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Diary

AGM

Poetry Workshop Weekend
29th – 31st July 2005

Annual Luncheon

22nd October 2005

DATA PROTECTION ACT

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

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Editorial

Despite our best endeavours we remain short of the minimum number of members to ensure our survival, which continues to depend upon the generosity of the members who make contributions in addition to their renewal fee. This is much appreciated.

We continue to seek ways to reduce costs to ensure our survival with a reduced membership, e.g. using a computer scanner to avoid retyping items published in Author.

An increasing number of members are using e-mail. Some have helped by submitting their work via this media. It occurs to me that those members who have the benefit of this facility could also receive Author in A4 format via e-mail attachment. Please e-mail me if you are willing to accept Author in this way, and thus save us the cost of postage. You can make your own hard copy or download it to a CD-Rom, if you have the means.

At some time in the future I will copy much of the content of the last few years to a CD-Rom and offer it to those members who are interested for cost plus a small fee to assist SCPSW finances. This would remain copyright and contain only material already published in Author.

Would anyone prepared to receive Author by this means please e-mail me to confirm it and we will discuss the details. Obviously this could just as easily include those who live in other countries, as there is no extra cost involved in sending e-mail to Australia than in sending it to Bristol.

It is unfortunate that all our members cannot afford the time and/or cost of travelling to attend our meetings in London. There are clearly advantages in having the personal contact that this provides yet, as Terry James has previously commenting by letter from Belfast, Author is the means by which we achieve the next best thing. However, this depends upon people writing to me, as they might talk if they could but be present, so that I can publish thoughts and comments on writing problems and possible solutions, e.g. is writer's block a problem, or is it only that you are not allowing enough freedom to your imagination? So get your pen out and let me have a few more letters on your problems. Having published such, those better qualified than I can offer comments – edited for invective of course!

SCPSW comprises members who write short stories, articles, plays, published letters and poetry. Many of our members with an interest in poetry do not write in this form. It was therefore a sad day when some

poetry members decided to abandon full membership and become members of Poetry Workshop only. Although we are pleased that many did not do so, we appear to see less and less of their work in consequence. May I once more prevail upon such members to assist Joyce Thornton by offering her your poems for inclusion in Author. Perhaps you would consider items that you have already had published in the P/W magazine Waves.

To ensure that no SCPSW funds are used to contribute to our Annual Luncheon costs, we must again restrict numbers. Those who wish to attend should apply as early as possible. Regrettably applications can only be dealt with on a first come first served basis.

* * * * *

Our Chairman, Alan Watts, is now in a nursing home and is settling in well. He would be pleased to receive telephone calls and visits from members. Probably the latter should be by prior telephone arrangement. The address and telephone number of the home is - Glebe Court Nursing Home, Glebe Way, West Wickham, Kent. Tel 0208 462 6609

* * * * *

WF and FG Froud Memorial Competition 2005

Subject – A Fantasy Short Story of not more than 2,000 words.

Did you enjoy Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, Fairy Stories? Can you write a Fantasy short story! Give it a go, the worst that can happen is that you don't win, but who knows...

Entries not later than 31st October 2005.

Entry Fee £3 by cheque payable to SCPSW and sent to Competition Secretary. For those with friends who might like to enter, the fee for non-members is £5, which sum will be credited against their annual membership fee, only if they are eligible to join SCPSW and do so this year.

Entries to be typed and double-spaced on one side of A4 only.

Only pen-names should be marked on manuscript. Quote name, address and pen-name on a separate covering sheet.

The W. F & F G Froud Memorial Competition 2004

The writing standard of this competition was higher than usual which is very exciting, especially as the membership has recently increased. The winning entry, *The Queen of Bronze*, jumped straight off the page into first place at the first reading. It is a highly original story of a civil war, a village craftsman, and a trader. The second story, *A Night to Remember*, written as a factual piece, harked back to the Second World War, as did so many of the entries this D-Day year, and was cleverly put together, simple and amusing. The third winner, *Incident at Naseby 1645*, had a complex plot and numerous characters that very nearly - but not quite - overwhelmed its word allowance, and explored friendship, treachery and belief on the eve of battle. There were also a number of entries awarded Highly Commended and Commended. Congratulations to everyone of you, and well done.

What wasn't well done was the overall presentation of the entries, which was the poorest I have ever come across in years of judging these competitions. Regrettably, it seems that the rules that should have accompanied the entry details were omitted.

For example, out of 60 entries, only 15 attached a word count. Only 40 were typed in double-spacing. There were entries typed on the back of the paper, which is never done; there was poor, unchecked spelling; there were several entries where '&' had been used for 'and'. Paragraphs were not indented. Half sheets of A4 paper had been used, with the bottom half tom off. So few entries had their pages numbered that I lost interest in looking for them.

It was a disappointing show. Worse, for those people who are just coming to writing and would like to enter more competitions, many of these things are failings that in well-run competitions lead to immediate disqualification - wasting all your effort and not getting your story read.

It is to be hoped that next year, the rules will be given out with the entry details.

Val Whitmarsh

(We who tried to run this competition have to admit responsibility for at least some of the above shortcomings, as we failed to provide clear rules. We hope to remedy this in future by seeking Val's advice from the outset. Our thanks to Val for her generous help and tolerance. Ed.)

The Queen of Bronze

Geoffrey Gardiner

(Froud Memorial Prize - Winning entry)

Sule, the Hausa soldier, nursed his rifle where he lay prone in the ditch at the roadside. He had just returned to the war zone after a weekend's leave in Benin, the same city where he had been given his combat training. In his mind he was going over his experiences of the city, its beer stalls and the girls quick to earn easy money from soldiers far from home.

From the bush ahead he heard the distinctive sound of a mortar, and a bomb exploded not far away. Then there was a movement in the tall grass only thirty yards to his right. He fired six rounds in quick succession, fitted another clip into his gun, and fired the whole lot off immediately, then reloaded. No clear target, but it was more sense to kill the Biafrans before they attacked, if that was what they were going to do. In the ditch ten yards ahead of Sule was another soldier of the Federal Army. He was waiting for a target before firing. He must have seen something, for he fired twice. Sule emptied his gun into the same patch of bush and felt for another clip. The pouch was empty.

“Buraimoh,” he called to his comrade, “pass me some cartridges.”

Another dull thud from the mortar, then before Sule's eyes, the bomb landed directly on Buraimoh, blowing him to pieces. An instant later and four Biafran soldiers rushed out of the bush, bellowing at the top of their voices. One saw Sule and sent a bullet crashing into his chest, then all four turned their rifle butts on him, and went on and on clubbing and smashing long after he was dead.

The fighting moved on, and the sounds of battle receded. Flies and other insects reclaimed the area.

The following evening a boy crept along the side of the road. He was having to overcome the nausea he felt from the stench of decaying corpses. He did not look at Sule's body, nor attempt to search his pockets. His task was to collect the used cartridges, which lay around the dead, and he spotted a good number round Sule. The cautious Buraimoh had only fired two cartridges, and the boy added these empty shells to his haul. He crept further on, with eyes for nothing but brass cartridges.

Late that night he reached his father's compound, and tipped out his booty from a plastic bag. His father, Pius, grunted his approval,

“You have done well, Cyprian.”

The man examined the cartridges and added them to others he was storing.

“It is enough,” he said to himself.

Next morning Pius set Cyprian to brushing all the cartridges clean, while Pius himself set a thick pillar of clay, eight inches high, on a firm base on the ground and sat in front of it, one leg on each side. He drew close an enamel bowl full of dried beeswax, and pressed lumps of it all over the clay. Then with a knife he began to fashion a head. First its general shape, spreading out to the shoulders and throat, then an elaborate hairstyle, with ornaments set in the hair. Then he added more strips of wax to the neck to represent necklaces. All the time he worked he crooned softly to himself. Cyprian came and squatted next to him in rapt silence, watching his father’s deft fingers at work.

After two good hours, Pius stood up, stretched himself, and went into his house, calling for his breakfast. Cyprian stayed by the carving, shooing away with handfuls of dust a dog, attracted by the scent of the wax.

When Pius returned, he took his knife and with infinite care shaped the features of his creation. His artistry was expressed in the perfect moon-like symmetry of the face: the broad nose, large lips, rounded cheeks and wide staring eyes. From time to time he would address his subject quietly, almost reverently, building up a character study, endowing her with qualities and a life of her own.

“May you live long. May you have many children. May the king be pleased with you.”

He scratched in a few lines for the eyebrows, but otherwise all was smooth, no individualised characteristics.

“Your slaves are very fortunate in you.....Rule well in your house.”

The eyes were hardly inset at all.

“May your grandchildren and great grandchildren praise and bless you. May your co-wives praise you for your beauty.”

He rested and leaned back. The ears did not satisfy him, and he pressed them into lumps and then reworked them with his knife, smaller and neater.

“The gods protect you.”

He added a band across the head, and put a wooden plug through it, right down to the clay core.

“Edo Queen, I salute you. I honour you.”

His creation was complete, and he was well satisfied. He carried the head on its base into the house, to dry overnight.

In the morning, Cyprian was sent to bring a bucket full of wet clay. The next step for Pius was to press the wet clay all over the wax. Patting and smearing, he applied this covering, frequently splashing water to keep the clay soft. Then he added another thicker layer. For two days the clay was left to harden, ready for the casting.

Cyprian’s next task was to set the enamel bowl at the bottom of a two-foot deep pit, then he carried burning wood from his fire to the pit and half-filled it, adding dry grass and twigs.

Pius carried the clay head to the pit, upended it on to poles laid across stones round the pit, and with Cyprian’s help lowered it into the pit, withdrawing the poles. They stood for a while, watching the glowing branches. The wax round the throat and shoulders of the head melted at once and drained down through the hole in the headband into the bowl underneath.

Without being told, Cyprian knew his responsibility was now to get the fire intensely hot. Pius arranged his collection of cartridges in a shallow bowl-shaped stone, which served as his crucible, and laid it between the stones where Cyprian had laid the fire. Then Cyprian worked the bellows to feed the fire with air, every now and then adding wood from the pile near him. At long last, and when his arms and back were aching and his eyes smarting painfully, he saw the cartridges begin to melt into a pool of liquid brass. Pius came across, saw the molten brass, wrapped rags round his hands, and slipped two iron rods under the stone crucible. Then with staring eyes, flared nostrils and bated breath, he lifted the crucible to the upturned head, rested the stone on the edge of the clay, and poured the brass into the narrow space left by the wax between the clay core and the outer covering. Pius breathed a deep sigh.

Two days later he woke early to offer libation to the gods of the brass-workers of the Edo people. Then he felt the clay. It was still hot, but baked quite hard.

“Cyprian, tell them to come.”

The women of the household gathered, with small children at their knees or on their backs. They stood in an expectant circle. Pius laid the head on the ground right way up, and began to tap the clay, until it all fell away from the brass head.

A chorus: "Aae, It is the queen."

When Cyprian had gouged out the clay core from inside the queen's head, Pius came with a file to smooth away a few blemishes, and then to polish the graceful rounded surfaces of the forehead and cheeks. The next day he wrapped the queen in old cloths, and carried her on his head to Benin.

"No one wants to buy these heads any more," grumbled the market trader. "I can only give you four pounds."

Pius pocketed the money, thinking that with this kind of reward for only four days' work he would soon be able to pay school fees for Cyprian.

Muhammed, the Hausa trader, came to the market to replenish his stock of Nigerian arts and crafts for sale in the big cities.

"There are too many of these things now," he grunted. "Everyone is making them. I can only give you five pounds."

The market trader protested and managed to extort another ten shillings, and the bargain was struck.

Muhammed was pleased with what he had bought in Benin, to add to the ebony heads and coloured leather goods he had already amassed. He was even more pleased when he managed to sell some ebony carvings to the Major commanding the barracks in Benin, a Hausa man like himself who was now aiming to adorn his house in a rich man's style. Muhammed asked if the Major remembered his son Sule who had been trained in these barracks, and the Major, out of respect for Muhammed's grey hairs, assured him that his son was doing well and would soon be home.

Two weeks later Muhammed sat at the door of the Federal Palace Hotel in the plush suburb of Lagos. He had spread his goods out to the best effect and awaited customers.

An Englishman strolled past.

"Very fine goods, Master. I give you a good price."

Muhammed kept up his persuasive patter while the Englishman indulgently looked the goods over, enquiring about first one item, then

another: a leather attaché case and a pair of elephants. Then he turned to the bronze queen.

“Thirty five pounds, Master. You can pay me thirty.”

The visitor, Frank, tested its weight.

“Too heavy for my luggage. I am flying home tomorrow.”

“You can give me thirty pounds, and I give you this case, too, free!”

“No, I can’t carry it. It’d use up my luggage allowance.”

“Twenty five pounds, Sir. Edo queen, from Benin. Very old. No one knows how to make this kind any more.”

“Ten pounds?”

“Ah no, you think I give it to you for ten pounds? This kind very dear. Twenty pounds. Last price.”

“Twelve?”

“Ah master, this is too low. You must give me eighteen pounds.”

Frank took out his wallet and counted his £1 notes and there were fifteen. He took out a purse and counted the coins; there were eleven shillings. He looked enquiringly into Muhammed’s eyes, and smiled. Muhammed sighed, accepted the cash, and shook his head as though over these sad times for honest traders.

“Oh that’s really beautiful, Frank darling, thank you so much,” and she kissed him warmly.

“It’s a queen, I understand, an Edo queen, from Benin. Very old.”

“If it is an antiquity, it’d be worth a lot.”

“Oh, I don’t know if it is really that old. But the trader said no one knows how these things are made any more.”

Sheila was inspired to do a painting of her queen. She assembled her easel and paints, and as she did so she found herself wondering about the queen’s life. Had the king chosen her for her beauty? Was she his only wife? His first wife, to rule his house, or a junior wife to be ruled by her seniors? Did she have slaves of her own? Did she live to see her children, grandchildren, great grandchildren?

A Night to Remember

Rex Andrews

(Froud Memorial Prize – Runner-up)

The siren was still wailing when the searchlights started weaving patterns in the sky and anti-aircraft guns began barking like fierce dogs. We hurried down the garden path to the shelter and tumbled in.

Mum shone the torch and Helen, my big sister, lit the candle like a zombie. It was our routine.

‘When Dad gets down,’ said Mum, ‘We can have a cup of tea.’

Against the background of ack-ack gunfire we could now hear the buzz of aircraft like a swarm of angry bees overhead. Mum, sitting on the edge of her bunk, began knitting desperately - unaware that the scarf she was making was already about six feet long. Helen glanced at me and winked. Somehow the bombs and guns were exciting for us. How could we understand how worried our mother must have been? To me the shelter was a rather comfortable den.

I curled up on my bunk thinking about Grandad. He lives in the road behind ours. I’d reminded him over the back fence that it was Guy Fawkes Day today and he’d promised to try to get us some fireworks.

An extra loud explosion interrupted my thoughts and made Mum drop a lot of stitches. ‘I wish your Dad would hurry up,’ she said.

A moment later the shelter door opened and Dad appeared.

‘Evening all!’ he said, playing the policeman. ‘All present and correct, 1 hope? Mrs Webb, Helen Webb, David Webb and one cat. That seems to be in order. The old boy’s not coming tonight.’

Helen frowned. ‘Why not? I like Grandad’s stories.’

‘He gets a bit claustrophobic,’ said Dad.

‘I’m not surprised,’ said Mum. ‘This tin box would get stuffy with two, let alone four or five.’

‘Especially with David’s socks,’ Helen said.

‘Anyway,’ Dad said, ‘I can assure you he’s staying in his own shelter tonight. I saw him going down there about half an hour ago with a book in his hand.’

‘Did it have a red cover?’ Helen asked.

‘Goodness knows. It’s too murky out there to distinguish colours. And I wasn’t that interested.’

‘Well, I lent him Little Women this morning,’ Helen explained, ‘and it had a red cover.’

‘That should suit him,’ said Mum, ‘He’s always had a fancy for little women.’

Dad just laughed and said, ‘What about a cup of tea. I’m parched.’

While Helen organised the primus and the mugs I told Dad what Grandad had promised. Mum exploded. ‘What! Fireworks! That man wants his brains tested. Surely we’re getting enough bangs already.’

There was plenty of noise going on outside now, so I could half see her point.

‘He is getting a bit unpredictable,’ Dad said.

‘For goodness sake, Frank!’ Mum said, ‘Unpredictable isn’t the word. What about that Mrs Briggs he’s taken up with since he started helping in the Rest Centre. I can’t see what he sees in her. She must be sixty.’

‘Well, he’s sixty-five,’ said Dad.

‘Maybe so. But she’s done up like thirty-five. Lipstick and all!’

‘I like her,’ said Helen, ‘She’s fun.’

‘So do I,’ I said. ‘She gave me all her sweet ration last month.’

Mum ignored us and looked hard at Dad again. ‘Well, I’m not keen. And what about Grandad’s house, I’d like to know.’

‘What do you mean?’ said Dad.

‘It’s obvious, isn’t it? That house must be worth £5000, at least. No mortgage. And you’re his only son.’

I couldn’t see what Mum was on about and Dad just laughed. ‘I think we’ve got enough to worry about just now,’ he said, ‘without

getting in a stir about that. What about that tea, Helen?’ he said, changing the subject.

‘I’m just trying to get the dried milk to dissolve,’ said Helen. ‘It’s all caked hard.’

‘It’s the damp down here,’ said Mum. ‘It brings on my rheumatism.’

At last Helen passed round the mugs of tea. There was no sugar in it - the ration had run out. But the clatter of spoons on mugs as we tried to stir in the lumps of dried milk made us suddenly aware of the silence outside. No gun-fire, no drone of aeroplanes.

‘Perhaps the all clear will come soon,’ said Helen.

Mum shook her head. ‘I hate these sudden silences,’ she said. ‘You wonder what Jerry’s up to.’

Dad looked thoughtful. ‘I wonder how my father’s coping,’ he said, ‘stuck in there by himself. His eyesight’s none too good for reading by candlelight.’

‘He’s probably playing patience,’ said Helen. ‘He often does when he’s alone.’

‘He might be playing whist with his floozy,’ said Mum, ‘if she’s down there with him.’

Dad wasn’t listening. His head was cocked on one side. ‘I think I can hear a plane coming,’ he said.

Just then the ack-ack started up again, and soon we could all hear an aeroplane flying low and heavy, gradually approaching. There were distant thuds, each louder than the last.

‘It’s a stick,’ said Dad, and started counting. ‘...five, six, seven, eight, nine

The violent explosion of number ten smothered Dad’s voice. Our shelter leapt several inches and earth poured in through the joints in the corrugated iron. The thump and rattle of falling masonry followed and the familiar tinkle of broken glass. My ears felt strange - sort of tight and hollow. I put my fingers in them to try to stop a kind of

whistling in my head. An acrid smell of high explosive seeped into the shelter making my nose and eyes smart

Helen was the first to speak. Phew! That was a close one,' she said. 'Is anybody hurt?'

Luckily, apart from the shock, none of us was injured. 'If someone can find a torch I'll go up and have a look round,' said Dad. 'I had one a moment ago, but I can't feel it anywhere now.'

'I think it landed on my bunk,' said Helen. 'Yes, here it is,' she said. She switched it on and re-lit the candle by its light.

The shelter door was completely jammed so Dad had to use the emergency pick and spade to break through it. After about ten minutes he had made a hole in the rubble just big enough for him to crawl through.

A few minutes later his head appeared in the opening. 'It doesn't look too good,' he said. 'Our house is standing, but badly damaged. But Dad's is flattened - a heap of rubble spread over both gardens and a lot of it on our shelter. Most of his shelter - and his book - are in our garden.'

'What about Grandad?' I asked.

'We've got some digging to do before we find out,' Dad said.

Mum started to cry. 'The poor man,' she said between sobs, 'to be struck like that all alone.'

'Maybe he went into the house,' said Dad. 'We won't know for some time.'

'D'you think Mrs Briggs was with him, Dad?'

'It's possible.'

'Oh God! The poor woman,' said Mum, starting to cry again. 'I never wished her any harm. Shall I come up and help with the digging?'

No, you stay where you are with the children. There'll be a rescue party here before long. Meanwhile I'll keep you posted.'

Helen was re-assembling the tea-making equipment when the all-clear sounded. We heard the bells of ambulances presumably

going to various bombsites. Soon a voice from the opening called to ask if we were all right. It was an A.R.P. man with the rescue party.

‘We’re all right,’ Helen called up. ‘But Grandad lives in the house behind. Dad’s outside digging to try to find him. Can you see him?’

‘There is someone digging. Right! We’ll go and give him a hand.’

After a while the A.R.P. man came back. ‘No news yet,’ he said. ‘But there’ll be some men here soon to help us shift some heavy beams. Meanwhile it’s high time we got you out and over to the Rest Centre.’

He widened the opening Dad had made with a spade and pulled us through one by one. Dad joined us, exhausted, wiping away a smear of blood from a cut on his forehead. ‘No signs of life yet,’ he said. ‘But there’s still hope. Meanwhile, we’re ordered to go to the Rest Centre.’

The Rest Centre was bright, busy and crowded with people. A tall thin woman, clutching a handful of lists came towards us smiling.

‘Oh, my dears, you looks worn out,’ she said. ‘Come along and make yourselves comfy. Best see the nurse about that cut,’ she said to Dad. ‘Meanwhile go and get yourselves a mug of tea. That lady over there’ll help you. You see? At that table in the corner.’

Halfway there Mum gave a start. ‘Good God!’ she cried. ‘It can’t be...’

We all stared at the small woman almost hidden behind the tea urn and the tall grey-haired man arranging mugs on the table.

‘Mrs Briggs!’ said Mum, ‘and Grandad.’

Dad stood spellbound. The torch he’d been clutching in his hand fell to the ground and he didn’t seem to notice it. Helen picked it up and grabbed Dad’s arm, guiding him towards the couple. When we reached the table Dad at last found speech.

‘What the blazes are you doing here, Dad.’ he said. ‘Where the hell have you been? How come you’re not in that shelter?’

‘Hello, Frank! Hello everyone!’ Grandad beamed. ‘Relieved to see you all alive. What rumours! A land-mine, somebody said. Was it?’

‘No it wasn’t a land-mine, it was a bloody bomb,’ Dad almost shouted. ‘A damn big one. And we thought it had taken you with it. We’ve been digging for you in the rubble for the last hour.’

‘Did you have any luck?’

‘It’s no bloody joke! Damn you! We’ve been worried sick!’

Then Mum joined in. ‘Why didn’t you say you were coming here? Frank said he saw you ... saw you ... going down into your shelter.’

‘With a book,’ said Helen.

‘Never mind the book,’ snapped Mum ‘why didn’t you stay there after you’d gone down there?’

‘And if I had ... ?’

‘Well, at least we’d have known where you were.... Oh... I see what you mean. Well, you might have told us, when you got out of it.’

‘I didn’t think...’

It was Dad’s turn again. ‘That’s just it. You didn’t think!’

‘What I was going to say,’ said Grandad, ‘was that I didn’t think you’d approve. My eyes got sore trying to read by candlelight and I got bored. And I just had this sudden urge to serve humanity. I remembered Mrs Briggs was on duty here tonight so I thought I’d come and lend a hand.’

‘Lend a bloody hand while we were shovelling through the rubble for your body - alive or dead.’

‘Well, I’m sorry about that. As a matter of fact. I feel very much alive. Especially, seeing that - like you - I’ve just had such a narrow escape. I propose we all have a mug of tea to celebrate.’

‘Well, I’ll be....’

‘I’m sure you will be, Frank,’ said Grandad. ‘Come along everyone and make merry, for tomorrow ... Who knows?’

Then he bent down and whispered in my ear. ‘By the way ... I’ve got you some sparklers, and a couple of bangers. Luckily they’re in my coat pocket. But we won’t say too much about those till the dust has settled.’

Incident at Naseby 1645

Don Nixon

(Froud Memorial Prize – Third place)

The mild June afternoon was fading into evening. Across the fields, rising on the other side of Naseby village, Richard could see the fires of the Royalist camp, glowing in the dusk. Shouts and the sounds of drunken laughter floated over on the breeze and were in stark contrast to the low hum of prayers from the soldiers around him. The young captain tried to pray with them but always the thought of tomorrow clouded his mind. In the morning he would ride out with Ireton's cavalry. perhaps to slaughter his own cousin, who had once been like a brother to him. He thought of Alison who Hugo had taken from him. There could be no forgiveness, only revenge. He shuddered as he felt the familiar spurt of jealous anger well up inside him..

‘The bait is taken then.’

Ireton's voice was harsh. He pointed to the enemy lines. In the growing twilight Richard could see out the red scarf fluttering from the point of a pike. He moved the spyglass and made out the figure holding the long weapon. It was Hugo. The signal had been given. Ireton sensed his captain's hesitation. He placed a hand on Richard's shoulder and his voice softened.

‘Go lad.’ he Whispered. ‘Remember God's work tomorrow may depend on the success of this errand.’

He watched as the young Ironside mounted his horse and rode towards the King's camp, his withered left arm hanging rigid and useless by his side.

‘Why must I always envy him?’ Richard muttered angrily.

He had been taken through the lines and now the two of them stood facing each other in Hugo's tent. Hard campaigning had etched deep furrows on his cousin's once handsome face. But the easy charm remained. Richard as so often in the past left raw and ungainly. He felt again his jealousy of his dashing cousin who had so easily taken Alison from him. Hugo would now pay for that betrayal.

Involuntarily, he pushed his palsied hand beneath the folds of his cloak. Hugo noticed the gesture.

‘So the London physics were unable to find a cure.’

Richard bridled. He did not want pity.

‘There is no cure.’ he replied brusquely.

The sympathy from his cousin jarred. He had tried everything. Wherever he had gone the answer had always been the same. It was witchcraft. The curse of the crone his father had hanged as a witch the day Richard was born

‘Perhaps there may be,’ said Hugo, ‘if you keep your promise. It was difficult to persuade the King but he finally agreed tonight. I told him what you offered in your letter but even so he still thinks of you as a rebel. If the Council had not insisted ----’

Richard nodded.

‘I will fulfil my part. But we have little time. It will not be long before I am missed.’

He took a roll of parchment from his satchel and spread it on the table under the lamp.

‘The disposition of our line of battle as I promised.’

He spun round and reached for his sword as he heard a noise from the darkness at the back of the tent.

‘Put up your sword young man. There is nobody here to harm you.’

A man, little older than Richard himself, stepped into the light.

‘Congratulations Sir Hugo. I was wrong to doubt you.’

The English was precise but there was a foreign inflection.

Richard stared in awe at the legendary cavalry leader. Prince Rupert was the only Royalist General Cromwell feared. Even the dour Ireton admired the German Prince’s courage.

He gave a short bow to the nephew of the king who began to study the map. He drew his finger across the uneven land between the two armies and pointed to a ridge on the right.

‘Is it here that Ireton will conceal his freeshooters?’

Richard nodded.

‘There are thick hedgerows along the slope.

So if I attack on the right flank, my cavalry will run into the enfilade fire. They will be cut to pieces.’

‘Cannon have already been hidden in the trees at the top of the rising ground further to the right. If any of your horsemen survive the sharpshooters, they will be destroyed by the cannon fire.’ Rupert pursed his lips and focused his attention on the left flank. Here the rolling ground was less easy for a cavalry charge and thick bushes were dotted on the slopes.

‘He would not expect me to go there?’

Richard shook his head.

‘No. The obvious route for your cavalry is on the right flank. Our battle plan is based on the idea that you will make your charge on the right. And we will be waiting to cut you down.’

‘You are sure of this?’

‘My cousin is a member of Ireton’s war council,’ Hugo broke in. ‘And he has every reason to tell the truth.’

‘Family loyalty before politics eh?’

Rupert sniffed.

‘Few have paid heed to family ties in this war so far. Brother seems to relish fighting brother.’ ‘My cousin has other reasons for his actions your Highness.’

The prince glanced at Richard’s arm which had now swung loose from its place of concealment under his cloak.

‘Ah yes. I forgot. Even a cropheaded Puritan is not immune from superstition. Well I suppose it is now time for us to keep our part of the bargain.’

He looked with distaste at the Roundhead.

‘Well captain, you have earned your audience. But tell me. How does it feel to betray your cause?’

Richard flushed and looked away. Rupert laughed. Hugo began to protest but the prince cut him off.

‘No matter. We have what we need.’

He turned to Hugo. He had made his decision.

I will stay here and study the map further. Let me examine again this weakened left flank. Take him to the king. When the charade is finished, see him back through the lines and return here. We have work to do. You will lead the new charge down the left tomorrow.’

He returned to the map.

Charles was with his chaplain. His tent was as plain as Cromwell’s. Richard was surprised. He had expected luxurious trappings. The king was tiny. Before the war, Richard’s father had taken him to the new palace at Whitehall where the royal portraits were hung. In these pictures, the king was usually portrayed seated on a charger, imperious and powerful. Truly God’s anointed, the living embodiment of the Divine Right the Stuarts claimed as their own.

All who entered the great banqueting hall, were awe struck. Even Richard’s father was silent. But now, kneeling before this tired sight figure whose face was grey with worry. Richard found his cropped head came up to the king’s chest. Charles seemed hardly the tyrant. ‘the man of blood’, against whom the puritan devines railed.

The king did not look at him but spoke to Hugo who knelt behind his cousin.

‘It is not usual.’ he said.

His voice was thin and querelous and he motioned to the chaplain who shuffled forward.

‘There should be days of prayer and fasting before the ceremony. It is a sacrament,’

He hesitated for a moment and then shrugged.

‘But the promise must be honoured and I suppose we must shift as best we can’.

He nodded to the chaplain and the prayers began.

Brought up to despise Papist mummery, and in Richard's father's eyes the king was in league with the 'Scarlet Whore' in Rome, Richard nevertheless closed his eyes and prayed that this frail little man really had the power to heal. As the chaplain intoned the Latin verses of the old ritual, Richard felt the king's fingers gently touching his paralysed arm and hand. He heard the king whisper something to Hugo and felt the rush of night air as the flap of the tent was opened. He opened his eyes and found he was alone with his cousin. Hesitatingly he felt for his withered hand. He shook his head at Hugo's look of enquiry.

'Nothing,' he said curtly. 'The King's Touch' is a myth like all the other flummery.'

Masking his disappointment he followed Hugo back to the sentries. He mounted but Hugo caught the horse's bridle. His face was haggard and his voice pleading.

'Richard! On her deathbed, Alison begged your forgiveness. The child is named after you. Can you not find it in your heart to forgive us? Can you not end this terrible jealousy?'

Richard snatched the reins away and spurred his horse. But as he crossed the fields to his own lines, his cousin's words burned in his brain.

Hugo fell at the first volley of Ireton's muskets. The trap that Richard had helped to set was sprung. Hidden among the bushes on the left flank, the sharpshooters decimated Rupert's cavalry who scattered and were driven back by a wall of pikemen. They turned and fled back to the village. From behind, the royalist cannon tried to cover their retreat. Richard urged his squadron in pursuit. He rose in his stirrups as the canter changed to the gallop. Suddenly, a searing pain tore through his crippled arm and he felt the lifeless fingers clench. The arm moved. He found the hand clasp the pommel of the saddle. In the clamour, he seemed to hear Hugo's parting words of the night before.

Forgiveness! Could he now ever forgive himself for his insane jealousy? Tears streamed down his cheeks as he charged into the smoke of the guns.

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 2005

The rules for the 2005 Bill Barnes Poetry Competition, which is open exclusively to members of the Poetry Workshop, appeared in the spring issue of **Wavelengths**. Deadline for entries to the Competition is 30 September 2005. Don't forget that if you want an acknowledgement of your entry, an advanced copy of the results and/or your entries returned to you, please enclose a SAE for each eventuality with your entry. Good luck!

2005 Poetry Workshop Weekend

A reminder that this year's PW Weekend will take place on 29-31 July 2005. The venue is The Manor House, University of Birmingham. The cost of the Weekend is now fixed at £140, and this includes accommodation, meals and conference facilities. A booking form was enclosed with the winter 2004 issue of **wavelengths**. If you have mislaid your form, are a new member interested in joining us or would like some further information about the Weekend, please write to me, Mike Boland (address above), and I will send you a copy. We ask for the normal deposit of £30 with a final confirmation and balance due in May 2005.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Poetry Workshop will be held during the Birmingham Weekend. If any member has any points to raise or motions they would like to submit for discussion, please send them to me by 1 July 2005.

Subscriptions 2005

Subscriptions to the Poetry Workshop fell due on 1 January 2005. The cost of membership remains unchanged at £3 for yet another year. Existing members should have received a subscription form with the winter issue of **wavelengths**. Cheques/postal orders and enquiries about membership should be sent to **Terry Rickson**, whose address appears above. **Please** remember to make out your cheques correctly: they should be made payable to **SCPSW Poetry Workshop Account**.

Membership of the Poetry Workshop provides:

- three issues of our magazine **wavelengths** 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 address at the head of the page.

Dates to Remember

29 - 31 July 2005	Poetry Workshop Weekend
31 July 2005	Deadline for Wavelengths # 4
1 September 2005	Wavelengths # 4 publishing date
30 September 2005	Deadline for entries to the Bill Barnes Competition
1 November 2005	Deadline for Wavelengths # 5
1 December 2005	Wavelengths # 5 publishing date

* * * * *

Mon Repose

Adrian Danson (1986)

There is water on the ceiling

 There is water on the floor

 And there is water in between

 That covers every wall

 Now I ask you

 I task you

 Explain it if you can

 But lest you think the obvious, I assure you I'm a man

Poetry Pages
Edited by Joyce Thornton

1940
Terry Rickson

Summer.
Swifts quarter the sky.
A gramophone plays
AI Bowily, Geraldo;
someone re-winds it.
"Farewell, Indian Summer."
Banter,
light, taut, laconic;
sudden laughter, the way of young men.
"Scramble!"
tinny urgency of the tannoy.
Adrenalin fuelled
expletives; profanities,
English, Dutch, Czech, Quebecois.
Sweet roar of Merlin engines.
The last few bars fade.

"Farewell to you, Indian Summer."

Faust
John Abrahams

If the chasm opened
As it apparently and definitely did
On so many previous occasions,
The right thing would be to fall as far as possible
For the sake of peace of mind.
And if you fell as it seems you did,
Reaching the bottom according to the usual equation,
Would you know about fear?
Would you sit there, on the floor,
Making cross- references, annotations, bibliographies?
Would you care?
And when the black flakes of light
Start to separate from you and rise upwards,
What happens then?
Will the journey's speed compensate?

Paper Seller
Terry James

A solitary cloth capped figure
lonely and forlorn in shabby
ill-fitting raincoat.

Stamping the wet flagstones
with dirty cracked shoes
hoping to bring warmth
to cold aching feet.

Bulbous nose twitching
in irritation as smoke
from the fag end on his lip
curls around it.

Clutching his livelihood –
the heavy bundle
of newspapers, under an arm
chilled and numb.

Whilst his free hand
attends to pulling
folding and thrusting
each paper to customers.
Actions automatic
and swift.

An insignificant man
except for the birth mark
vivid and frightening
in its intensity;
like an unmasked phantom
of the opera.
Bawling out the late edition number
in a gravelly carrying voice.
An art practised in public
in all weathers.

Before shuffling on
rush hour business gone,
to his next
and final patch.

Turn of the Century

Andrew Millican

Silence In the sitting room.
Bright festive lights Colgate
white hug the retinas igniting
reflection. Outside traffic tapers
into earshot zooms out to distance.

Word for a thousand years
begs to be written. Over-
cooked burnt cindered by
commercial firestorms media
mania. All ms, eyes, ns and ells.
Nah, I'll not write you.

Instead "turn of the century"
glides into mind like a goshawk
ghosting through a million
rootless thoughts. All endings
beginnings resolutions.

A zillion clocks count on.
Champagne corks bubble
with anticipation. Whatever
else there is, is beyond our
manufacture of time. Outside
a taxi toots it's horn.

Comfort in Writing

Roger F de Boer

(Salient points of a talk given to Mothers' Union on 5th April 2005)

As a means of communication

During WWII the writer's parents wrote to each other daily for 18 months. A sailor at sea appreciates a letter to break the boredom of his situation. The correspondence flourished and marriage followed in six months (October 1944)

To replace a loss

Whether people or things - when someone has died or a loved subject has disappeared into history - itself something which has been written down - the grieving process can be helped by exchange of letters and the lost item written about in a book which is often the reason for the latter activity (non fiction)

A practical exercise

By keeping a daily diary you can exert some control over your life. When depressed in 1963 the writer became confused and vowed that if recovery was made he would maintain a diary - which was done since 1965. Ten years later this became useful when the police asked of his whereabouts on a specific day in February of that year. But the question was posed in August (during BLACK PANTHER scare).

To dissipate hurt/frustration

When criticised or upset by a situation the writer found that the anger resulting could be calmed by expression in writing poetry -it was usually "immediate" although sometimes it could be thirty/forty years later before the muse struck.

Writing from other resources than your "own"

The culture of Christianity not only has the bible but the forms of worship and the hymns from writers of all denominations - Charles Wesley and Cardinal Newman spring to mind

"We all have secret fears to face Our minds and motives to amend"

Les Feuilles d'Automne

P W Stock

Last year I decided to attend a school reunion lunch for Old Bryfordians. The venue was a modest, but smart hotel in Bournemouth. About thirty old boys - and some were very old - had made their way there.

Unlike many of my friends I have never been a really enthusiastic reunion-man. When I think about them at all I prefer to remember those contemporaries of yesteryear - fellow officers, school friends and others - as they were, or at least how I now believe they were. But, as I tell myself, 'This time there might just be someone there who, I shall remember, was a real soul-mate and there will be an instant rapport.'

The rapid, alcohol-induced, reunion bonhomie is always a bit 'Muffersausen' –

bottom-clenching is the best translation for this useful German word - for the first ten minutes anyway.

So fifty years on, clutching a glass of warm, white wine, I find myself cruising around the assembled oldies. All seemed older than me and all well-acquainted. They must be regulars, aficionados of the reunion circuit or maybe they'd just been at the bar longer.

I search despairingly for a recognisable face.

When I actually get round to identifying anyone - a process achieved by an embarrassingly close inspection of a name tag round the neck and of the associated, red, whiskery face - I am prone to recoil in horror.

"Good grief, you're not really old Stinky Stevens, are you? Not the Stinky who...?"

I remembered a tall, thin, inky-fingered wimp, with steel rimmed spectacles and a stutter. He had been a Boy Scout - not one of the 'men' in the XV.

This gross, boozy individual must have the wrong name tag. But he hasn't.

"I remember you, Simpson. You were in the eight weren't you?"

I smiled, nodded, already basking in expected, if belated accolades. "Yes, that's right, I was, halcyon days. We used to win then-at Marlow, Henley..."

"And you were also the bastard who ran those punishment PT classes, weren't you, in the mid-morning break, for the weak and feeble ... like me?"

I thought he was going to grin, but he didn't. He just stared, looking fierce, perspiration glowing on his face. This old memory obviously died hard.

Moving on fast - I needed the Gents anyway - where I was surprised to be accosted by a sharp-looking young man whom I had not previously noticed. He turned out to be the Director

of Studies.

He looked much like a senior car salesman, or maybe it was just his accent - perhaps the suit, or maybe just the way he peed. I asked him what he actually did, such an appointment, as I explained, having not existed in my days.

He ignored my question.

“When were you at the school then?” He shook himself without inhibition, vigorously, peering at my name tag - at least I think that is what he was peering at.

“40 to ‘48 - all the war years - and a bit”

He zipped himself up.

“Simpson - that name’s familiar - I saw it recently ... yeah, I remember, on an old silver sports cup, in the library - senior steeplechase was it? Your name was on it three times in a row. Caught my eye”

I managed a modest smile and appreciated that this man, attending today as a representative of the school, as it was in the year 2004, had done his homework - and had a good memory -short-term anyway.

The lunch was a standard three course, three star affair. There were a number of tables, each seating about eight members, selected by the secretary with regard to commonality of years at the school.

I had been informed previously that a certain Robin Wright was attending (from Australia) who, by letter to the secretary, had professed extensive recollection of me and indeed a close friendship.

We shook hands, stared at each other and sat down. After a few minutes’ chat I began to wonder who on earth this chap was - I suspect he may have been thinking the same. And then we hit a common chord.

“Did you ever know a girl called Catherine Green, at the High, she went on to be a nurse, at the Middlesex, I think?”

I was aware that conversation at the table had stopped.

“Yes” I said. “Yes I knew Catherine Green - quite well, actually...”

In the pause that followed every other diner at our small table nodded in unison.

“So did I, so did I, nice girl ... what happened to her...?”

Eyes were lowered, someone burped, concentration on the soufflé. Even the top table had gone quiet.

“I remember she had a mole...”

With a scrape of his chair on the wooden floor and a nod from the president the Director of Studies had stood up.

He gave a short and pithy slide presentation on the school, now and, just to remind us, as it had been in the forties.

He started by saying he had been warned that talking to a collection of old boys was a bit like sleeping with the queen mother - the honour was likely to be greater than the pleasure.

Short irreverent titter - good intro, wrong audience.

But his presentation was professional. Quick flashbacks aroused howls of recognition, the new amenities ~ recreation centre with a heated pool, new library - envious growls of reluctant approval.

That the costly services of MORI had been invoked to conduct a survey to determine opinion on whether the school should become dual gender prompted cries of disbelief.

“Bisexual, that’s the word today, isn’t it?” An old man on the high table cackled before subsiding into an asthmatic fit of coughing and wheezing.

“Should have asked us, we’d have told ‘em. Waste of bloody money! Keep the girls where they belong, barefoot, pr...”

Before he could say more his neighbour put a hand over the mouth of this white-haired patriarch. He wheezed into disgruntled silence.

Unsurprisingly the results of the poll had indicated a vast majority in favour of Bryford remaining a boys only establishment.

Roars of approval and much thumping of tables while the Director of Studies washed his hands with invisible soap and smiled knowingly. This wasn’t the first time he’d done this.

We raised our glasses in toasts to various and good causes - the Queen, the School, the Club, one another ... Uncle Tom Cobbleigh.

A touch of bathos attended this traditional ritual as our glasses now contained only water, the ‘included-in-the-price’ two glasses of house red having been consumed early on.

A retired naval commander, Jonathan Smart, who I remembered had been a beefy lad - played fullback for the seconds - and was now huge - produced a large hip flask and proceeded to splash neat brandy into his own and his

neighbours' glasses. He growled something about never being able to live this down in the wardroom.

We raised our glasses and drank gratefully.

The proceedings concluded with a rousing speech from the President of the Club, a dour individual who had been elected largely on account of his once captaining the England XV.

This was primarily an exhortation to go on recruiting for the school - 'lots of competition nowadays... healthy waiting list gets parents interested-no waiting list and they wonder what's wrong... grandsons... fees-you can all help ... Floreat Schola Bryfordiensis!'

For a brief moment I almost started to feel guilty that I had sent all my sons to a different school - and then I recalled Bryford now being one of the most expensive public schools in the country. That and its location - dreary East Midlands - just might have been influences, and I reminded myself that I certainly wouldn't have gone there if I hadn't been lucky and won a scholarship.

Another alarming moment occurred when I thought we were all about to sing Auld Lang Syne or even the School Boating Song - 'Bryford by the River'. These stirring songs and the patriotic words of the latter were disquietingly reminiscent of the jingoism I had to admit to enjoying in my boyhood days at the school.

But the party was over. I was spared any more Muffersausen, just as well really, my buttocks were pretty well clenched as it was.

My misty-eyed table companions, whose names I can't remember, except Robin Wright and Jon Smart, all shook hands, I joined in.

The commander stood up, drained his flask, burped gently, murmured 'God bless her' and sat down again.

For what seemed a long time we all smiled at one another, nodding - and then the room emptied.

There was a chorus of "See you again next year?"

The plaintive voices trailed off - some to the car park where sober, tolerant wives awaited in the family 4 x 4 - and some to the bar where yesterdays' triumphs were to be replayed once more.

'Probably not.' I smiled to myself as I walked to the railway station. 'Probably not ...'.

On the train home I was one who didn't wonder what had happened to Catherine Green - I knew - she was my wife... but who the hell was Robin Wright?

Model Behaviour

Angela Pickering

Vanity is as attractive in a young person as an ingrown toe-nail, so it has been with great caution that I have raised my daughter, Betsy. As a sensible and modest woman myself, I have walked that fine line between over and under praise with consummate skill. My Betsy is confident yet humble, self-aware yet thoughtful, in fact she is everything that I have handed on to her. And so it was a complete surprise when, one morning during the school summer holidays, she suddenly announced her intention to change her name.

She sat down at the breakfast table and pushed away the plate of scrambled egg that I had prepared for her.

‘Mum, she said, ‘Mum, I’m going to change my name.’ She smiled at me, and I turned open-mouthed to stare at her.

‘You’re what?’

‘Going to change my name. I want you to call me “Cecile” from now on, or maybe “Claudia”. I’m not sure yet. I’ll let you know which one when I’ve made my final decision.’

‘Claudia?’

‘Yes, Claudia, but not “Clawdia” like you just said. More like “Cloudia” please. Go on, try it. And where’s my grapefruit and black coffee? You know I can’t eat this stuff.’

I lost the use of my legs and flopped into the chair opposite her. ‘And exactly what is wrong with your real name, may I ask?’

Betsy flicked back her long, blonde hair with a scarlet fingernail. ‘Well, look at me, Mum. You have to admit that you made a mistake with my name. I’m definitely more of a “Claudia”. What ever possessed you to call me “Betsy” in the first place? Not even “Elizabeth”, I could have lived with that. But “Betsy”?’ She leant across the table and fixed me with an intense look, ‘I’m hardly a “Betsy” now am I?’ She paused, delighting in the moment. ‘If I’m going to be a supermodel then I can hardly be called “Betsy”’

‘Supermodel? Since when are you going to be a supermodel?’ I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. ‘And I think your name is beautiful.’

‘And while we’re on the subject,’ continued Betsy as if I hadn’t spoken, ‘I’m going to change my last name as soon as I’m old enough to do it

legally. Why you married Dad with a name like his beats me. You could have kept your own last name at least.'

Ben looked up from his newspaper, 'What?'

'I knew the minute I set eyes on your father that he was the one for me,' I snapped, desperate to protect the dear man before Betsy really upset him, 'and I love our name. It's cute.' I remembered the reason for the conversation. 'Since when are you going to be a supermodel?'

'Since I realised exactly how gorgeous I am. I have to get something underway before I leave school, everyone keeps telling me. So this is it.' Betsy practised her pout.

'Vanity is hardly attractive in a young lady, Bets' said Ben, pouring himself another cup of tea.

'Claudia,' corrected the young lady in question. 'How many more times? Get with the programme please, father.'

Ben shrugged his shoulders and borrowed one of Betsy's own expressions. 'Whatever.'

Betsy forked some eggs between her perfectly painted lips. 'This school holiday Emma and I are going to London to visit some model agencies. Now that we're seventeen we can do as we please. Emma says we're a certainty to get taken on, with our looks. Especially me.'

'Oh, Emma says so, does she? Well, it must be true then.' I was fast approaching the point of no return. 'And just how good looking do you think you are?'

'Look, Mother,' Betsy said, using what I called her "talking to old people" voice, 'It's no good being modest about this. That won't get me anywhere. I have to use what I've got as best I can. I'm not the brainy type, am I? I'm really struggling with my 'A' levels. So, I'm going to use my looks instead. If God didn't want me to be famous, He wouldn't have made me so drop-dead gorgeous.'

'Oh, Betsy,' I said, 'how can you talk like this?'

'You'll just have to get used to it. Anyway, I bet you won't be so picky when I buy you a big house in the country.'

Five minutes later, Betsy was making the final checks and adjustments to her appearance in front of the hall mirror. She treated the operation with military precision. I could hear her mumbling under her breath: 'hair - shining, teeth - dazzling, eyes - sparkling, figure - amazing'.

I stood behind her, checking out my own reflection next to hers. There's no point in missing an opportunity, I thought. 'I've created a monster,' I said.

'A monster called Claudia,' replied Betsy, practising a model's smile on me.

'You be careful, now.' I forgot the mirror briefly and went into concerned mother mode. 'You and Emma stay together all the time, and be sensible won't you? Some of these model agencies are just after your money, you know.'

'Oh, Mum,' she said with that scornful tone only a teenager manage, 'we're not silly little kids, you know.'

I watched Betsy rushing across the road on her way to the station where she was to meet Emma. I knew she was aware of the admiring glances she attracted.

'Betsy, Betsy,' I called, waving her forgotten purse in my hand. She turned, mouth open ready to shout her anger. I knew that the last thing she needed was to have her mother yelling "Betsy" at her in the street. But she needed her purse. The silly girl would forget her head if it weren't so pretty, I thought, and I should know. I had the same problem.

I stepped into the road. The sudden squeal of brakes was a sound I will remember for the rest of my life, and the feeling of hitting the front of the car and then the ground. There was a sort of dull thud and then the world stopped as I floated to the ground in slow motion. There was no pain, just the sound of someone screaming.

Betsy was suddenly beside me, kneeling in the glass shards I could see twinkling in the sunshine. Pretty. I knew then that I was still alive. Betsy clutched my hand, 'Claudia,' I whispered, hoping to dispel the look of horror on her face.

A man's voice droned on somewhere behind us, 'She just ran out in front of me. I couldn't stop in time. It wasn't my fault.'

'An ambulance is coming, Mum. Don't be afraid, you'll be all right.' Betsy was smiling although her face seemed to be wet. There was uproar all around, but it seemed as if she and I were together on an island of peace amidst it all.

Despite the panic I could see in her eyes, Betsy's hand was steady as she brushed the hair out of my face. 'I'm here,' she said, 'I'm here.'

Later, in the hospital, Betsy and Ben held my hands as the doctor explained to us how lucky I had been. They would keep me overnight as a precaution, he told us, but I had no serious injuries, only a black eye and split lip from my sudden arrival on the ground. ‘I must look awful,’ I said and Ben kissed the undamaged side of my face.

‘You never look awful to me,’ he said.

Betsy was more forthright. ‘What a disgusting thing to say, Mum,’ she said.

‘How dare you worry about your looks, when you could have been killed. I never heard anything so pathetic.’

I felt my eyes filling with tears; she was right of course. But it’s hard to change the habits of a lifetime. ‘Sorry,’ I whispered. ‘And I’m sorry you missed your trip to town, as well.’

Betsy stood up and stretched. ‘Don’t worry about that, Mum.’ She patted her father’s shoulder and they smiled at one another. ‘I’ve decided to skip the modelling career after all .Dad and I had a little chat with the nurses while you were being examined. He thinks I was so good at looking after you in the street, that I should enter one of the “caring” professions.’ There was a note of pride in her voice that made me want to cry even more.

The nurse came over to us, obviously to continue a previous conversation, ‘Well, sweetheart,’ she said to Betsy, ‘the Personnel Department will see you now, if you like. They’ll give you all the information you need, I’m sure. ‘She gazed into Betsy’s face. ‘But,’ she paused, ‘with your looks, darling, I’d have thought you’d want to be an actress or maybe a model.’

My beautiful Betsy shook her head, ‘Oh no,’ she said, ‘I’ve already tried that. It’s not for me. No, I’ve decided. I’m going to be a paramedic.’

‘Good for you,’ replied the nurse. ‘What did you say your name was again?’

Betsy stood tall, as if auditioning for a model scout, and grinned at me. ‘Betsy,’ she said, her eyes never leaving mine. ‘My name is Betsy. Betsy Button.’

The Dent Ego Trip

Terry Austin

Six of us were waiting in the gardens of Dent Youth Hostel as our guide for the day drew up in his battered Volvo Estate. We watched as the fifty - plus figure in a one - piece fleece lined suit stepped out, his face distinctly dropped momentarily as he saw us.

“My name is Jack,” he said, a smile gradually appearing, “I wasn’t expecting a group of your age, I usually take younger, fitter folk down with me. Have any of you been caving before?”

We all shook our heads. We were walkers and members of our local Youth Hostel Association group. The youngest of us, the only other male beside myself, was forty-five.

“Ah, well, I’ll go easy on you then and take you through some of the less complicated systems. A word of advice first. If we get separated, stay still, I can find you in twenty minutes from any part of the caves. You will be quite safe; it just takes a little getting used to, with no light apart from your helmet lamps. If you would like to follow me we have a fifteen minute drive to the entrances.”

We followed him in our own cars to Selside Farm and parked within reach of Alum Pot and the Ingleborough Caves. We were shown how to connect the leads from the lamp to the power pack secured on a webbing belt and tested each one for potential faults, each making sure our helmets were adjusted for a good fit before setting off.

Jack invited us to peek over the hole that is known as the Devil’s Kitchen by having an arm crooked round a stout tree and his other hand grasping the webbing of each of us as we took turns to lean over the edge to view the rock strewn bottom, eighty feet below. There was a rock bridge two thirds of the way down, reached by a single rope suspended from a beam at the surface, a few feet away from where we were standing.

“We won’t go that way today, we may have a chance of a closer look from below that bridge if conditions allow later.” We walked

half a mile until we came to what we thought was a larger than average badger hole in the ground, a little over two feet in width.

That was our way in, a rubble strewn passage where the only way to move was to stoop low and inch our way forward. It had already been decided that the men folk should be at the front, middle and tail of the party - I was at the tail, listening to the helmets bumping against the rock ceiling and watching the strange patterns that the light from the headlamps formed.

Later we came into a slightly raised area about head height: the only trouble was that there was a spine of rock running along the entire length and in the centre of the passage.

“This is where we sit down for a bit, this area leads to Double Shuffle Pool and to get there you do this.” Jack climbed onto the ridge and, using his hands to take the weight, edged sideways on his bottom along it. We all followed suit, suddenly realising that our weight was more than was desired for this sort of thing. We thankfully ended the hammering our buttocks were taking and came to the pool itself. Another shock to the system awaited us. The pool had steep sides and no visible way round it apart from two rocks jutting out from the side, barely a foot wide.

“Here is the other shuffle.” Jack laughed as we pressed our trunks against the rock, our legs dangling over the watery abyss and moving slowly sideways again. We each grasped his offered hand to get across the last gap and sat for a few minutes.

“How deep is that pool?” One of our ladies asked.

“Nobody has found out, yet.” We didn’t ask any more questions. “Now we are going to climb into another chamber and this time you will be getting a little wet.”

We climbed up through a waterfall and, once into the chamber were obliged to crawl on hands and knees along a part, which was all of three feet high, the same in width and with two inches of water running between us. It was surprisingly warm; we were told the whole cave network stayed at a steady temperature all year round.

Our next target was a place called The Slot, which, although having good headroom, had rock jutting out along its length at head height on

one side and waist height on the other and made us walk sideways in a rough S shape. We were starting to get used to walking in awkward positions but the caves were not finished with us yet.

We steadily worked our way along a broad passage with large rocks interspersed along its length.

“We are coming along the Lower Long Churn Cave,” Jack called out, “if it starts raining above it will flood in minutes. We would then have to take a passage called Upper Long Churn which is always dry, if needs be we can sit out quite comfortably until the water drains into the sump at Alum Pot. Now I want you to see our showpiece.” We entered a large chamber. “Turn your lamps to full power and look upwards.”

We did as we were bid and were met with a wonderful sight. Where the water action from the moors above had swirled and gouged at the limestone for millions of years it had created a domed ceiling.

“Welcome to St.Paul’s,” Jack smiled, “we will have a few moments here, then I will take you to where the fun really starts. Turn your lamps down again to conserve the batteries.”

We were soon on the move again towards a place Jack called the Cheese Press.

“I think it’s time we had a coffee break, find yourselves a comfortable rock, there are plenty about.”

After we had our coffee Jack told us of some of his experiences as a cave warden and many anecdotes of his former charges. Then he pointed to a passage to one side of us when he saw we were all prepared to move again.

“That’s the way I want you to go next, but before you do, just turn your lamps off.” We were in complete darkness. “All of those films you see of explorers and smugglers walking through caves without light is bunkum, this is how they really are. Now switch on again.”

We blinked in the light again and looked round. Jack was nowhere to be seen. “Look over here.” His voice called. At ground level, in a gap no more than nine inches from floor to ceiling, was Jack’s head and shoulders.

“This is the Cheese Press, possibly the smallest passage in the caving world. Carry on along the passage I have shown you and I will catch up with you without using my light down this way. You have a choice of levels, I suggest you split up with one group taking the upper chamber, we should all meet at the same point.”

We did just that with three of us walking comfortably upright on the lower chamber, while my fellow male companion took the other two ladies through the upper chamber, with appropriate remarks heard all the way above us, their lamps making small shafts of light stream through the holes where old water courses had worn the rock away. Quite an exhilarating feeling knowing that we were making our way through the caves alone for a while.

We found Jack in a large chamber ten minutes later, sitting on a rock and finishing his coffee with his lamp switched off.

“Now we will visit Dr. Bannister’s Hand basin. You may have noticed that we cavers are religious folk. Apart from St.Paul’s we also visit the Font and indulge in the Baptistry Crawl regularly, where I shall lead you shortly. If you didn’t get wet last time I can assure you that you will next.”

It was wet, very wet. We had to negotiate our way through another waterfall which led to two passages, the entrances of which were side by side at the edge of another pool with a permanent rope attached between them for us to swing out over the water, across the rock face and, with a bit of luck land in the desired hole.

After much gasping and utterances of relief each one of us made it without falling in, a thing I personally expected to happen, I never did have much sense of balance. Then we had the Baptistry Crawl to contend with, which I can only describe as very hard on the knees as eons of running water had scalloped out the cave floor in shell patterns, rough to the touch if felt against what used to be the flow of the current and smooth with.

All the way through the upper chamber system were holes where the water from the moor above had found a weak spot and worn through, we could see daylight peeking through in some, revealing the remains of sheep or other small animals that had fallen through and perished.

We reached our final water spectacular, Dr.Bannister's Basin was gushing away at all sides and from where we were standing at the edge of the chamber we felt the water which was coming from behind us at thigh height getting stronger and threatening to carry us over.

“It must be raining above,” Jack looked at his watch, “we had best go through Long Churn again, we can make our exit by the Borrins Moor Cave, we have one more water slide to go through, the wrong way of course.”

He turned and we retraced our steps, making slower progress through the increased flow and climbing the water slide was difficult but we reached dry ground soon after and found an exit even smaller than the entrance we had used, each of us wishing we were a little thinner.

It was teeming with rain when we reached the surface. All the while we were in the damp below, not one of us had felt the least bit cold, now that we were on the moor and walking across the Limestone Pavement towards the parked cars we were shivering and the wind was bitter.

“We have a saying here,” Jack said, trying to take our minds off our discomfort as we walked, “If you can see the top of Ingleborough Hill it is going to rain, if you can't it is raining.”

We watched in awe as white water sluiced down into the caves we had just vacated, the limestone channelling it into wild torrents and funnelling it at ever greater speed down every conceivable fissure.

The next few moments were spent loading the equipment we had used into the back of Jack's Volvo and checking each item. My oppo and I waited under the shelter of the tailgate door while the ladies used our two cars in which to change into some dry clothing. We decided to drive back to the hostel in our wet gear in order to avoid any further delay. We all said our goodbyes to Jack and thanked him for his company, time and expertise. Like most of his Cave Warden colleagues, he was an inspiration to us all and we thoroughly enjoyed our trip below, our stay was further enhanced by the typical friendliness and crack of North Yorkshire folk.