

The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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Diary

Closing Date for Bill Barnes Poetry
Competition

30th September 2004

Annual Literary Luncheon

30th October 2004

Closing Date for W F & F G Froud
Memorial Open Competition

31st October 2004

Members' Work Display & Writing
Workshop

4th December 2004

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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ISSN 0959-0064

THE SCPSW AUTHOR

NUMBER 167

AUTUMN 2004

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Editorial

Adrian Danson

I regret to admit that I have seen another false dawn; my problems continue. However, other than severe backache, I truly believe my difficulties are nearly over. I am grateful for the expressions of support and tolerance shown by members in the face of my inadequacies.

Ron Jeffreys, our Competition Secretary has suffered a stroke, but is recovering. I am sure all members join me in wishing him well. Alan Watts, has also suffered a minor heart problem. Consequently he has decided to cancel the Chairman's Awayday for this year. We wish that he too has a speedy recovery and that we can enjoy further Awaydays, as they provide many of us with much pleasure. Of course we can now present our work at the Fair* in December and hope Alan will be well enough to attend.

Due to our precarious financial position and the much reduced number of members who are able to attend our Annual Luncheon, this year we are using smaller facilities. This should result in no cost to those unable to attend. Previous years have often resulted in unavoidable losses.

*On 4th December we are holding a Writer's Fair at St Vincent's Centre, Carlisle Place (just round the corner from Victoria Station. All members who have published material are invited to attend and to display their work, for sale where appropriate. After a break for a snack lunch, a workshop will be held, where other members are invited to read out their own work and invite comment. For those able to attend, this promises to be an interesting and useful experience.

I hope you have all got your entry ready for the Froud Memorial Prize and have been knocking on the doors of fellow writers to persuade them to enter. I am happy to report that Liz Eastwood has taken over the work of Publicity Officer and Jenny Chamier-Grove has agreed to assist her. We welcome Liz and Jenny to their new roles and wish them success.

Article Folios

Joan reports that the Article Folio is going very well. We are currently 8 in number but could run a second folio with a few more people. There is one person currently on the waiting list. Please write or email Joan Lewis at address inside front cover.

SCPSW Competition Results 2003/2004:

Lewis Wright Short Story

- 1st Prize: “The Jap Pom” by Don Nixon
2nd Prize: “The Story of Po Li” by Terry Rickson
3rd Prizes: “A Victorian Solution” by Margaret Hothi
“Taking the Right Steps” by Maureen Mills
“Valentines Day in Penzance” by Jenny Chamier-Grove
“Love Letters” by Sheila Rioch
“Shadow” by Jan Jefferies

Herbert Spencer Poetry

- 1st Prize: “An Old Woman Cooking Eggs” by Norman Bissett
2nd Prize: “Messages” by Norman Bissett
3rd Prize: “Marked Cards” by Ann Froggatt

Vincent Brennan Travel Article

- 1st Prize: “The Simple Pleasures of Samos” by Stephen Bibby
2nd Prize: “An African Journey” by H J Williams
3rd Prize: “On the Trail of Turtles and Lemurs” by Jenny Chamier-Grove

George Farley Prize

- 1st Prize: “Twister” by Peter Downes
2nd Prize: “The Purple Gallinule” by Jenny Chamier-Grove
Commended: “Swinging Sixties” by Don Nixon
Highly Commended: “Teaching Aid” by Norman Bissett
“Lares et Penates” by Norman Bissett
“Not my Line” by Norman Bissett

Congratulations to all the above. Most, if not all, of their winning entries will be published in the Author.

Comments by Dr Vivian Edwards on Lewis Wright winners and other entries

The Jap Pom

Awarded First Place in the Lewis Wright Short Story competition. This is a very well written story painting a powerful picture of the conditions endured by British service men within Japanese prisoner of war camps during the Second World War. It vividly describes the

emotional suffering endured by the guilt ridden central character during the time following his release, there being traumatic memories of his subservience to the Japanese captain. This story, along with its tragic finale, will remain in the reader's mind.

The Story of Po Li

Awarded Second Place in the Lewis Wright Short Story Competition. This is a magical little story set long ago in the land of China. A truly enjoyable read concerning the mysterious appearance of a wise old man, who in touching the life of a small boy, led him both to fame and fortune. This particular tale evokes childhood memories of fairy stories once read, yet remains enjoyable for adult reading.

A Victorian Solution

Awarded the First Runner-Up in the Lewis Wright Short Story Competition. A poignant tale, it tells of the pregnancy of a girl aged only fourteen years during the reign of Queen Victoria; and of her compassionate treatment by the woman to whose care she had been entrusted. This is another story that will dwell in the reader's memory, for all ends well for that young mother, in spite of the times in which she lived. A thought provoking story.

Taking the Right Steps

The Second Runner-Up in the Lewis Wright Short Story Competition. This is another enjoyable thought provoking tale concerning the courage of a mother, who in reporting her beloved son to the police because of his potential criminality, both presented and surmounted a challenging ethical problem. It is another story which will linger in the reader's mind.

Valentine's Day in Penzance

The Third Runner-Up in the Lewis Wright Short Story Competition. This is an entertaining little tale, being nicely presented. The unexpected ending brings a smile to the reader's lips; pondering on a difficult situation.

Love letters

The Fourth Runner-Up in the Lewis Wright Short Story Competition. Another thought provoking and tragic little story about the increasing confusion experienced by a once romantic and much loved husband; a

man with a failing memory, seemingly unable to respond in any way to his wife's attempts to resume that loving relationship.

Big Time

The Fifth Runner-Up in the Lewis Wright Short Story Competition. The story opens with twelve arresting words delivered to a cat standing on the guitar player's doorstep. There is however no further dialogue within the tale, and it reads rather like part of a chapter within a novel; a report rather than a short story. The quality of writing is high. The words used throughout the story so vividly describe a situation experienced by an ambitious musician; painting a very vivid picture.

The Message

A poignant little story relating to the loving relationship between a mother and son. The tale somehow seems unfinished, and needs a more definitive approach; almost as if composed like a chapter within a novel. Perhaps the writer should continue with narrative. It was an enjoyable read.

Road to the Aisle

This was a clever plot, and well written. Somehow it did not however read like a short story, but more like a chapter in a book; consequently it left little imprint in the reader's mind. Try again.

Dearly Beloved

A nicely presented manuscript; the plot seemed somewhat complicated at times, and thence a little confusing to the reader. I particularly liked the clear presentation of the dialogue. Keep on trying.

Comments by Barbara Dickinson, Judge for the Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition 2004

The first thing I did was to read all 24 poems aloud, and then put them by for three days, before reading them all aloud again. This time I managed to short list to 10, which wasn't easy as they are all very good poems. After a few days rest I read the 10 poems aloud and managed to short-list to three. Finally, after much thought, I made the final selection.

An Old Woman Cooking Eggs

In well-balanced free verse, attractively presented in six-line stanzas, this poem describes the reactions of the poet moving through an art gallery and coming across a painting by Velazquez. This is a multilayer poem; on first reading, a description of a painting, with keen observation and effective diction, bringing the picture before my eyes. Then the poet's knowledge of the world of art and appreciation of the artistic and technical skills of the painter shine through every line, yet never dominate the poem. Deeper still, this poem talks to me of love; love of art, of beauty, of life, so that the two characters in the picture become real, and in my mind forever the old woman will be holding the egg '*with unstudied tenderness*'.

I would like to offer two runners-up. They are:-

Marked Cards

A well-crafted sonnet in rhyming couplets, with a touch of light humour, expressing a philosophical view of life. (Don't tell me this is not a sonnet because it does not conform to the Petrarchan or Shakespearian forms; there is an infinite variety of sonnets all of which share with cut diamonds the qualities of compactness, perfection and beauty.)

Messages

In well-balanced free verse presented in four-line stanzas, rounded-up, Shakespeare-style, with a rhyming couplet, this poem tells of a couple returning from holiday to some unexpected discoveries — were they omens, auguries, strange messages? There are touches of light humour, but the atmosphere is strangely haunting.

For the rest, they are all lovely poems, so do get them published, they are too good to lie in your file unread, and please try again next year.

Comments by Alan Watts, Judge for 2004 Vincent Brennan Travel Article Competition

I had no doubt as to the winner, but beyond that I was in difficulties. You will understand from my saying this, that there was a high standard amongst most entrants. One or two, of course, did not come up to the standard set by the majority, but as far as judging was concerned, these did not present me with any problem. It was those who ranked not far

below the winner who have given me the headaches, and I hope that my final placings have not done grave injustice to any.

These are my final results:

1st Prize: “The Simple Pleasures of Samos” by Stephen Bibby

2nd Prize: “An African Journey” by H J Williams

3rd Prize: “On the Trail of Turtles and Lemurs” by Jenny Chamier-Grove

I would like to add some words of advice to some I had to place at the bottom of the pile. Please be sure you understand the rules of the competition. If you don't observe these — word-length, spacing, etc — then however good your entry may be, the judges cannot award you a prize. Again, read over your entry before submitting it. Make sure there are no mistakes in the typing, that you have spelled the names of foreign places correctly, that you have people's names right. In other words be meticulous, don't submit anything which is not 100% accurate.

Letters

At both the 2003 AGM and the 2004 AGM we discussed the turnover in Society membership — this leading on to what reasons there are for us to stay as members.

As writers we need to see how others are doing and to receive feedback on our own work. “*The Author*” enables us to read our colleagues' work and see how the winners of our many competitions win.

Comment and feedback on our own work can be obtained by joining one of the correspondence folios organised by Terry Rickson. We have short story folios and now have a recently instigated article folio. There is also a poetry folio for our poets

I find that the prose folios are just what I want to help me keep writing. It is also rewarding to read and comment on the work of fellow contributors.

So for those who ask why they should stay as members my advice is to join one of the folios and begin to enjoy writing for its own sake.

Yours sincerely,

Roy Froud

Summary of SCPSW AGM, held on Saturday 22nd May 2004 at the Civil Service Club

Chaired by with Alan Watts with 15 members and one guest present.

Minutes of the 2003 AGM were read and agreed.

Matters arising from the minutes.

Adrian Danson advised that the Book Prize competition had been delayed due to his house move. The article, short story and poetry folios have been very successful.

Ethel Corduff offered to run a second article folio, commenting that one does not have to write a new piece each time, as member's comments can be used to create a revised version for redistribution.

Joan Lewis had provided details in Author of e-mail and mini-competition in May issue, response had been small, but as she had a blip with her e-mailing facilities this may have been the problem.

Report by Joan Lewis, as Membership Secretary and Acting Treasurer.

Membership of 150 is about the same as this time last year. Donations from members have kept us afloat and are much appreciated. She is grateful to those who pay by standing order. We have made a small loss this year. The Civil Service Club is extremely expensive to meet in. We need to recruit new members and publicity is essential, especially for working members. We hope Roy Froud's competition will help as it is an open competition this year and we are externally grateful to Roy for funding it.

Roy asked why we did not use direct debiting. Adrian replied that when Roy raised this point before he had approached our bank and been advised that they do not operate direct debiting for organisations with membership less than about 2000. Terry Austin asked if it was possible to have meeting in a bar to cut costs, but this is not believed to be possible

Report by Ethel Corduff, Meeting Secretary.

The New Year party continues to be successful, well attended and should be continued, though room hire remains costly. We try to offset this by including a committee meeting, running a raffle and charging members £8. Our Annual lunch will be in the Trafalgar Room this year for 26 people. This does not involve any room hire charge, whereas we had to pay £130 for use of the dining room when less than 50 people attended, as has been the case in the last few years. A Writers' Fair Workshop, will be held on Saturday 4th December at St. Vincent's Centre with the workshop afterwards, a display of members published work and other members can bring a contribution to read after a mini lunch.

Report by Ethel as Acting Publicity Officer.

I advertised our competitions to all my e-mail contacts, staff magazines and writing magazines and those provided by Val Whitmarsh. I have also asked for posters to be displayed. Publicity is essential to maintain membership numbers and we cannot afford to pay for advertising.

Report by Adrian as Editor.

Editorial activity has been severely restricted due to traumatic house-move and living in rented accommodation, with most house contents inaccessible as it was in storage. Fortunately I was able to continue with a lot of communication being done by e-mail. I hope matters will soon improve.

Report by Ron Jeffreys as Competition Secretary.

Details of competition results were provided. Results and judges' comments will be published in *Author*. Ron praised our judges, particularly Barbara Dickinson and Val Whitmarsh.

Report by Terry Rickson on behalf of Poetry Workshop.

Membership is 82 of whom 17 are associate members. The annual poetry weekend again took place in Birmingham. Bill Douglas has produced the 33rd collection of *Waves* with art work by Albert Thornton, for the last time due to poor health and failing eyesight. Liz Rowland is now editor of *Waves*. In December a convivial mini-workshop took place at the home of Mike Boland.

Subscriptions remain unchanged. The AGM elected Liz Rowland as Chairman, Terry Rickson as Treasurer and Mike Boland as newsletter editor.

Alan Watts thanked Terry for his report and said the Poetry Workshop standard is excellent. Roy Froud said that he was not happy about associate membership. Terry said that some members are on limited income and Joan said that some had returned to be full membership.

President and Vice-Presidents were all re-elected. Beryl Jones proposed by Joan as Treasurer, seconded by Adrian and duly elected. All other Committee members were re-elected by unanimous vote

Any other business: Alan said he wished to thank all the members of the committee.

Poetry Pages

Edited by Joyce Thornton

Neil Glover, whose death was reported in the Summer issue of this magazine often contributed to Poetry Pages. From his unpublished poems which I still have on file, I have selected 'Autumn' as a tribute to his dedication to poetry writing and support of these pages.

Autumn

by the late Neil Glover

The heath wakes
This morning with winter's door ajar,
Windswept birches swinging
Like girls with loosened hair
Skirts streaming.
Bracken, a storm-tossed sea
Above which, lonely sunken masts,
Wave tails of the walked dogs.

This is not shipwreck,
Nor is this flood
Bearing away home and possessions.
It is not desert of scrub and sand
With splintered trees
Starved cattle and the bones
Of eaten dogs,
And wisps of people
Swept away by the wind.

The polished horses pass
Bucking their sweated riders,
Lucky as we
In the begging bowl of nature.

Transition

by Joan Lewis

Crunching the beech nuts
Sniffing the sheep
Accepting the apples
Collecting the sloes
Burning the chutney
Chasing the jars
Singing Jerusalem
Making the jam

Nothing to do in the country?

Crunching the wrappers
Sniffing the oil
Accepting the mouthing
Collecting the abuse
Watching the traffic
Striding the mall
Admiring the goodies
Doubting the cost

That's why I quit the suburbs.

Crunching the cookies
Sniffing the wine
Polishing church brass
Listening to bells
Watching the thatcher
Straddling the ridge
Admiring the horses
Doubting the Hunt

'The country habit has me by the heart'

Brickyard

by Terry James

An old brickworks fascinated this child
A sensitive lad just eight years old.
On days away from school, he would climb
The wall to another world.

Standing at the edge of the vast clay crater,
Thrilled, excited, frightened even
By the enormity of this now-silent place.
Gazing wide-eyed at the tall chimney
Shooting up into heaven, it seemed,
Feeling in his mind the roasting heat
Of the kilns, now cold and bleak.
Venturing closer to the windowless buildings,
Wanting to explore, yet terrified
Of what might be within.
Afraid too of falling walls
And smoke stacks that seemed crooked
To his child's eye.

Then with fresh delight, coming upon
The rusty rails of the narrow gauge line
That snaked around the brickyard.
Trotting happily along the rotting sleepers
Pretending to be a train,
Imagining the little trucks, clay-laden behind him.
Arriving soon at journey's end —
The old engine shed,
Padlocked now and barred to all,
The blackness between the cracks
In the door, reminding the lad
Of a fairground ghost train.

This was his railway, his brickyard,
His private playground.
Its vastness like a sleeping giant
Captured his imagination
And touched a chord within.

Kindling a liking
For the strange romance
Of things disused.

Southernland

by Steve Glason

Past Tolworth Rise near Malden New
There is a quaint suburban view
Serried ranks of Thirties homes
With timbered frames and stuccoed gnomes.

The empty fields in which one stood
Have disappeared near Hinchley Wood
And in their place these houses stand
They seem to sprawl in Southernland.

Doorbells do chime in Ewell East
Or so it seems to me at least
And Southern trains near stations spark
Near Epsom. Cheam and Worcester Park.

Thus from these dwellings built by Wates
Commuter and his merry mates
Go up to town via Waterloo
For that is what I think they do!

Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition — 3rd Prize

Marked Cards?

By Ann Froggatt

If life's a hand of cards you have to play,
who shuffled them, who dealt — and who could say,
straight-faced, you get an even chance to win?
A random hand is usual; you begin,
in theory, with a fair share of the deck —
but that's a premise you'd be wise to check,
so I'll hypothesise. Let's say you start
with some advantages, but in your heart
you feel uncertain, so you can't quite find
a way to use your best cards. Half your mind
says *Take a chance* — the other bellows *NO!*
You should have come up trumps — but down you go.
Is nature's ace unplayable? Look back —
could nurture be the joker in the pack?

Poetry Workshop

Mike Boland

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

Bill Barnes Competition 2004

Don't forget that the closing date for this year's Bill Barnes Poetry Competition is 30 September. The rules for the 2004 competition appeared in the Spring Newsletter, but if you have lost your copy, or are a new member, contact me (Mike Boland) at the above address and I'll send you a copy. This year's Competition will be for rhyming poetry only, in accordance with our policy to hold such an event on alternate years.

The judge for this year's competition is Ann Froggatt.

Hopefully, the results will be given in the Winter Newsletter, and of course all entries will be printed in the Competition Special early in 2005.

PW Weekend

By the time this page appears in the Author, the Poetry Workshop will have held their annual Weekend at the University of Birmingham. As well as the usual events, three talks were scheduled on Dylan Thomas (by Liz Rowlands), Thomas Hardy (by Barbara Stewart) and W.B. Yeats (by Ethel Corduff). The text of these talks will appear in subsequent Newsletters.

A full report of the Weekend will appear in the Autumn Newsletter.

AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Poetry Workshop was held during the Birmingham Weekend. A full report of proceedings will appear in the Autumn Newsletter, now due out on the earlier date of 1 September.

Subscriptions

The membership fee remains unchanged for yet another year, being **£3.00** for members of the SCPSW. **Please** remember to make out cheques correctly; they should be made payable to: **SCPSW Poetry Workshop A/C** and sent to Terry Rickson (address above).

Membership of the Poetry Workshop provides:

- three lively Newsletters each year, plus a fourth, Competition Special issue
- the chance of publication in **Waves**, the PW's annual anthology of members' work
- access to the popular Postal Folio scheme
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition (open exclusively to PW members)
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend at the University of Birmingham

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

Dates to Remember

1st September 2004 Autumn Newsletter

30th September 2004 Closing Date for Bill Barnes Poetry Competition

1st December 2005 Winter Newsletter



Market Information

By Gordon E Gompers

A Beginner's Approach to the Markets

A complete novice is likely to be intimidated by the task ahead: he need not be! There are so many markets that what ever he wishes to write about there are lots of publications eager to accept his work regardless of standards. Let us consider the main market guide books.

The foremost is *Willings Press Guide*. This lists 20,000 publications and is in two volumes. One is for home publications: the other for overseas. This latter is invaluable to help one find in-flight magazines: a rich seam for travel writers. It is primarily aimed at advertisers than writers but addresses are given and the bulk of publications mentioned depend on freelance contributions. *Willings Press Guide* can be found in most reference libraries.

The main British market guide book is the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook*. This is very comprehensive and can be bought at any W H Smith or from Freelance Market News, Sevendale House, 7 Dale Street, Manchester M1 1JB.

Writers' Handbook is a similar publication which can be found in most reference libraries. It is particularly useful for supplying local market addresses.

Writer's Market is the American directory (purchasable from Freelance Market News). It lists some 8,000 markets and really tells you how to cross the , Atlantic.

Freelance Market News is not only a top agent for necessary market guides but also publishes a monthly market guide. The editor's name is Angela Cox.

Such is a broad outline of the main markets. I will go into greater details in future articles.

For Those Who Surf and Those Who Don't

By Joan Lewis

For all those writers who don't have a computer or, if they have, don't use the Internet, there is a very useful guide to research sources.

Ann Hoffman worked as a researcher for the writer Robert Henriques for 4 years and then founded a research service in 1966. Her excellent book '*RESEARCH FOR WRITERS*' (A & C Black) reached its sixth edition in 1999.

Ann cites organisation of your research material as the vital starting point — however good your information it's not much help if you can't find it. She gives a formidable list of equipment you'll probably need but much of this you'll already have.

Twenty two pages of basic sources of information and their location must surely satisfy the requirements of most of us — books, bibliographies, libraries, the Newspaper Library, *Willings Press Guide* for periodicals, Official Publications, maps — and so on. Unpublished sources are also given — oral history collections are an excellent source.

Fiction writers and dramatists also have to research — differently but equally seriously. Authentic backgrounds and dialogue in the correct idiom are essential. So try town halls, travel brochures, dictionaries of place-names, *Pevsner's Buildings of England*, dictionaries of dialect and slang and, of course, for you crime writers, a friend in the local nick.

Suggestions too numerous to quote are given to help historical novelists. Approaches to biography and autobiography — even if the latter becomes family history for the grandchildren — are covered at length. An excellent chapter on 'Preparation for the Press' includes house-style, typescript, the index, proof correction and — plagiarism.

Having (I hope) whetted your appetite, I now have to tell you that Ann's excellent book is out of print. It seems the 1999 edition was the last — but copies can still be obtained second-hand or borrowed through public libraries.

George Farley Competition Winner

Twister

By Peter Downes

He writhed
in many frantic ways
his friends and family
to amaze.
Said they,
with curious impropriety,
'Where did you learn
to twist and turn
with such apparent unconcern,
and dazzling variety?'
There is no mystery
to my history.
I joined a madrigal society.'

George Farley Competition Runner-up

The Purple Gallinule

By Jenny Chamier-Grove

The wildlife presenter told his crew
That what he really wanted to do
Was to capture on film in some hidden pool
The secretive Purple Gallinule.

As the film crew settled into their hide
A bird stepped neatly around the side.
'Here's a hut full of men I know I can fool,'
Thought the secretive Purple Gallinule.

Lewis Wright Short Story Competition Winner

The Jap Pom

By Don Nixon

It was the final session. Both of us were exhausted.

“I can do no more. It is time now for you to take the next step. We call it achieving closure.” Dr Geissmar walked round the couch and sat by my side. She took hold of my hand. I noticed the numbers tattooed on her wrist. I realised that we must be nearly the same age. No wonder she had been so understanding. Like me she had known horror.

“You still need to come to terms with it, although it was so long ago.”

I felt such a fool, consulting a psychiatrist at the age of eighty. But the nightmares I thought I had been rid of for years had returned to haunt me in the months following the death of my wife. I close my eyes and the accusing faces are there. And the curses.

I lay back on the couch. I forced myself to picture the garden again in my mind. The path that wound around the pool and the scarlet hibiscus trailing along the wall of the little pavilion. I shuddered. The flower had become streaks of blood flowing down the walls and congealing in the water. It was the same as in the dream. At that point I always awoke but here I was safe. I felt her fingers stroking the back of my hand and she whispered reassuringly as she coaxed me up into a sitting position on the couch.

“You are fit enough to make the journey,” she said gently. “And the flight to Malaya is easy nowadays. Go back and face your demons. You’ve suppressed the memories for far too long. Old emotions triggered by your wife’s death are running wild and coming to the surface. You will only know peace when you have seen it once again.”

She paused and unconsciously touched the tattooed number on her wrist.

“Believe me. I have been there.”

In desperation, I took her advice. I could no longer cope with the nights when my mind escaped the controls I had clamped around it and in my fragmented dreams I roamed through a garden that might have

been created by Hieronymous Bosch. And so I found myself on the long flight to Singapore, which I had last seen in 1946, with lots of time to think and force myself to live again through those far off days which now seemed like yesterday.

I had been taken up country from Changi and as soon as I arrived in the compound at Lontang, the commandant, Captain Tanaka, sent for me. He was standing on the veranda of his bungalow and behind him the imperial Japanese flag drooped in the hot still air. I knelt and bowed my head as I had been taught when I was first taken prisoner.

“I am informed that you were the gardener for an English lord before the war.” His English was almost perfect with just the hint of the upward inflection most Japanese find impossible to eradicate. Otherwise, the intonation was excellent and echoed the clipped diction of the English upper classes. I could see why they had readily accepted him. I kept my voice low.

“I was an assistant to the head gardener on the estate of Lord Berham. I was often in charge when the head gardener was ill,” I couldn’t help adding. I was always one to gild the lily and I wanted to impress. “And I designed the water feature myself.”

He nodded for me to rise. He spoke casually but there was a touch of pride in his tone. “I met the lord’s son when I was at Oxford in ’39. The Berham estate was of an adequate size but a trifle compared to the palace of Chatsworth in Derbyshire to which I was often invited. So many of the English aristocracy I met in those days shared our views. It was there I had the honour of conversing with that great Englishman, Sir Oswald Moseley. One day his time will come and then this foolish war will be ended.”

“Sir Oswald is married to a sister of the Duchess,” I said ingratiatingly. I remembered the gossip in the servants’ hall at Berham. My reply seemed to please him and he nodded. I was impressed. He must be a member of the old Japanese aristocracy to be a guest of the Devonshires. He pointed to an area to the side of the bungalow. It was partly fenced in by crumbling trellises and overgrown by the slowly encroaching jungle.

“There is why I had you brought from Changi. That used to be a garden. I want you to use your skills and transform it back. You have three weeks to complete the work. Then the General will be here to inspect the camp and I wish to entertain him in the garden. We will perform the saki ritual there and I will compose a haiku to celebrate the occasion. The General is a lover of poetry and a poet himself. He may do me the honour of composing one to mark the occasion.”

He walked along the path and his swagger stick swished at the tops of the jungle grasses which poked through the cracks in the paving. He motioned me to follow him.

“I met Mr Auden, the English poet, when I was at Oxford you know. I instructed him in the ancient art of the haiku. I even presented him with one of my own. He was most gracious. I have collected all his works.”

For a moment he was back in an Oxford quadrangle. Then he stiffened and made the gesture of dismissal. His voice became curt again. I found I liked the tone of command. I once again felt secure. A security I had not felt since I left the service of his lordship. I knew my place. It was comforting.

“Go and inspect it. You will have all the labour you wish from the other prisoners here. You will order them in their work.”

I bowed and a guard escorted me to the miniature jungle I was supposed to tame. In fact, it looked worse than it was. The pathways were overgrown but I pushed through easily to the centre where a pool shimmered in the harsh midday light. With the promised labour, I felt confident that I would make the deadline. The guard motioned me to enter a small wooden shack and I realised this would be my home. A bowl of cold rice, bread and a jug of water were by the bunk and I marvelled at my luck. I was no longer the half starved inmate of a disease ridden prison camp. Here I was on my own, in the open air with food to fill my belly. And the Captain was like the civilised English gentlemen I had served before the war. I had always said that blood and breeding counted. If I played my cards right, I'd be well looked after. I felt more in tune with Captain Tanaka than the ignorant squaddies I had been thrown amongst who could only whine and curse and who had mocked me for my attempts to maintain some standards of decency and had mimicked my accent, the accent I had worked so hard to improve.

Lord Berham's butler had even complimented me once on the progress I had made in my elocution lessons. After Changi, this place was luxury and I wasn't throwing away my chance to survive the war in some comfort. This garden was my passport to that.

The nearby prison camp was small. The prisoners were mostly Dutch and Australian, working on road-building. They seemed well enough treated. This was the Captain's influence I guessed. He was really like an English gentleman. He often came to watch the progress of the work in the garden. He asked me to tell him the names of the plants in English and practised his English with me and told me of his time in England. He said that he hoped to go back to England after the war.

"We are islands so much alike, with strong monarchies and powerful aristocracies. Why should we differ? This war is so unnecessary."

I could only agree with him. I secretly began to hope that perhaps after the war, he might take me into his service. I was determined to impress him with my skill.

My walks in the garden with the Captain and the way he way he listened to me so courteously made the two Australian prisoners who had been assigned to help me with the garden view me with suspicion. Though through me, they had access to more food, and the manual labour with the plants was much easier than road-making, in their eyes I was a collaborator. When they thought I couldn't hear, they referred to me contemptuously as the "Jap Pom" and in spite of my protests, bowed mockingly in front of me when they arrived at the garden each morning. But I had been bullied at school and I was used to mockery so I just ignored them and got on with the job. They were just coarse working class fodder who had been little better than coolies in the Queensland Outback. Crude Australians. Cane cutters probably, judging from the way they could use the machete.

The work went well. By the end of the second week the undergrowth had been cleared and many of the original plants which had gone wild could be cut back and saved. The hibiscus was retrained and bursts of colour emerged at each turn of the path. The bamboo trellises were repaired and the tiny stream that fed the pool was cleared so that the water ran smooth and sweet. Stone slabs were placed as seating on the bank and the little ruined pavilion was restored. I loved to sit there in

the evening and dream of the future when I would be back in England in the service of an important Japanese official. It was now obvious after the fall of Singapore that England would lose but I would be looked after. I thought of the slights I had suffered at Berham when the parlour maids had made fun of my attempts to better myself. I would get my own back on them and on all the others who had made my life such a misery then.

To the disgust of the Australian pair, I was given extra pieces of chicken with my rice but they were not too proud to take the food I saved for them and their friends back to the camp. They were too stupid to see that I was helping to save their lives. I was still the “Jap Pom”. I shrugged off their surly attitude. After all they were only Colonials and probably descended from transported felons. I mentioned their probable ancestry to the Captain who roared with laughter. He could appreciate class and breeding. A gentleman through and through. It was going to be a pleasure to serve him after the war.

The day before the General was due to arrive, the Captain arrived at the pool with guards carrying a heavy metal tank.

“This will complete the picture,” he said. “Their graceful movements will be the final touch.”

Gently, two large Koi carp were placed in the pool. They were beautiful.

“Tomorrow,” the captain said happily, “the General will drink saki and watch the fish and I will compose my haiku. Did not your Keats write, ‘Beauty is truth’? This then is Truth.” He struck a pose on the steps of the newly painted pavilion. I bowed. I was pleased for him. This could get him promotion and surely secure my position.

I walked with the captain to make a final check the morning of the General’s Inspection. I looked into the clear water of the pool. The fish had gone. Desperately, I poked among the lotus pads but the pool was empty. I looked across to the trellis entrance. My two Australians were there leaning on their spades. They were grinning. Out of the captain’s sight, one gave me a two fingered salute. The resentment which had been building up in me exploded. After all I had done to help them, this

was my reward. I was furious. “You bastards,” I yelled. “You’ve taken them. Where are they?”

Guards seized them. They had made no attempt to hide the evidence. In the ashes of the fire by their hut in the camp, the skeletal remains of the carp could be clearly seen. It must have been quite a feast. The other prisoners looked on, terrified as the two men were beaten with canes. Finally the captain barked an order and they were dragged to the pool’s edge.

I was made to watch the summary execution of the Australian pair. Quickly they were bound and thrown into the pool. As they struggled, they cursed me until they sank and drowned. As the last of the air bubbles floated to the surface, the Captain turned to me. I flinched. But he had already dismissed me and the garden from his mind. It was now contaminated. No ceremony would now take place. No haikus would be composed. “You will drain the pool and fill it in. The bodies will remain there as a warning to others. After that is done, you will set fire to the garden. It is to be destroyed.” He walked away and I never saw him again.

I was sent back to Changi. The other prisoners at Lontang did not survive the war and I heard that Captain Tanaka was killed during the Japanese retreat. I was the only one left who knew what had happened in the garden. I have carried the guilt with me for the rest of my life. They died because I had accused them. If I had not lost my temper, they might have got away with it. It was always possible that an animal might have been blamed for the loss of the carp. I still hear their drowning curses in my nightmares. They had been right. I had been the “Jap Pom”.

Perhaps Dr Geissmar is right. Perhaps my return to Lontang will achieve closure for me when I have the headstones erected in memory of the murdered prisoners. But I doubt it. The contorted faces, the frantic gasping for air and the curses are my nightly companions. They will never leave me now and I need them to remind me of my guilt and my stupid deference to authority. I shudder now to think of the foolish little snob I was then. Only with my own death can there be true closure.

Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition Winner

An Old Woman Cooking Eggs

By Norman Bisset

I ignore the porky putti and the chubby cherubs
clodhopping around Valhalla,
the fattish, kittenish, doleful demoiselles
semi-concealed in plums and grapeleaves,
the sacrificed saints and soulful seraphim,
and make a beeline straight for young Velazquez.

Why, uniquely, does it invariably draw me?
The woman — madonna, not sybil — and the boy, perhaps
her grandson, two heads emerging from a stygian void.
A knife and plate, white as her holy shawl. The dazzling
pots of burnished brass — supererogatory, no doubt,
but demonstrating masterly technique, don't you agree?

A purple onion, adding tang, inflames the taste buds.
Two jugs of earthenware, roughly glazed.
An unlit crusie and a wicker basket with a duster,
hanging in space, suspended, as at some peasant séance.
The boy brings water in a gleaming flask,
clutches a world-sized, nurturing gourd.

It's partly the magnificent chiaroscuro, partly a question
of opposing visions — his of the future, hers the past.
But mainly it's the hands. Worthy of Michelangelo,
they echo *The Creation's* electric charge.
Her right hand holds a simple wooden spoon,
her left, with unstudied tenderness, cradles an egg.

Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition — 2nd Prize

Messages

By Norman Bisset

A week ago, when we got back from Portugal,
there was the usual spate of messages
on the answerphone, resonant, unintelligible
mutterings from the depths.

Also, bizarrely, in the long front grass, an entire
sardine, deposited from on high, perhaps,
by some maladroit, cack-handed seagull, some
butter-fingered albatross or neighbourhood cat.

Oracular and delphic, it lay there like an augury,
immanent, pregnant with potential, like some
Old Testament mini-plague, addressing us,
unsettlingly, in Sardinian. We took it in our stride.

Even more oddly, on the rear lawn, adjacent
to the recently-dredged canal, what I mistook
at first for a kiddie's rugby ball — a perfect,
miraculous, oval jewel, a gleaming swan's egg,

mysterious, inviolate, plumb in the middle
of the uncut backyard. Briefly, I felt both
classical and mythological, Leda-like:
the Swan Princess dropping in to see us,

during our Easter break, leaving her calling card.
It was as if a visitant from outer space had sought
to establish contact, speaking Egg. ! felt both
honoured and uneasy. How to communicate?

Cradling it carefully, I climbed the garden wall,
placed it beside the water, among reeds.
Perhaps the goddess would return to nurture it?
The wee green Klingons claim it as their own?

Today, a second egg is nestling on our green.
I'm going to package it, and send it to the Queen.

Vincent Brennan Travel Article Competition Winner

The Simple Pleasures of Samos

by Stephen Bibby

September is the time to visit Samos. With barely a whisper of autumn, both land and sea retain their summer heat but the air temperatures have lost their furnace ferocity. The pleasant warmth and mild Aegean breezes seduce the visitor into the simple pleasures — a spot of walking, sightseeing or, in the sleepier part of the day, lazy lunches at friendly tavernas.

Samos is one of the most eastern Greek islands. It can be reached by boat from Piraeus or by an enchanting flight over the Greek archipelago, the azure Aegean encircling island gems of craggy hills, small white villages, deserted coves and curving strands. At its far extremity it is only 3 kilometres from the western shore of Turkey. Standing on its summits whichever way you look there is always land to be seen — either the long vague outline of Turkey or else one of the neighbouring islands beckoning across a perfect sea.

The island is more verdant in the north. Its steep slopes green with forest and leafy vineyards rise steadily out of its wildest coast. To the south there are plains and gentle beaches. Across its centre is a hilly spine with magnificent viewpoints. In places giants stand — enormous slender wind turbines powered by the updrafts off the Aegean, endlessly whirling their arms and silently despatching kilowatts of pollution-free power to the coastal settlements which wink and blink in the early twilight.

The most captivating spots are in the folds of the northern hills. Many such as tiny Manoltes can be visited only on foot. We left our vehicle on the coast at Platanakia and followed the way-marked track upwards. Where the road ends there commences a jumble of confusing narrow alleys completely traffic-free, stepped, but with ramps to permit the passage of barrows. The houses are neat and whitewashed, contrasting only with the deep blue cupola of the Greek Orthodox Church. Many sell local crafts, their small windows offering glimpses of coloured glass discs, delicate jewellery or chunky pottery with typically Greek motifs.

Beyond Manoltes the track winds through dense vineyards. In September the vines were heavy with fruit, bursting rich golden Muscat grapes. Occasionally we encountered a small group busy with their harvest but mostly we were alone, accompanied only by the sighing of the breeze, the babble of a distant brook and the secret chatter of the songbirds. This was the head of the locally famed — and romantically named — Valley of the Nightingales. Then we walked through aged dry olive groves around the hillside to the next village of Vourliotes. This settlement was even more labyrinthine than Manoltes. Fortunately it has delightful painted flowers on the paths which lead the walker to the tiny central square, shade, a seat and welcome refreshment.

Further west there are more attractions to be discovered in the hinterland of Karlovassi, the second largest settlement after Samos town itself. Tourists may island hop from here as there is a waterfront ferry terminal but it is well worthwhile acquiring a map and guidebook and exploring the nearby countryside. We walked an easy 3 kilometres up to the village of Leska and admired the views from the village square. Our guide book directed us to an ancient pebbled mule track leading upwards to the hamlet of Nikoloudes. At one point we followed an equally ancient irrigation channel brim full of clear fresh water tumbling down through a scented pine wood. Emerging from the shade of spruce we threaded our way through a tiny smallholding, goats and chickens penned and tethered in a sparse orchard. Across a swathe of grassland sleepy Nikoloudes awaited us. We ate our picnic under a vast plane tree on a bench beside an old stone building, evidently still much in use as a communal wash house for the few inhabitants.

On our descent we passed numerous votive shrines and the occasional wayside chapel. These simple constructions, invariably freshly whitewashed, are dotted throughout the island. Some are locked, but beyond Nikoloudes we passed a small open chapel nestling below the cultivated slopes near a grassy valley bottom. The altar was ornate with a richly embroidered coverlet. In an alcove the flickering flame from a small red oil lamp gave a silent message of welcome and peace. We saw not a soul. The faithful must travel many miles on foot to maintain their still sanctuaries of worship.

The very best walk is along the coast beyond Karlovassi. We turned away from the ferry port and followed the road until it petered out into a

track. After some exploration we located a well concealed and almost secret path that runs down to the sea through bushes of juniper, thyme and sage. It descends to the tiny secluded cove of Mikro Sietani. Here the Aegean, funnelled into the rocks, breaks on the pebble beach in large friendly waves. The hidden route continues around the next headland to the large sweep of Megalo Sietani. Towering behind the beach are the vast Kerkis mountains. Indeed a wide fissure cleaved into the mountainside and strewn with boulders marks the start of the bay. There is no motorised access and the path eludes the unprepared, so we were almost alone as we cooled off in the sighing surf.

Then we had a long but rewarding trek up the hillside to Drakei. One reward was the scent of herbs, the sound of blackbirds and the emerging view of the mountain peaks ahead with the deepening blue of the sea behind as the afternoon advanced. We were ready for refreshment at Drakei and followed a sign to 'Kostas Tavern'. Slightly dismayed we found that we had to climb some steep steps as Kostas' bar was on his flat roof. But there was another reward as it was actually the ideal location in which to sit with a chilled beer and gaze westwards as the sun sank over the Aegean.

But you do not have to be energetic to appreciate Samos. It is relatively cheap to hire a car and the roads are fairly uncrowded. Having travelled to Votsalakia on the south-western end of the island we were ideally placed to visit sandy beaches and sites of historic interest.

Samos town itself was about an hour's drive. There we wandered among the shops and were tempted by an inviting display of local fresh fruit enthusiastically served by a gnarled lady clad in heavy black garb, delighted at our interest. We selected some succulent bunches of sweet grapes and a punnet of plump, purple fleshy figs. Then we sat by the quayside and enjoyed them as traffic rumbled onto the huge ferry boats bound for neighbouring islands or Turkey. Below their bows a couple were fishing with significant success. Intrigued, we peered into the remarkable crystal clear water of the harbour to see an abundance of silver fishes in sizable shoals. What was even more remarkable was that they were being hooked in storybook fashion — literally with bent needles and balls of bread as bait!

Another drive took us over the back of the island through a rugged landscape softened by the green fringes of the lower slopes and framed

by the deep blue of the sea. From viewpoints we identified the neighbouring islands, Chios to the north or Nikaria to the west, the Turkish mainland to the east. Distant ships traced pencil lines on the ocean, its dark colour lightened by currents as if Zeus himself had traced a skein through the waters.

Our destination was Pithagoria, the ancient capital and centre of a vanished civilization. In the 6th century the island had been at the centre of Greek culture. It was home to Pythagoras the mathematician of theorem fame and also to the storyteller Aesop. For much of the century it was ruled by Polycrates who governed harshly but who also — in the way of despots — commissioned some fine architecture and civic constructions. In later centuries the island was harassed by invaders — Athenians, Romans, Byzantines and Venetians. By the late Middle Ages, vanquished and deserted by its indigenous population, Samos lay abandoned. It was finally re-occupied in the mid 16th century but by then much of the ancient architecture had deteriorated or had been destroyed.

Nevertheless in a small area just outside the town there is a cluster of fascinating monuments from early Christian churches to Ionian temples. The Temple of Hera was obviously vast as the ruins cover an area the size of the Parthenon. All that remains is one magnificent solitary pillar but even so from bases and capitols lying in pieces you can envisage its former magnificence.

Even more impressive is the Tunnel of Eupalinos. Polycrates established Pythagoria on the plain but needed a water supply from the hills. He commissioned Eupalinos of Megatra to construct a tunnel. Over a kilometre long, it had to be hewn by hand out of solid rock. Eupalinos engaged two teams working from either end and such was the precision of his calculations that they met in the middle. Thirty years ago archaeologists discovered the tunnel which today is in the care of the Greek Government. For a fee of 4 euros you can actually step into it via a narrow access. You can walk along the passage, barely wide enough to let two people pass, along which centuries ago flowed gallons of pure mountain water. Now it is of course dry and skilfully lit. Looking closely at the hewn walls you can see the actual chisel marks of the ancient stone cutters. Slowly you walk deeper into the mountain until it is unsafe to progress further and you reach a barricade bearing a

notice in Greek but idiosyncratically translated thus: ‘Visit is allowed to this point only according to the Ministry of Culture’.

But even in September it was too warm to spend all day at cultural sites. Midday, the sun at its zenith, is the time for a leisurely lunch in the taverna. We quickly made two important discoveries. Firstly the local Samanian wine perfectly captures the flavour of the Muscat grapes but is balanced with a pleasant dryness. Secondly it perfectly complements a lunch of Greek salad — a huge bowl of fresh lettuce, red onion, succulent tomatoes and pieces of feta cheese, accompanied by chunks of fresh bread.

Our most enjoyable lunch was on a Sunday in the village of Kalithea just west of Votsalakia. We walked up through the narrow streets to the taverna whose few tables were under a tree opposite. The proprietor performed the usual ritual of securing a paper tablecloth (always decorated with a map of Samos) with elastic. We duly ordered our salad, wine and water. Then as we slowly sipped and savoured, we noticed a growing hum of conversation. Sunday mass had ended and the church was emptying. More people came; more tables were set up. The narrow street filled up so that a local resident who arrived in his car nudged past a jumble of chair, table and human legs. Next the Greek Orthodox priest himself arrived, a huge barrel of a man with a big beard and a bigger personality accompanied by a tiny old lady, evidently his mother. Our host scurried backwards and forwards, producing salads and bread, beer and wine. In a sheltered corner a small charcoal grill was laden with simmering kebabs, deftly turned between scurries and swiftly served to the hungry congregation.

Intruders on a timeless scene, we eventually requested our modest bill and crept away leaving the villagers to exhaust the grill and drift into late afternoon somnolence. As we wandered through the deserted streets, leaving the fading family badinage, the chink of glasses and the lingering scents of Sunday lunch we reflected on a great feeling of wellbeing. We had experienced a calmer pace of life, tranquillity, an unfussy relishing of the unfolding delights of an unpretentious island. We had been privileged to taste the simple pleasures of Samos.

The Theatre

By Michael O'Connor

“Are you sure the patient is fully anaesthetised?” barked Doctor Zadok, his voice muffled by his white mask. “There seems to be a great deal of REM for someone supposed to be unconscious!”

Nurse Bramble pushed the uncomfortable plastic cap back on her head and stared intently at the read-outs beside her. “Yes, doctor,” she snapped. “She is out cold. You can proceed with the transplant.”

But she was not out cold. Not completely. Part of her was still in the real world, and part in a world that was even more real. To her.

‘Will no-one save me from these demons? This murderous monster and the witch who serves him? Today was to be my wedding day, and even now I should be standing in the great church beside Sir Douglas, my beloved. Oh how I rue that moment when I disobeyed Mama and wandered alone into the wood behind our castle. I shall never forget how they felled me from behind, and bore me away in a mighty white carriage which screamed like a soul in torment and struck sparks of blue lightning from the ground as it sped to this place of death and decay. How muttering minions strapped me to a board and rough-handled me to this chamber of glistening white light. And now they subject me to a death which surely the most evil of men would blanch at: they slice away layer after layer of my living body, and will continue to do so until there is nowhere left for my precious spirit to dwell. Oh, where is my betrothed? Why does he not come for me?’

“Blood pressure very low, doctor,” Nurse Bramble stated in her surly tone. “She is not reacting well.”

“Just keep her breathing!” Zadok snapped. “Surely that can’t be too difficult for you! I’ll attend to the complicated matters.”

“Yes, doctor,” said Bramble, her mask hiding the scowl on her face. “Anything you say. I’ll do my best.”

‘My life is slipping away, and still there has been no sign of Sir Douglas. Oh, where can he be? Someone must have seen me being abducted, and told my parents. Surely they will have sought him out and send him to rescue me? He is the greatest knight in the land. No castle

is too strong for him to breach, no army too powerful for him to overcome. He will fight until he reaches my side, and then he will carry me away to our wedding. Oh my beloved, please do not delay. I cannot wait for you much longer.'

“Her life signs are falling fast, doctor,” Nurse Bramble said, a shade more urgency in her voice. “It would be advisable to make haste.”

“Damn you, woman!” snarled Zadok. “I decided it was safe to do this operation, and it will be, as long as you do your job properly. I have only one more incision to make, and then we can start closing up. So just make a bit of an effort!”

'I hear him. He is here. My darling Douglas, you have come for me at last. But what is that. Oh no, watch out, my love. The witch has a magical blade, an evil thing which even you cannot withstand. No. NO! Aargh! Too late! My reason for living is no more. You were my life and now you are slain. The witch stands there, holding your poor severed head in her hand, swinging you by your long, dark hair. I will join you now, my love, my heart. We cannot exist apart. Is this truly the end of Dorothea Dangerfield ...'

“She is dead, doctor,” Nurse Bramble said, inwardly gloating at the trouble this would cause the foul-tempered surgeon. “You might as well go and wash up. The juniors can tidy up here.”

“Don't think you can blame this on me, you old witch!” Zadok hissed, his hands trembling. “It was your inability to keep her life signs steady which brought this about. I'll make sure you never work again!”

“I'm not sure you're any longer in a position to make threats like that,” Bramble smirked, pulling off her mask. “Your incompetence may have remained a closely guarded secret up to now, but killing the star of the classic thirties film serial *The Dangers of Dorothea*, will make tabloid headlines across the country. Everyone told you to leave it to Dr Swann. Heart transplants are his speciality. I'd start seriously thinking about retirement, if I were you!”

They continued to argue as they strode out of the operating theatre, leaving behind them the crumpled body of an aged actress who would never again escape in the final reel.

Laid Back in Alderney

By John Gatrell

Whatever their shortcomings, the good citizens of the tiny island of Alderney have never lacked a sense of humour or a zest for living. Not that everyone, of course, knows where Alderney is, although 1999 has thrust it into prominence as one of the few parts of the British Isles to be favoured by a total (as opposed to a partial) solar eclipse in August.

To get to Alderney involves a flight from Southampton in a small yellow plane which a visiting Australian described as “*vaguely resembling a flying cigar*”. To make matters worse, it carries only one pilot. But ample compensation awaits the brave souls who venture on the forty minute flight above the English Channel in the form of the warm hospitality they receive as soon as they touch down at Alderney’s small, friendly airport. Provided, of course, they are tactful enough not to try the patience of their hosts by reciting the bewhiskered pronouncement that Alderney is “*a rock sticking out of the sea with 2,000 alcoholics clinging to it*”. One distinguished but unimpressed 19th century visitor went further, suggesting that the islanders resorted to smuggling and drinking because “*they live on a God-forsaken windswept, fog-ridden and desolate outcrop of rock*”.

Not so today. Few of us would recognise the description of our ruggedly beautiful island and the sober and industrious people who dwell on it. But it has to be admitted that the Alderney Court records of the 19th century lend some credence to the belief that, in times gone by, many Alderney folk saw little virtue in sobriety. Indeed, in 1935, the writer H D Inglis painted a picture of a primitive and quarrelsome island race lurching between tavern and courthouse. All this, despite the publication in 1800 of the “*Regulations of the States of Alderney which must be observed by the publicans of the said Isle*”. Among other injunctions, the unfortunate publican was reminded that “*if the company assembled on his premises uttered oaths, excretions or other blasphemies or seditious words, he was to exhort the company to behave in a more Christian manner*”. Failure to do so could cost him his licence, or render him liable to a heavy fine.

Despite such instructions, the incidence of drunkenness on the island in those days was truly awesome according to the Court records, women distinguishing themselves in this context no less than their menfolk. When not engaged in quarrelling and consequential Court exchanges or soaking

up hospitality in island hostelryes, many islanders were occupied with the export of smuggled brandy to England. 4 gallon kegs would appear mysteriously and illegally on beaches, “found” by accomplices, reported to the Court and auctioned, whereupon the liquor was held to be legally on the island and ready to be shipped across the Channel. Fights with the crews of British customs cutters were frequent. The Army took part in the racket and a good time seems to have been had by all.

Such excitements are long past. True, in today’s world, we need to be philosophical about minor irritations. Such as occasional delays in mail and newspaper deliveries when fog, high winds or a waterlogged runway interfere with our air supply line. On such occasions, patience allied to a sense of humour helps to put things into prospective.

Even Queen Victoria, whose capacity for amusement was acknowledged to be finite, was moved to record in her diary for August 8, 1854, following her visit to the island that “*the people were friendly ... it was very amusing*”. Her subsequent comments would have infuriated the Tourism Committee of the day had there been one, for she went on to add: “*It is a place hardly ever visited and so primitive ...*”. Admittedly in the pre-air service and pre-package tour days of 1854, it must have been a little difficult getting here if you did not have a Royal Yacht at your disposal.

To 20th century Alderney eyes, Victorian pomposity and undue regard for the conventions can seem hilarious — as witness the offended materfamilia who wrote to the Guernsey Press in August 1894:

“Will you allow me to call the attention of the authorities in Alderney (as I cannot discover the responsible officer) to the annoyance caused to lady bathers by the careless behaviour and unnecessary proximity of some half-dozen gentlemen who bathe at the very time that a few retired spots are used by ladies ... The attractions of this islet are not numerous, and if lady bathers are to be annoyed (I do not say insulted) I think we shall all soon seek a more civilised watering place for our children’s holidays.”

Worse was to follow. In November 1894, a complainant wrote:

“It is proposed that urinals should be erected, in the town. Instead, of spending money on these unpleasant structures, would it not be better to follow our sister island and vote a few pounds towards a Poultry Show?”

So much for the Victorian view of public mod cons a hundred years ago. I doubt whether the Guernsey Press of that era would have dared

print three letters on the same controversial topic which appeared in successive issues of *The Alderney Journal* in 1972. The exchanges opened with a letter signed “A A”, which asked:

“May I enquire when the lavatory at Whitegates will be opened? Tenants around here are rather tired these last two years of letting all and sundry use their bathrooms. Are we awaiting an official opening by Prince Charles who, I hear, will visit shortly? If this is not the case, will it have priority, please?”

In an attempt to be helpful, a distinguished member of the Guernsey Press weighed in with this contribution to the next issue of the Journal:

“The letters from A A, hinting that a member of the Royal Family may officially open the public convenience at Whitegates, inspires me to suggest that possibly a Peer of the Realm might be a better choice.”

Not to be outdone, a prominent Alderney citizen then adds his ideas on the subject:

“While it is right to suggest that the more appropriate opener of the new Whitegates convenience would be a Peer of the Realm, it should be ensured, that he is neither Tory or Labour. Only a truly Liberal Peer could properly officiate and by so doing, demonstrate the continuing necessity for the Second Chamber.”

There the debate seems to have ended, possibly because no one could emulate the wit displayed in these communications. Not that Alderney humour is confined to matters of sanitation, it can take many forms.

The visitor making his way through the town (as our one street is proudly called) is soon aware of the Aurignais’ relaxed attitude to life. Our menswear shop adds this rider to its notice about opening hours — *“This shop should be open, winds, tides, wives, husbands, chores and human frailties permitting”*. Across the road, the Midland Bank plays its part in marketing the annual production of 600 lbs of marmalade, sold for Guide funds. The Bank advertises for the benefit of visiting French yachtsmen *“Marmalade Nouveau Sold Here”*. The Chairman of the Midland Bank is said to get his pound jar for nothing every year. Further up the street, the greengrocer serving our tiny island used proudly to proclaim: *“Deliveries everywhere — distance no object”*. While across the way, outside a hotel restaurant, under the heading *“Special Today”*, some wag has carefully written *“WET PAINT”*.

At the same time, Alderney folk have a due regard for what is right and proper. A take-away recently opened under the name of “*Get Stuffed*”. The young proprietors thought this a witty extrapolation of the delicious fillings on offer, but Alderney’s sense of decency was affronted. In a public apology in the press, the abashed proprietors announced that they intended to re-christen their establishment “*Meat ‘N’ Plaice*” as soon as they could get some more paint. Honour was satisfied, and inside the shop they displayed the slogan “*Good buy, Mr Chips*”.

Visiting sportsmen — be they footballers, cricketers or anglers — enjoy their regular excursions to Alderney and appreciate the generous hospitality they receive, albeit sometimes offered by the host with an ulterior motive. In the past, cricket teams adjudged to be too strong for the home side have been regaled on arrival at the airport with generous libations of Buck’s Fizz, designed to even up the balance on the field of play. And if that hasn’t worked, the attention of visiting batsmen or fielders has been drawn, at critical moments, to passing ships or interesting seabirds.

Sadly there was one period in Alderney’s history when humour was not in evidence. From 1940 to 1945, Nazi forces occupied the island. The invaders displayed the traditional Teutonic stolidity of outlook and lacked any sense of fun. But even in those dark years there were moments of deliciously unintentional humour stemming from the German ignorance of the English language. There was the German officer who gave notice to the authorities that he had vacated his house named “*Please shut the gate*”. Even more delightful was the saga of the German jazz band which specialised in playing folk songs and asked an islander to teach them an English folk song. He readily consented and after a few days, had them giving a passable rendering of “*God Save The King*”.

Victor Hugo wrote that the Jersey folk were distinguished by “*a steady, alert, quick intellect*” and that the Guernseymen were “*just as shrewd and sound, but they are slower*”.

I doubt whether Alderney folk would score heavily on intellect or steadiness, but they would surely rate highly for tolerance, conviviality and a sense of humour. After all, how many places are policed by a friendly Landrover bearing the registration AY 999 or have policemen who name their houses “*Copse End*” and “*Plod’s Place*”?

Statement of Income & Expenditure for the period 1.4.03 to 31.3.04:

INCOME	2003-04	2002-03	
	£	£	
Subscriptions	2869.50	2568.00	
AGM receipts	78.00	88.00	
NY Party receipts	214.00	176.50	
Luncheon receipts	616.00	660.00	
Bank interest	1.41	2.10	
Competition receipts	219.50	264.00	
Sponsorship receipts*	175.00	150.00	
Donations	271.45	393.00	
Reimburse bank charges	4.00		
‘Author’ sales	16.00		
	4464.86	4325.60	
EXPENDITURE	2003-04	2002-03	
‘Author’ printing and distribution	2373.08	2372.70	
Subscription refunds	30.00		
Subscriptions to PW	153.00	162.00	
Room hire/refreshments**	1322.71	1055.76	
Committee expenses***	118.33	74.90	
Bank charge/unpaid cheque	26.00	30.80	
Competition prizes	504.95	485.00	
	4528.07	4181.16	
Income less expenditure	(63.21)	144.44	
Balance bf 31.03.03	2198.01		
Receipts	4464.86		
	6662.87		
Payments	4528.07		
Balance cf 31.03.04	2134.80		
Treasurer Account		Business Money Manager	
Bank statement	2550.03	Balance @ 31.03.03	64.16
Unpresented cheques	415.23	Balance @ 31.03.04	64.91
Cash at bank - 31.03.04	2134.80		

Notes

*Sponsorship	Roy Froud	150.00
	Farley	25.00
**Room hire/refreshments	AGM	216.33
	Luncheon	754.25
	Committee meeting	16.00
	New Year Party	336.13
***Committee expenses	Publicity	18.93
	Postage	54.42
	Stationery	1.98
	Photocopying	6.00
	2 x train fares	37.00

Audited and found correct
(Signed) Alan S Watts 28 April 04

A Sonnet on Sonnets

Brian Scott

Of lines a sonnet has fourteen all told,
And half a score of syllables per line,
And, be the poet young or very old,
Follow these rules and he will be just fine.
For subject he may choose whate'er he wills,
Romantic love or war and bloody strife,
So long as in the end our mind he fills
With solemn thoughts of love, and death, and life.
And yet when all is said and all is done,
The poet's bared his soul to one and all,
The tale of love or woe its course has run,
Emotion lingers, holds us still in thrall.
A sonnet by a master of the art
Touches its reader to the very heart.