceedings and details of the AGM, which took place during the Weekend, will be published in the Autumn newsletter.

## **WAVES 2002**

This year's *Waves*, the annual collection of members' poetry was launched at Birmingham, and is now available. Containing 31 poems from 25 of our members, copies, price £2 (incl p & p), can be obtained from Bill Douglas at 47 Walkerston Avenue, Largs, Ayrshire KA30 8EP for copies. Full details of this publication will appear in the Autumn Newsletter.

## **Bill Barnes Poetry Competition**

The closing date for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition is 30 September. Rules for this competition, which is open only to members of the Poetry Workshop, were given in the Spring Newsletter. If anyone would like a copy of the rules, please contact me at the address given above. Results should appear in the Winter Newsletter, and all entries will be printed in a special Competition issue of the Newsletter.

## Subscription to the Poetry Workshop

It is still not too late to take out a subscription for membership of the Poetry Workshop. The fee for 2002 is £3 for members of the Society of Civil and Public Service Writers. This gives you:

- three lively Newsletters a year, plus a fourth. Competition Special issue
- the chance to submit poems for publication in *Waves*
- access to the popular postal folio scheme
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend at the University of Birmingham.

Cheques for membership should be made payable to: SCPSW Poetry Workshop Account, and sent to Terry Rickson at the address given above.

### Dates:

30 September 2002	Autumn Newsletter
30 September 2002	Closing Date, Bill Barnes Competition
30 November 2002	Winter Newsletter
1 January 2003	Subscriptions due
31 March 2003	Closing date for submissions to <i>Waves</i>
31 March 2003	Spring Newsletter
12-13 July 2003	Poetry Workshop Weekend

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## MARKET INFORMATION

### Writing On Theatre

Gordon E Gompers

One of my many maxims is: if something is it can be written about. However, some subjects are more interesting: than others. Having written about anything and everything I still find theatre my favourite subject.

There are quite a number of aspects of theatre but I have only space to write on three. There are pieces on individual theatres that can be very acceptable by county magazines. Thus *Monacle*, a Surrey county magazine, bought two articles from me: one on the theatres of Croydon; and the other on the theatres of Wimbledon.

All theatres have a publicity officer of some sort. If you wish to write about a specific theatre send a letter asking for co-operation to “The Publicity Officer”. The theatre in question might not have such a functionary but some one must handle publicity, perhaps the manager or under manager. One can be sure of the maximum co-operation.

Another aspect of theatre upon which I have been much published is back stage work, especially as an audio engineer and effects man. I had quite a few articles about my work in this field placed in *Amateur Stage* and *Dramatics*, the American equivalent. The dosh was not much but what a subject!

Most of my most recent writings has been concerned with criticism. As the Accredited Music Critic of Morley College (1966-72) I had to cover many stage productions, mainly opera. As an accredited critic to the Dolmetsch Festival at Haslemere I had to cover the occasional play. As the present critic of The Streatham Society I cover nearly everything that occurs in Streatham.

Why not write to your local society and ask them if they need a critic? There might not be any dosh but there are lots of lovely things you can watch without having to pay for.

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## **Morwenna**

Clare Gaen

(1<sup>st</sup> prize winner in the Lewis Wright Competition)

**P**ushing my toes against plush, warm sand, I imbibe the hazy luxury of a lazy seaside afternoon. Blue sky, laced with cloud froth, canopies my dreams, while a soothing sea breeze carries a cocktail of happy sounds. I marvel at the rhythmic bass force of waves continuously strumming and its accompanying melody – the sound of my two children, Tom aged seven and Jessica five, splashing whoops of joy and laughter as they jump in and out of the sun-warmed pools that edge this large and very beautiful bay.

Cringle Bay, as it is known, has been my second home ever since I toddled into pools all my own. It's impossible to believe such a happy carefree place could be haunted by a wicked spirit. Yet many will tell the tale – as did my mother – of a child ghost called Morwenna who lures unsuspecting children away to death-games in her treacherous cove here.

For my part, I don't believe in ghosts. Sure there have been tragedies. But if people will ignore clearly displayed warnings of dangerous currents and the need to pay careful heed to tide times when exploring the bay's furthest nooks and crannies, what do they expect? Heaven knows, if it isn't safe to let young children out of sight near the hazard of a garden pond, what madness possesses people to let them run loose in the face of a monster like the sea! Judging by the bay's popularity, I'm not alone in my

views. If the beach were haunted, it would have to be one of the best-loved haunts ...

Groggily, I notice the sky has changed hue, the air lost some of its heat and, looking at my watch, I see it is only about forty minutes to high tide. Usually Tom and Jess will have started sandcastle-building long before now, wanting to finish in good time so the waves can fill a myriad of intricate moats and waterways. I love sandcastles and look eagerly across to where Tom and Jess had been playing a short doze ago. Strangely, there's no sign of them – not so much as a mound of sand or a heap of decorative treasures. Surely they can't have wandered far ... I've warned them so many times ...

“Tom! Jess! ... Tom! Jess! ...” I'm screaming full pitch now, growing more and more anxious with each unanswered cry. Fiercely, I scan and rescan the horizon, but find no sign of either Tom in his lime-green trunks or Jess in her bright pink bather. My legs race me down to the water's edge until, knee-deep, I catch a lime and pink glimpse of two children gathering shells in Morwenna's cove.

I feel a wash of unreality, yelling out to sensible, watchful parents, shepherding youngsters bumping the waves: “Quick! Fetch help to the cove – Morwenna's cove! There's not a moment to lose! My children are stranded!” Then, purposefully, stroke out to sea in a torrent of guilt, desperation, fear. I know that by the time a lifeboat arrives the currents around the death-trap cove will be too treacherous to risk a rescue. I also know I cannot let my children die alone.

The quickest route is by far the deadliest and I take care to give myself ample clearance from the rocks that mark the headland before cornering towards the furthest cove. Then, dragging memory as forcefully as I yank my aching legs, I try to recall everything I've heard tell about Morwenna.

It must be a hundred years since Morwenna first came to Cringle Bay. A stranger to the sea – about Tom's age – how she would have marvelled at the wonder of it all ... Skipping along the shoreline, lost in the joy of collecting sea-washed treasure, oblivious to time and the sound of the sea. What a shock to look up from her hunting and find the sea so suddenly upon her – the sandy path she had danced along completely gone, replaced by a mass of sprayful, arching water. I can almost feel Morwenna's fear as,

unable to swim, she backed herself onto every last inch of sand, back and back into the tiniest nook and crevice she could find to hide in. How she must have prayed for the sea to stop. But the sea didn't listen. It just kept on advancing, until swirling, mad and angry, it pounced – playing with her as a cat throws a mouse.

So anguished was her death, Morwenna's soul was reputed never to have found rest. Instead, it haunted the bay, where, at a critical hour, unattended children were lured away to re-enact Morwenna's deathly fate. I don't believe in ghosts, but shudder at the thought of Tom and Jess entrapped like Morwenna.

At last I near Morwenna's cove, grateful for the swimming prowess born of a lifetime lived beside the sea. Some twenty metres ahead, on the left, Tom and Jess are still collecting their treasures, eerily oblivious to the roar of the ever-approaching sea. I call gently to them. As I do so, the spell they appear under is broken and, shaken by the roar of breaking waves, they turn towards me with fear-filled faces.

Behind them hangs a wraith-like figure of a girl, wearing the long attire of the nineteenth century, staring at me with a look of pure and utter hatred. Sharply, I close my eyes and make the sign of the cross, else I too fall under some other-worldly spell. Blindly, I rush forward to scoop up Tom and Jess.

“Don't worry. Mummy's here. I'll save you,” I whisper soothingly. “But hurry! We can't stay on the beach ...” Forcefully, I pull them out into the water. From the recesses of memory another tale has surfaced – of a fisherman shipwrecked near the cove, rescued dramatically from a rocky outcrop subsequently nicknamed the Guardian's rocks. It's our only hope – the current is already far too strong to risk dragging Tom and and Jess back the way I have come. But the children are reluctant, clearly frightened by the noisy breakers and strong drag of water – so different to the teasing, gentle waves they are accustomed to in the calm of the sandy bay. Besides they don't want to leave their new-found friend. How can I tell them, she's already dead?

“I've sent for help. We're going to be saved.” I try to reassure them. “But I'm only strong enough to carry the two of you. Others will rescue your friend.” I'm doing my utmost to quell their quivering, all the while

battling hard against the stubborn current set on knocking us off our course. Tom and Jess know as well as I that the rocks will be covered in less than fifteen minutes and would clearly rather wait ashore. “Close your eyes and hang on to me. It’s not far now.” I urge them as we make laborious progress forward, water swirling around our thighs and waists. Then, urgently, I push them up onto the rocks, throwing my body behind theirs as a fresh wave dashes past, threatening to skittle us from our post. We cling on desperately, until – immediate danger past – we dare to clamber on up to the highest point.

The children are restless and edgy. Thoughts of Morwenna flicker through all our minds and a new danger opens as I sight Morwenna and her ghostly playmates approaching the rocks intent on pulling us back to what little remains of the shore. Hugging Tom and Jess closer, I start to tell the story of Oscar Wilde’s “Happy Prince”. A surprising calm descends and, daring to open my eyes just a peep, I see the ghost children listening enthralled – just like the Lost Boys and Wendy in Peter Pan. By the time I near the end of my story, the sea is washing our ankles, our bodies soaked by the waves and spray. We are jerked to attention by a sudden unexpected roar overhead. “A sea-rescue helicopter! Wow! Mum – we’re saved!” The ghost band are clearly transfixed by this space-age invention. Meanwhile, no time is lost before a short-haul rescue is attempted from the cliff-top, taking Tom and Jess together in one dangerous fell swoop. “Remember, I love you!” I shout, as they are hoisted swiftly away.

My danger is great. The water has risen rapidly and the next big wave could be my damnation. Never mind the waves, the ghost children, angry at two new playmates being so abruptly taken from them, are about to exact their revenge. Playing for time, I lower myself back into the water, taking a needle-pained grasp of jagged rock, trying to wedge myself into its craggy crevices.

“Morwenna. Your mother didn’t abandon you. She couldn’t rescue you because she couldn’t swim and there were no helicopters in her day. But she loved you very much ...”

A huge waves rushes on and, ducking my head down, I cling on desperately, the razor-sharp rock tearing at my limpet fingers. The waves are too strong, too powerful ... I feel myself slipping, then an immense push upwards, a sharp tug. As I feel the breeze slapping my soaked body, I



realise I am being hoisted away. Looking down, it dawns on me that I owe my life to Morwenna and her band. Without their incredible push upwards, I would have been taken by the waves seconds before rescue. Smiling in acknowledgement, I watch the Guardian's Rocks, haloed in the most wondrous orange brilliance and know that Morwenna and her playfellows have achieved salvation. Will anyone ever believe I owe my life to a bunch of ghosts?

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### **The Wondrous Giles**

Doreen Fay

Winner of the George Farley Prize

'You're looking well,' he smiles.  
While I stand much amazed,  
Is this the wondrous Giles?  
Who spurned me, as I gazed  
At him, so long ago?

Where gone the flopping hair?  
Skinny frame, crooked grin?  
The shy and hungry stare?  
Goose pimples on my skin  
caused by him long ago?

I mutter, that I'm great  
And wonder how he's been?  
He's put on so much weight!  
Can't think why I was keen  
on *him*, so long ago!

### **Country Refrain**

Geraldine Smedley

Runner-up for the George Farley Prize

"It's quiet in the country"  
My colleagues said to me,

“We envy your new lifestyle –  
You’ll love it, wait and see.”

I like the cows and chickens  
Adore the pigs and sheep,  
The only thing I’m lacking is  
A single wink of sleep!

With foxes barking nightly  
And hooting owls forlorn  
And cockerels and crow scarers  
I am a wreck at dawn.

So now I am beginning  
To plan a city trip –  
I’ll listen to the traffic  
And hope I get some kip!

### **In The Wake Of Odysseus**

Peter Stock

(Winner of the Vincent Brennan Travel Article)

“Kalimera.” A fisherman of indeterminate age and with a beard that was home to a number of small ecosystems took my bow warp, made it fast.

“Kalimera” I responded, and, stretching my Greek, “Epharisto.” He grinned. There were at least three good teeth in there.

Our beautiful white yacht now secured bow and stern we stepped ashore. This was Vassiliki, our first port of call on a sailing holiday in the Ionian Sea.

The previous day an early Gatwick charter had flown us to Prevesa. After a short coach journey we arrived in the late afternoon at Vounaki marina on mainland Greece. Our chartered yacht, ‘Asteri’ a Beneteau Oceanis 40 foot sloop, sparkling new, snubbed gently at her moorings.

On the ‘Oceanis 400’ there are berths for a crew of ten. Even on a yacht of this size that number would make for ‘cosy’ living. For ‘Lebensraum’ and comfort in the June temperatures a party of four is ideal – more expensive but worth every penny.

That night we dined ashore and being weary had resisted the attractions of the tavernas in Palairos a mile or so to the north and opted for the marina restaurant. Good plain food and a lot of the local wine – Retsina is best avoided – helped to ensure a dreamless night.

Dawn in June comes very early – but has to be experienced – at least once anyway. The sun rises behind the great bare mountains on the mainland and suddenly illuminates the distant olive-green islands on the far side of the Inland Sea. The sky is a cloudless, azure blue. It is quiet, very still. The white yachts in the marina are briefly motionless.

Once the eulogising was over – and we had stopped yawning – we victualled the boat from the well-stocked marina ‘supermarket’ and cast off.

A brisk sail across Palairos Bay and south down the channel between the islands of Meganisi and Levkas had brought us to the little fishing village of Vassiliki.

Mid afternoon ... and it was hot, the sky still a brilliant blue, the sparkling sea dark cobalt. Under the eucalyptus trees on the waterfront tables and chairs jostled for shade outside small dark tavernas. A swim was imperative, off the boat, now.

And this is one of the delights of many small harbours in the Ionian – they are clean. Clean enough to swim in. Environmental controls are strictly enforced. Quaysides are patrolled by the local port police and transgressors fined, instantly and heavily.

South-west the following day took us across the Cephalonian Straits, to call in at the pretty port of Fiskhardo with its old Venetian lighthouse and colourful quayside tavernas. A long cold beer at The Captain’s Cabin and, dodging the inter-island ferry, we set sail for a quiet anchorage in Polls Bay on Ithaca.

Half a mile inland up a steep track lies the ancient village of Stavros – legendary birthplace of Ulysses (Odysseus). By day it is a bustling, dusty place. With the lengthening shadows a stillness descends. The only sounds are the cicadas and the deep voices of the old men at their tables outside the candlelit tavernas. A black-clad ‘orthodox’ priest strolls by, smiles and bids us ‘Good evening’. He looks about nineteen and sounds like an English public schoolboy.

That night we stayed anchored in the shelter of Polls Bay and awoke in the glittering morning to the sound of tinkling bells as a herd of goats wound its way along the high cliff path.

On south down the Ithaca Channel, Steno Ithaki on the chart, the 40 HP on-board diesel pushing us along at a useful 6 knots and on past Andreou Bay on the southern tip of Ithaca. A helpful wind sprang up and blew us

north around the eastern end of Meganisi, past the Onassis owned island of Scorpios and on into Nidri.

Nidri is a busy port, a crossroads from where ferries and hydrofoils sail throughout the olive covered islands of the Ionian. The whitewashed, waterfront tavernas, decked with bright blue Morning Glory, provide a colourful backdrop to the bustling harbour.

We cast off before sunrise, another magically still dawn – heading for the narrow Levkas Canal and on to the islands of the North Ionian.

It was a long, dreamy passage with a favourable breeze, an occasional soaring gull and a school of dolphins who swam with us for miles. We lunched on olives, bread, cold meats, salad and white wine, chilled to perfection in the boat's big fridge.

That night, shunning the busy port of Gaios, we anchored in the almost land-locked bay of Mongonisi on the southern end of Paxos island, ate kebabs at Theo's taverna and inspected our sunburn. Later we swam off the boat our hands making tiny phosphorescent lights in the dark sea.

Lakka, where the bay provides a sheltered anchorage lies at the northern end of Paxos, a lazy sail from Mongonisi. The sea is clear, swimming is safe and the sandy beaches are fringed by pine and olive.

The town has classic charm that sends would-be artists scabbling for their sketch pads. After dark the loom of the nearby lighthouse provides an eerie periodic illumination of the sky and the only sound after midnight is the hooting of the little owls and the soft lapping of the sea.

Twelve miles to the east, Parga, on the Greek mainland has embraced 'Tourism', enjoys it, exploits it. The main harbour is another highly active little area, with colourful caiques, dozens of tavernas and shops of every kind and quality. The small yacht harbour on the west side of Ormous Valtou a mile or so away, provides easy moorings – and a water taxi service to the town.

From the summit of Parga's steep main street the views across the straits towards the southern end of Corfu are like Japanese watercolours. In the misty dusk they become magical.

It was here a polite, importunate proprietor urged us into his restaurant – via the kitchen. In typically Greek fashion lids were proudly lifted from huge containers – stews, moussaka, meat pie, fish soup, pork chops, beans, kebabs and stuffed aubergines – the quantity and complexity were

confusing, the aromas powerful, nostril twitching, the explanations informative, articulate, enthusiastic.

We sat, drank local wine, amazing how one can get used to it – I was reminded of a similar ‘accommodation’ in Cyprus – ate black olives and watched a golden hazy, sunset wondering what to order. We shared a meaty moussaka, a stefado, stuffed aubergines and pork chops ... and a few other dishes ... and a lot of wine ...

That night the electric storm lasted several hours, the lightning and thunder continuous, the rain torrential and noisy on the cabin roof. By 8 am the sun shone, the air was wonderfully clean and the boat gleaming. The weather forecast predicted high pressure and moderate north-westerlies – ‘standard’ for this area.

Our return southwards started calmly in the early morning sun – this was the route Odysseus followed – so the guidebook stated anyway.

Within two hours it was raining hard and we were reefed down, rolling along at an exciting six knots. My mate and I sought to assure our wives – and one another – that this was all fun, I was not so certain but the mate’s wife, a sturdy seafarer and untroubled, retired to the galley to make tea and sandwiches. There was no rush to join her. Those on deck peered into the gloom while on the wheel I watched the compass and kept a weather-eye astern at the following wind and sea.

That evening, securely moored in the tiny but deep-water Port Spiglia on Meganisi we went ashore in the soft and cloudless sunset to the hill-top town of Spartakhouri where the bougainvillea was breathtaking and the views more dramatic than any holiday poster could even try to indicate.

Down on the waterfront there is another taverna run by the hardest working family I have ever met. It’s basic, friendly and depends on ‘yachties’ for its existence. Bebee, the co-owner watches for boats and is out on the quay in an instant to help with the mooring and get the punters into his beach taverna.

This year he was beside himself with enthusiasm – he and his brother had built a ‘floating jetty’ right in front of the family taverna. Despite our misgivings there was really no option but to use it.

The jetty was an archetypal manifestation of Greek improvisation and DIY. It was built in sections, each section, about five metres long, consisted of a number of old oil drums on top of which half-a-dozen

wooden planks had been lashed with bright orange plastic rope. Each section was joined to its neighbour with loops of the same material.

When it was calm this articulated construction was reassuringly stable – the slight tendency of each section to pitch as you stepped on or off it inducing a jolly feeling of ‘nauticality’ and an occasional ‘whoops’ from the ladies. In any sort of swell to walk on this construction would have taxed the balancing ability of circus clown. Bebee and his brother of course found no difficulty and enjoyed putting their arms around female crew to keep them upright.

On our last evening we stood on the quayside at Vounaki gazing sadly, fondly, at ‘our’ beautiful white yacht. Next year ... next year we would sail further ... south to Zakinthos and east through the Dragoneras ... perhaps further north – to Corfu. Next year we could come for longer ... practise our Greek ... find the dolphins again ...

### **Wordmonger**

William Wood

(Winner of the Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition)

Yes, take a look at these words.

Every shape, every size, colour, texture,

Flint-hard, sandstone-soft and all

The rough and smoothnesses in between.

Come on, don’t be shy, try them

Touch them, run them through your hands

Like pebbles on a beach, like pearls

In a casket, like the bright sands of time.

Listen. Each word has its voice,

A clink, a clunk, a tinkle. Its taste,

Rough surfaced, aniseed gobstopper,

Live-slurped, salt-sex oyster, fresh

From its encrusted shell. Smell them,

Tongue them, handle and delight in them.

You’ll take a sentence? Yes sir, long or short?

How about a page, a chapter, sir? You’ll

Not regret it. You’ll be back for more.

It's like a drug. Now don't be alarmed!  
Yes, perfectly legal and the side effects  
Are wholly beneficial.

Tell you what, I'll bung this lot in too.  
A complete story for a fiver, can't say fairer,  
Is it a deal, m'am? Ta. What's that  
You say? Do I do novels? Indeed I do.  
I've got novels by the kilo, nice ones  
Naughty ones, high-brow, low-brow, some  
That punch you in the guts, tear out  
Your heart, make you laugh, make you cry.

Some I've got even make you think. No,  
They're quite harmless, sir. How heavy  
Do you want it, madam, eighty thou',  
One hundred thousand words? Tell you  
What. Here's a nice saga, three volumes,  
A package holiday in time, fifteen quid.  
No airport tax to pay. Something smaller,  
Something slighter, lighter to carry but  
Weightier on the mind? I've just the thing,  
Booker nomination, a mere two hundred and  
Fifty pages, twenty five pounds to you,  
Guaranteed unread. A bargain at the price.

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### **A Sailing Episode!**

Pamela Hadman

(Winner of 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize – Froud Memorial Competition)

**I** well remember the day that I embarked on a disastrous sailing holiday with Ron, my husband, and his friend Jack. The boats (Cormorant our 24-footer, and Nella Jack's 18-footer) were moored alongside a

pontoon in a small East Coast estuary port when I arrived in the car, the men having brought them downstream from our river moorings the previous day. To my dismay the top of Cormorant's 17ft mast was well below the overhanging rim of the quayside parapet! I stood there shaking with fear and despite all the coaxing from Ron and Jack, nothing would induce me to go over that overhang and underneath to the metal rungs of the ladder with the tide out and more than a 20ft drop below! I looked longingly at the ladders on the other side of the river – although sheer, there was no overhang to contend with – and eventually persuaded my long suffering husband to pick me up from there. I went round by the bridge while he gallantly rowed across in our tiny fibreglass dinghy, losing an oar in the process and nearly capsizing the boat trying to retrieve it in the midstream race of the current. Then after all that, when still overcome by the fear of heights, I refused to descend, his unrepeatable language goaded me into action watched by a delighted crowd of onlookers!

Evening came and I was presented with an ultimatum, either up the ladder and over the parapet or stay on the boat by myself. Faced with such an alternative what could I do? Fortunately the tide was in making the ascent easier, but I must say the thought of what I had to overcome before getting back on board, cast quite a blight on my enjoyment of the evening. However with a bit of dutch courage and help from my companions, I made it safely.

Still as all enthusiasts will know, boating is full of hazards and disappointments. Next morning we arose, me very protestingly, at 4 a.m. to catch the tide on a dull and decidedly chilly morning. However, when we finally got out into the Wash it was quite pleasant, with a stiffish breeze, and we hoisted sail. We were all together in the Cormorant and we sped merrily along thoroughly enjoying ourselves – this is the life and all that – for all of ten minutes, when suddenly there was a loud crack and mast, sails and rigging were all trailing in the water. We drifted helplessly like a bird with a broken wing, Ron and Jack frantically struggling to free the sails and get the mast and boom back on board before the trailing ropes wound round our propeller! In the meantime the wind and tide were taking us perilously near the one of the buoys marking the channel. It was a nasty minute, but they were able to start the engine just in time to prevent a collision!



When we got back to the moorings we found that the mast mounting was horribly bent, so next morning we set out to find a blacksmith and we eventually ran one to earth who promised to do the work immediately. However repeated visits found him either closed or, “Too busy to find the time to do that!”. During this time we were using the engine, a single cylinder diesel which produced shattering vibrations in a small glass fibre boat and we were longing for the relative “peace” of sail, so the men decided that I must go and collect the mounting, hoping that feminine wiles might accomplish what they could not! After half an hour wait while the blacksmith endeavoured to straighten the offending piece of metal, with frequent stops to hold it up to the light and squint hopefully at it, I returned triumphantly, to be met with the angry exclamation “the b.... thing is not straight now, any fool can see that! That was the end of sailing for that holiday.

We started for home at 7 o’clock next morning against a bitterly cold head wind and drizzling rain. I was delegated to crew for Jack as the Nella’s temperamental engine might need attention during the trip and he had to have someone for the tiller. On our way up river we were just going under a bridge where the cross currents are very strong when the motor coughed and then cut out completely! We were swept helplessly about from one side of the river to the other. Ron sped to the rescue and lashed us alongside while he helped to restart the engine. This done Jack and I set off at a spanking pace and arrived at the last sea lock cold and wet through two hours later. We were consuming steaming cups of Oxo by the time Ron appeared! However, the respite must have been too much for Jack’s engine for when we left the lock although it zoomed ahead at full throttle it expired again in a few minutes whereupon the strong wind promptly drove the Nella aground! Ron tried to tow her off and turn her upstream, but this proved impossible against the wind, so it was decided to moor her and return for her another day. In the process of moving her to a suitable mooring position the wind nearly dashed her to pieces against the piles of the lock and Jack, in trying to fend her off, suddenly found himself hanging on to one of the piles, feet flailing in the air and calling loudly for rescue, while the boat with me in it drifted out of reach!

When the Nella was at last safely moored and the men were unloading her, I retired to Cormorant for a much needed cup of tea. When the kettle began to boil, happening to glance out of the cabin door, I realised I had a different view of the landscape than previously. I rushed on deck only to

find the mooring rope trailing in the water! My cries for help brought my husband dashing to the rescue falling headlong over a bollard in the process and by the time he got to the scene the Cormorant and I were aground! She defied all attempts to shove her off until Ron with one overzealous push overbalanced and fell in the river! Satisfied she then floated free!

It rained all the way back to our home mooring and it was late evening by the time we arrived. My sister was anxiously waiting to collect us, and her first words were, “Oh! What have they done to you?” She hardly recognised me, I was so weather-beaten and my hair was all rats tails. She admitted to me afterwards that she was afraid I would never be the same again!

Was I GLAD to see home once more! I had discovered the truth of the saying “The best thing about boating is when it stops!”

## **Browned Off**

Andrea Wynne

(Winner of 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize – Froud Memorial Competition)

**T**he day I didn't join The Brownies was one of the most significant landmarks of my childhood.

At first I had no entrenched aversion to this hyperactive band of shrieking eight-year-olds. Each to their own, I say. All I knew about them was that they met every Tuesday evening in the Sunday School. I used to see them going past my house, hopping their way down the avenue like a bunch of disorderly brown fleas. I expressed no opinion one way or the other, tucked safely at home with my School Friend annual and my little Mettoy typewriter. This state of affairs might have gone on until I grew up and left home had not some interfering busybody suggested to my Mum Winnie that a spell in The Brownies might not do me any harm.

It's one thing not having an entrenched aversion to a particular activity but it's quite another having someone else suggest that you should actually do it. No sooner had it been hinted that I would benefit from the rigours of The Brownie regime than I decided that Brownies were feeble-minded, brainwashed little prigs and that even were someone to drip-feed me

sherbet lemons from Whitsuntide to Christmas, there was no way *anyone* was going to make me join.

Now, I loved My Mummy very much so when she asked wouldn't I go along to a Brownie Open Evening to see if I mightn't just change my mind and have my name put on the waiting list, for her sake I swallowed hard on my preconceptions and allowed myself to be towed across to the Sunday School, where I was deposited, in mufti, in the middle of a boisterous chattering uniformed rabble.

We played a variety of infantile games during the evening, all of the team variety of course, in which I graciously consented to take part. Well, it helped to pass the time on until I could escape back to reality again. There was a brief interlude of lukewarm interest on my part during the beetle drive – anything involving competitive dice-throwing couldn't be all bad – but we were soon back to sitting down in rows of six, one behind the other, doing God-knows-what. I can't remember all the sordid details but it involved a good deal of jumping up and down, a lot of racing round for no substantive reason and getting our knickers black bright on the grubby wooden floor.

All good things come to an end. The bad ones do too except it takes a sight longer. I eventually found myself walking home with someone who called herself a Sixer, who elaborated at length on life in The Brownie ranks. We could take something called a Needlework Badge. After that there would be an opportunity to Go Camping. When we Went Camping we left our Mummies and Daddies at home and went off with only an owl to look after us. We would sleep in a tent. We would get ourselves up in the morning. We would get ourselves washed. We would ingest vast quantities of baked beans.

And if we had long hair we would comb it all by ourselves, put it in plaits and tie on the ribbons.

Little did the Sixer know that she had just hammered the final nail into The Brownie recruitment coffin.

My plaits were a significant part of my persona which I bore through my childhood until I was eleven. Only Winnie could tie them properly. They weren't just two straight pigtails, you understand: they were trichological triumphs. They started halfway down the back of my head, continued to the very end of my hair, where they were strapped in ribbon, neatened,

turned and tucked. Then they made another pass before coming to rest halfway up the main straight, where they were threaded back through the primary plait, restrapped and finished with a flourish and a whopping great bow. Once you'd been plaited by Winnie, you stayed plaited. Well, I tell you. No jumped-up badge-encrusted beetle-grubbing Brownie pack was gonna come between me and my plaits.

This all happened in May and there wasn't to be a new conscription into The Brownies until September. Four months seemed like a lifetime so I figured if I kept quiet, Winnie would just forget about it and the whole thing would die a death.

So for four months I got up, went to school, ate my dinner, went to bed, went on holiday, came back home, got up, went to school ... and said absolutely nothing.

What I hadn't accounted for was that one week before the recruitment deadline, Winnie, with swingeing disregard for the consultation process, would take herself off to another part of town to avail herself of the unmissable opportunity of buying a second-hand Brownie uniform from Mrs. Chydwyck, my Nan's next-door neighbour. Mrs. Chydwyck's daughter, Cheryl (who was a rotten kid who once dislocated my dolly's head and threatened to do the same to me if I ever told) had been elevated to The Guides. It was no more than she deserved. After lulling me into a false sense of security with rabbit stew and baked potatoes one teatime, Winnie suddenly produced two items from a crumpled C & A carrier.

There they lay: one brown woolly hat and one shapeless tunic in the same rotten unrelieved colour, except where it was besmirched with a flash of sickly yellow on the sleeve. Though my transition to secondary school was as yet a way off, when that time arrived the local grammar never even made it on to the list of preferred schools. Why? Because its uniform was brown and yellow. I don't suit brown and yellow. I never have. Put me in brown and yellow and I look like a hard-boiled egg.

"I'm not joining The Brownies," I said.

"You are," said Winnie.

"I'm not," I said.

"You are," said Winnie.

“Well, *I’m* going to see what My Daddy has to say.”

But my Dad Arthur refused to be appealed to, saying this was women’s work and could I excuse him because he had to get on with pegging out the washing.

“You *are* going to join,” persisted Winnie, “because I have now chopped nine inches off the bottom of this tunic and I can’t give it back to Mrs. Chydwyck.”

“Give it to the Sixer, then,” I said. “She can sew it back on again as part of her silly stupid Needlework Badge.”

I don’t know what Winnie did with the uniform in the end. I *do* know that Cheryl Chydwyck grew up, got married, converted to North Sea Gas and went to live in Mablethorpe. Much good it did *her* in The Brownies.

And if it was full of rotten ratbag kids like me and Cheryl Chydwyck, I’m not sorry I never joined.

## **The Two Loves**

Paul Williams

**U**ntil yesterday there were two loves in my life. Now there are none.

I suppose I am being a little flippant, for one of those loves was in fact curry or, to be more precise, the chicken vindaloo served at The Goa Gateway restaurant in Station Road. That was where I went with Moira twice a week, every week, for the past two years. It was not always the same days of the week, the only rule being that it would not be a Coronation Street night, both of us agreed on that. We understood each other, Moira and I, had the same tastes in both food (though Moira’s weakness was onion bhajias) and television. And someone in my position doesn’t often get the opportunity to go out with a beautiful woman, does not, in truth, get the opportunity to go out much at all.

I should perhaps explain that I suffer from McClusky’s Syndrome (named after the doctor who identified it). Not many people know about McClusky’s Syndrome. Suffice it to say that it has confined me to a wheelchair, as it does to most sufferers eventually. It is not a common condition, and even Moira had not heard of it before she started visiting me, despite having worked all those years at the clinic. Nor had Mr Menezes, the owner of The Goa Gateway, and he was most interested when I told him that there were only five people in the

whole country with it. He often used to come and chat with us when he had a free moment, not that his friendliness ever prompted him to take anything off the bill (his meanness is legendary, but what the hell? The food he serves up has earned him the right to be forgiven). Although I appreciated his interest, I was happier when he left us alone, so that we could eat our curry while Moira and I discussed the latest events in Coronation Street. She had a lovely face and a therapeutic voice, two beautiful accompaniments to a good meal. I can't stress enough how much those nights out meant to me. I will never again be able to look at an onion bhajia without thinking of Moira's face.

Perhaps I appreciated those nights out all the more because I knew they could not last. Kind though Moira was, I knew that the time would come when she would have to move on. Alarm bells began to ring for me about three months ago, when Moira first told me that her brother in Australia had written to her to tell her of the marvellous opportunities for health visitors there. 'But there's no Goa Gateway there' I pointed out, trying to disguise my fear. She laughed in her usual way, the same laugh she gave when she saw them bringing the curry towards us or spoke about some incident in *The Rover's Return*. Until then her laugh had delighted me, now it took on a slightly sinister connotation.

She did not mention Australia to me again until two weeks ago. She probably had not wanted to upset me. Then the bombshell landed. It was all arranged, it appeared. She had been offered a job that was too good to pass up.

She left for Australia this morning. Oh, we had a lovely night out on Tuesday, but how could I enjoy the curry knowing that it was the last time I would be there with her? She tried to make it as cheerful as possible, even ordered a bottle of wine (her treat). But she must have known what our nights out in *The Goa Gateway* meant to me. 'Never mind' she said. 'I know you can't get out on your own but you can get curries delivered from *The Bombay Star*.' I was astonished that she could be so insensitive. *The Bombay Star* indeed! They wouldn't know a curry from an Irish stew. And yet I know she has her own future to think of. I have to tell myself that.

And so here I am, alone in this little flat, immobile. My favourite restaurant might just as well be in Australia along with Moira. And to cap it all my television has conked out, so I won't even have *Coronation Street* this evening. What on earth is the point of going on?

But you'll have to excuse me ... Someone has put something through the door. The usual circulars I suppose. It certainly can't be the normal post at a quarter past six in the evening. The front door, at least, is somewhere I can get to in this chair. Sorry if I sound bitter. People sometimes don't realise how much you miss out on when you're immobile.

But what's this? Hang on, let me get back into the sitting room ... Oh no, I can't believe it! Just when you think all is lost this happens. *We are pleased to announce that the Goa Gateway is now doing home deliveries.* And a menu. And, good grief! There's something at the bottom here. *10% discount for people with McClusky's Syndrome.* So there is a God after all!

Well, that's nice to be sure, but that still leaves me without my other, my most important love. But what's that coming onto the TV screen? *We apologise for the break in transmission. Normal service will be resumed in approximately five minutes.* So it wasn't my television! And even if their five minutes turns out to be ten, that still means I'll get Coronation Street. It isn't due to start for over an hour.

Let's look at this menu. If I phone in for my order now I can get it delivered just before The Street starts. Coronation Street and a Goa Gateway vindaloo both at the same time! Just what I've always dreamed of. My two loves together.

What was I thinking about earlier? Oh yes, Moira, that silly old bag. Still, I shouldn't be ungrateful. It was nice of her to wheel me to the restaurant. I was wondering how I would get there without her, wasn't I? I hope she gets on okay in Australia, though. Now what's that number ...

***The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers***

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AT THE CIVIL SERVICE CLUB

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Whitehall, LONDON SW1

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Chef's gateau  Bread and butter pudding   
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