

# The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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Bernard Newman (1967-68)  
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## Diary

New Year Party  
28<sup>th</sup> January 2006

## 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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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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## **Editorial**

Adrian Danson

I hope you will forgive the length of this editorial, but there are many matters that need to be included.

May you all have a peaceful and enjoyable Christmas and an inspired New Year, leading to success in competitions and perhaps publication of a new block-buster. Lost for ideas? Try one about an alien from outer space who enters your home via the central heating flu, dressed in a red cloak, disguised by an excess of white hair and carrying a sack of who knows what.

Please ensure that your payments for renewal of membership are sent to our Treasurer as soon as possible. From our small financial resources, sending reminders is an expense we cannot afford.

Despite the efforts of members of your committee to reduce costs and increase membership, this has been largely unsuccessful. Consequently we again ask those members who can afford to offer a little more than the £15 membership renewal fee to please do so once more. We have not abandoned the matter of cost cutting and hope to report some success in the near future.

Perhaps few, if any, will be surprised to know that no one has offered to take over the role of editor, so I will soldier on with the continued wish that someone may yet do so.

I thank the many members who wrote, praising my work, asking me to continue and, without exception, finding no cause for P/W members to take offence at my Summer issue editorial. I am grateful for such expressions of support but will not publish them – modesty forbids. Two such letters mistakenly thought the complaint had come from those who had become associate members. This was not so, as they are not sent copies of Author, though they may have sight of such if full members who are fellow members of P/W pass copies to them.

Joyce Thornton did not fail to provide material for the last issue, i.e. P/W contributors had not failed to provide such as a consequence of the reported taking of offence, this was simply a matter of the material being lost in the post and consequently not being received by me. This issue will hopefully provide a return to normal service, though Joyce

still needs more material from our poetry members for inclusion in future issue of Author.

My litany of excuses for late publication continues with apologies again. I changed my computer about a month ago and have consequently lost many of your e-mails to me, to which I had intended to reply. If possible please send them again and I will try to ensure they are not lost before I have the chance to respond. My scanner has also become unusable, so processing your contributions to send to our publisher is currently awaiting the reinstallation of my old computer.

I have been suffering migraine of late, a debilitating condition that had left me alone for some 14 years, but recently returned with a vengeance. For half of a bowls match I was, to all intents and purposes, blind. At least my team had a better excuse than usual for losing. This problem has prevented me from doing any work on Author for some 2 weeks. Recently a blood circulation problem has produced “pins and needles” in my left hand and arm whenever I lean forward to type. It is easing off, though still troublesome.

Do you have tears in your eyes yet? Imagine what it is like for those foolish enough to ask after my health! We continue to show people around our house, though an offer to buy has yet to materialise. Then there are the annual accounts of my bowls association, involving a turnover of more than £50,000, which I have just completed and must now discuss with our auditor. Shall I go on? At least I trust you will understand why I hope we can find a new editor soon, much as I enjoy the role when I have time to spare. More than 2 years have passed since I last wrote anything more than my editorial and my philatelic interests have been completely abandoned.

### **P.S. to the article on lawn bowls**

Those familiar with the subject may have noted my error in quoting the registration of the oldest bowls club as 1298. New Green Southampton Bowling Club was in fact registered in 1199. The oldest indoor club is Crystal Palace, initiated by the famous cricketer Dr. W G Grace in 1905, was lost to the fire that destroyed Crystal Palace in 1936. The bowls club was re-established in 1937 at new premises about a mile away in 1937 and is currently celebrating its centenary.

As a qualified bowls umpire I have often been called upon to officiate there, including the English qualifying round of the World Professional

Indoor Championship. I was the only umpire present and was on duty for 13 hours on the first such occasion and was very tired at the end. The day having started for me with my car battery going flat, this was a day I shall not forget.

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London members will wish to know that Vee Bradley, a member of the society for many years, and one of those regularly attending our London meetings, has gone into a residential care home and is settling in well. She would be very pleased to hear from members. For those who wish to get in touch or visit her, she is in Torkington House, Creswick Road, Acton, London, W3 9EF telephone 0208 992 5187.

## **Letters**

11<sup>th</sup> September 2003

Dear Editor

I was delighted to receive my first copy of Author following my subscription a few weeks ago. Unfortunately I have only just had the chance to peruse it at length recently as I have just started my maternity leave.

I understand that the magazine is run purely by volunteers, which is very commendable. Particularly as your editorial of this edition shows, you are a very busy man.

It was mainly the letters from subscribers that made me want to write to you in defence of the Magazine, and the volunteers that run it.

Half of the letters that you published in this edition [Autumn 2003 – Ed] were from unsatisfied subscribers, and I was outraged at their tone. What struck me most of all was the fact that they simply complained, and offered no suggestions of their own as to how to improve the flaws they had named! It begs the question why do they subscribe at all? Surely the readership would be better off without these cynics?

I, personally, cannot say that their observations were unfounded, as it does seem that the magazine needs to consider a few factors in its layout. In my opinion the sections need to be made clearer, with bolder titles and maybe closing horizontal lines to finish each piece or feature.

I would also like to suggest a few more features on issues that affect writers. Maybe on the legal side of things, copyrights etc. Or maybe a jovial column by an unpublished writer trying to get into print. Something that other authors can empathise with. I might also suggest a regular book review thrown in for good measure. All the above I would be willing to help with, or compose on a regular basis.

What would other subscribers like to see?

I hope this letter lifts your spirits slightly dear Editor, and confirms that not all your readers are damning your magazine. I for one see its amazing potential and am more than willing to help raise both its contents and profile.

Yours sincerely.

Mrs E Moore

[I have published this letter, two years late, in order to offer a few comments on its content. Firstly I hope Mrs Moore is enjoying the pleasures of motherhood, perhaps raising tomorrow's J K Rowling and I must apologise that my problems have caused the letter to be buried for so long. Then I must point out to Mrs Moore, and others who may not understand the situation, that I process the work that is offered to me and pass it to Alan Gibb. He makes any necessary corrections, i.e. removes those that I have overlooked, or introduced myself, passes it to the printer and distributes it on return. Alan is paid for his work, but not significantly more than he has to pay the printer and cost of envelopes and stamps. His contribution and tolerance of my errors and delays has been critical in getting the magazine out more or less on time. The layout, other than that determined by convention such as contents page, is largely decided by Alan who tries to include as much of what I pass to him as possible. We do, of course, periodically publish advice on writing. I also make a point of including any work from

our members, not just the prize-winning entries. Sometimes this is jovial work, but that is a style that is difficult to maintain. This is intended to encourage all members to both submit their work for publication and increase their prospects of winning future competitions. After seeing one's work in print it is unusual not to recognise how it might be improved. Our folios, distributed amongst members, provides the same stimulus. Any contribution Mrs Moore wishes to make would be gratefully received, as is her support for my efforts. Ed]

## **Summary of AGM held at The Civil Service Club on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2005** Ethel Corduff.

**Membership Secretary's Report** Membership stands at 145, which is probably the lowest yet. We have free listing in Writer's News, Writer's Forum the WAYB and the Writer's handbook and I receive occasional enquiries through these sources. We shall rely on as much publicity for the Froud competition as we can organise and any help from members will be appreciated. Only 3 members since beginning of year. Folio is going very well, such a good read. Ethel will lead another one when necessary.

**Meeting Secretary's Report** Our annual Lunch was very successful with Ruth Winstone and surprise guest Tony Benn. We missed the late Charles Neilson Gattey and Marjorie Watts and our former Chairman Alan Watts, all three enhanced and helped to create our social gatherings. The New Year party was also went well. The Annual Lunch is booked for 22nd October, speaker to be arranged.

**Treasurer's Report** (see separate sheet) Sent out 55 reminders, 20 of those renewed. Expenses kept to a minimum. The auditor did it as a one off this year. We try not to increase subscriptions. We rely instead on donations. We received £241.50 this year in donations.

**Publicity Officer's Report** Ethel had looked at our website, approx 650 people had logged on. There were changes and improvements to the website carried out by Liz. Both she and Jenny have advertised in staff magazines.

**Editor's Report** Adrian proposed distributing Author as an email attachment for those who want it. This would save costs. He

acknowledged his gratitude to members who had provided enough stories and articles for magazine at present, but reported a continued shortage of poetry sent to Joyce Thornton.

**Competition Secretary's Report** Competition numbers and winners list supplied by Ron Jeffreys.

**Poetry Workshop Report** (P/W AGM Report sent to members) Terry Rickson said there are 89 members and 12 associate members.

**Writer of the Year** This is still under consideration.

**Fronde Competition** A fantasy short story had been decided. Terry Rickson asked how we see Fantasy? Joan is at present reading "Time Travellers Wife", she gave as an example. Posters were given to members present to display.

**Election of President and Vice Presidents** Terry Rickson said we had discussed the President and we thought Alan Watts should be offered it. Joan said he had been Editor and Chairman for many years. A vote was taken and it was agreed that Alan be invited to be President. Vice Presidents re-elected

**Election of Committee** Gordon Gompers voted that the committee be re-elected en bloc this was seconded by Brian Scott. Committee re-elected. Terry Rickson was elected Chairman.

**Any other business** Gordon Gompers told us about his recent book to be published by the Lambeth society, subject Morley College called "Morley Days", which he wants reviewed by Alan Watts if possible. Terry will ask Alan about reviewing the book.

## **Obituary**

Sadly we have to report the death of member Pat Brindle from Blackburn after a short illness. She was well known to those who attended the Poetry weekends of the Poetry Workshop as an energetic and enthusiastic member. For a number of years she planned the programme for the weekends. Her family and grandchildren meant a great deal to her. She will be greatly missed.

## **Annual Luncheon 2005**

Joan Lewis

On 29 October, Roy and I left Grantham very early, courtesy of an anxious taxi-driver. We arrived in the big city in time to take a quick look at Dutch paintings in the National Gallery and to watch young sea cadets limbering up for the Trafalgar high jinks before walking down Northumberland Avenue to the Civil Service Club.

Ethel Corduff was there, of course, calmly ensuring that all went well for the Annual Luncheon, which was to take place appropriately in the Trafalgar Room. There was time for a drink with old friends from near and far before greeting our speaker, John Jenkins.

The food was excellent, as usual, and the portions substantial. Time rolled by and so Terry Rickson, our new Chairman, started off the 'business' while coffee was being served. He gave the apologies for Alan Watts, our new President, who was unable to be with us. He reminded us that in 1935 the idea for the Society was forged but it was 1936 before the inaugural meeting took place. (See Beryl Jones' history). Next year will be the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary for our Society and we must give thought to ways of celebrating.

Ethel related how many 'John Jenkins' she had found on the web but put them aside to introduce the editor of Writers' Forum, a magazine of value to writers and known to many of us.

John proceeded to give us the most useful talk on writing we had ever been given at this event. He came prepared with handouts and copies of magazines for everyone and then went through his recommended reading list and his guide to tight writing – we may have been on courses and read guides but all of us felt we'd been given more useful information than ever before. Among all the detail three messages stand out – your beginnings are crucial, you must be able to cast your own characters in your mind, and above all, don't forget to 'back up' your work.

After questions we let John go, applauding with enthusiasm as Terry Austin gave the vote of thanks. We were concerned that John's car hadn't been towed away – he'd had to move it between main course and dessert!

It had been another successful Luncheon and we give thanks to Ethel Corduff for her devotion to organisation and detail.

## **Rosa Mundi**

Norman Bissett

(Winning entry, Lewis Wright Short Story Competition 2005)

“Goodbye, my dear,” said Rosie Anderson silently, without moving her lips. “Until we meet again.” Despite her resolve not to break down, tears welled up in her eyes, threatening to blind her.

A feeling of numbness, like paralysis. The chill of the afternoon. Her sense of isolation and exposure as, coat flapping in the breeze, she stood, alone, despite the crowd of silent, sympathetic mourners around her. The horror-cum-farce of the image that still, almost a week after the event, continued to flash intermittently through her mind, assaulting her innermost spirit, lacerating her soul. All these circumstances caused her to fumble for her hankie.

She touched the corner of her swollen eyes with the ball of tightly screwed-up lace.

As the pall-bearers lowered the coffin into the ground, she shivered involuntarily. Even now, in late March, it felt like mid-winter. A snell wind, swirling up Liberton Brae, blew across the churchyard, chilling the mourners to the bone.

Again, the nightmare image seared her brain. Of John, spilt and crumpled like a broken manikin, lying in a widening pool of blood. Of John, pitched, like a rag doll, over the low wall that fronted his pride and joy, the manicured lawn sloping gently down towards the main road from the front of their bungalow. Of John, pinned beneath the heavy tractor-mower, whose blades continued to flail and roar as it pressed down upon his chest and hipbone, and crushed his poor legs on to which, through a gap in the privet, it had toppled.

“Brake failure”, the Coroner had concluded.” Clearly, the machine skewed out of control.”

Behind his gravitas and solicitude, however, she had detected a distinct sniffiness, a hint of disapproval that a handicapped man should have presumed himself fit, able, strong enough to manipulate a power mower weighing nearly half a ton.

As, indeed, he had done for several years now, triumphantly, given his fear of all other forms of machine transport. This, within the confines of his garden, he had overcome through sheer willpower. Independence. Determination. Single-mindedness. These had been the qualities that had attracted Rosie to John in the first place, all those many years ago. John Anderson, my Jo. That had been her pet name for him, early on.

She stifled a groan. She felt as though her soul were bleeding, bereft. She was appalled that even in the midst of grief, a still, small voice, as of some invisible creature perched upon her shoulder, was whispering into her ear, insidiously:

“Free, Rosie. Perhaps now ...?”

Sniffing, she closed her ears, shutting out the seductive whisper. With her hankie, she dabbed each of her nostrils, red with cold and weeping. She looked down at the ground. The toes of her shoes, she observed bleakly, were speckled with mud.

The sky was overcast. Although it was just after three, it felt much later, as if the day were as good as over. Behind the kirk, where John had served as an elder for over twenty years, rooks cawed and squabbled in the elms. It appeared to be raining beyond Arthur’s Seat. The river was hidden, as by a veil.

She took a pace forward, to the edge of the grave, and dropped a single red rose on to the coffin. Caught by the wind, it almost missed its mark, teetering precariously on the edge of the wooden surface. It did not fall off, however.

She had snipped it from his favourite bush, before leaving home. *Rosa Mundi*. A keen gardener, he would have approved her choice: a perfect blossom, just opening from the bud, tightly-curved petals about to unfurl. While Sandy McAllister had been intoning his farewell prayer, she had noticed, with a sense of revulsion, the arum lilies in the granite urn in front of the adjacent headstone. They had already turned brown, festering in the cold.

For a few moments, she stood, as in a dream, her head bowed, alone with her thoughts. Outside the cemetery, an ambulance swept up the

hill, its siren blaring. A plane droned overhead, turning westward onto finals, beginning its slow descent above the murky islands in the Forth.

The budding rose looked like a crimson jewel or drop of blood against the polished mahogany. Its thorns reminded her of barbed wire, of the crucifixion. It horrified her to think that, very soon, the fragile perfection of its petals would be obliterated, crushed under the weight of earth, when the gravediggers...

Swaying slightly, she stepped back from the dreadful, narrow trench. The Reverend McAllister gripped her by the arm and steered her away, gently.

For a little longer, huddled groups stood around, talking quietly among themselves. John's partners from the practice and some members of the congregation muttered condolences. She was aware of hands reaching out to clasp hers, of lips brushing her cheek. Her sister, Marion, whom she hadn't seen for a year or two, embraced her briefly, murmuring inchoate words of comfort.

Gradually, people drifted away, towards the gates. She was conscious of an overwhelming desire for a strong cup of tea.

On the drive home, she sank back into the plush upholstery of the funeral car and closed her eyes wearily. She was glad that the ordeal was over. Again she was conscious of the small, insinuating voice:

*"Free, Rosie. Now you can travel, as you've always wanted..."*

She huddled into the corner, covering her eyes with her gloved hand, fighting back tears and this unworthy suggestion. Through his rear-view mirror, the dark-suited chauffeur recognised her grief. He looked away and stared fixedly through the windscreen, maintaining a compassionate silence.

The gathering afterwards was not in the least sombre. The Reverend McAllister, who had another duty to perform at the Infirmary, excused himself after a few brief pleasantries. Marion was even more garrulous and vapid than Rosie had remembered. The rest of the company were like ravening locusts. The food disappeared as quickly as it was brought out.

Tea. Sherry. Scotch for those who wanted it. Wee sausage rolls, hot from the oven. Variety quiches from M & S. Pizza slices. Cucumber, tomato and ham sandwiches, prepared earlier, and kept fresh in clingfoil, in the fridge.

Shortbread and chocolate digestives. Fruit cake. It was a relief to Rosie to be kept busy, circulating and making polite conversation, receiving condolences with her usual grace and composure.

Afterwards, alone in the silent house, she sat for a long time in front of the dying fire, gazing into the embers, averting her eyes from her husband's empty chair, remembering random incidents from their long life together and musing idly, almost dully, about the future. She felt pleasantly drowsy.

After the accident that, soon after their wedding twenty-five years ago, had left him partly disabled and psychologically scarred-permanently afraid of most forms of transport-John's condition had prevented them from doing many of the things that they had talked about during their long courtship, as students, and while they waited for him to qualify and to get established. That was a profound source of sadness to her. It especially grieved her that they had had no children.

She smiled, recalling their pre-graduation optimism, as they had planned to conquer the world together, through science and art-he as a doctor of medicine, she as a teacher of literature. All the same, it had been a good marriage-solid, quiet, without much drama, perhaps, but sounder than most, founded on mutual understanding and trust. He had been a kind husband. She had much to be grateful for.

It was only in the last few years that she had lost some of her natural sparkle, that the girlish glow in her eyes had been replaced, increasingly, by a look of fleeting wistfulness. Many a dawn had found her lying awake, at John's side, anxious not to disturb his sleep, and nursing within her the nagging thorn of regret.

At first she had put this malaise, this distemper, down to advancing years, the menopause. She had tried shrugging it off, to ignore it. Then she had struggled to ward it off by flinging herself into a plethora of activities, novel or mundane, she was like a woman driven.

She hoovered several times a week, shampooed the carpets back to their pristine glory, blitzed the upholstery, took to touching up the wrought-iron garden gate oftener than was strictly necessary. She had enrolled in a succession of evening classes, earning certificates in Flower Arranging, Intermediate Italian, Knowing Your AppleMac and Renaissance Art Appreciation. She had become a Friend of the Book Festival, joined a Poetry Writing group and had become a regular at the lecture series in the National Museum (of Scotland). Like John, she was active in the work of the Church increasingly so in the past three or four years. Everyone recognised how much the Minister relied upon her talent-genius, even-for flower arranging, every Sunday.

All to scant avail. She had looked across the room one evening at John, nodding over his unfinished Times crossword, and realised with a pang that life was passing her by. The thought had seized her in a grip of ice. Dust had filled her mouth.

And now?

Now, she determined, things would be different.

She decided that, after a decent interval, once she had attended to John's affairs, she would take a trip somewhere exotic, for a complete change of scene. The conviction that she was destined to do so had been growing upon her steadily, as had the acuteness of her need to get away, to effect escape. To make a clean break with the past.

Where should she go? The isles of Greece, with her Collected Works of Byron? The Holy Land, in the footsteps of Doughty, Lawrence and Lady Hester Stanhope? Tuscany, perhaps, land of Dante and Beatrice, of Petrarch,

Laura and the Primavera, ablaze with spring flowers and still, at this time of year, relatively free of tourists. Where? Where?

The world was now her oyster. But it was still too soon. Each of these places, to which, over decades, she had been an avid mental traveller, she would see soon enough, when the time was ripe. But not now, not yet.

Just for the present, so early in her widowhood, she knew that their sights, sounds, colours, flavours, aromas, histories, associations would be too overpowering, too rich for her to assimilate. She needed to go

somewhere small and quiet where she could try to become whole again, learn to reconstitute her life, start living out the remainder of her days.

She closed here eyes. Her imagination had been fed by years of reading and dreaming.

She envisioned a place of mountain peaks and sunlight, of blue skies and cool umbrage, fragrant with orange and lemon blossom, of goatbells and running water, the thrum of a guitar. A place as bright as a jewel, and perfect as a rose. That, she decided, would be her destination.

So it was that, before two months were out, she found herself for the first time in her life, excited as any schoolgirl, climbing the steep, elm-shaped avenue in Granada that leads up to the Alhambra. It was not yet nine o'clock in the morning.

In the hotel, she had sat with her book at a corner table overlooking the tiled courtyard, breakfasting lightly on cafe con leche, goat's milk cheese, tomatoes, crusty bread and olives, but feasting more deeply still on the tinkling fountain and profusion of scarlet potted geraniums that lined the staircase and festooned the dazzling white walls of the patio.

Fifty two years old, alone in that perfect setting, she had read again of the Conquest of Granada, of Boabdils lament as he relinquished his beloved city to its conquerors and of his mother's dry comment: "You do well, my son, to weep as a woman for the loss of what you could not defend as a man."

Afterwards, she climbed the hill, before it got too hot, her heart surging with excitement and expectation. Crossing the threshold of the first door of the first ochre-coloured wall, she walked straight into the Arabian Nights.

In a dream, she wandered though myriads of courtyards, halls, palaces. She scaled towers from which she could look down over the city in a sweeping panorama. She gazed at lacy walls and gold mosaics, domes and cupolas adorned with intricate, fantastic tracery. She strolled across ornate plazas, rested in the welcome shadows of a baroque, heavily gilded church, studied her own reflection in the Pool of Mysrtles, cooled her fingers in a fountain that was a miracle in stone. Everywhere, there was running water. The Muslim paradise. She was intoxicated by the beauty all around her.

Shortly before ten, she found herself in the Generalife, the summer residence of the Caliphs, a veritable garden of sensual delights, sultry with the scent of orange blossom. A screeching peacock displayed a magnificent, swaying fantail. It seemed as if a hundred luminous green eyes were gazing at her. She was at once dazzled and enchanted anew.

Here all was proportion, understatement, grace, every detail designed for cool, relaxed repose. The gardens were sublime-perfection of roses, jasmine, cypress, yew. In the great reception hall, open to the sky, she stood entranced by a constant shower of crystal drops from the fountains playing above a mirror of sparkling water.

She stooped, and plucked a crimson rose, careful to avoid the thorns. A flight of white marble stairs led up to a double Moorish window, decorated in scallop-shaped filigree, divided by a slender column and framing the landscape below.

From across the ravine could be heard the tinkle of goatbells. In the distance, brilliant against the blue sky, were the snow-covered peaks of the Sierra Nevada.

Rosie rested her head against the pillar, drinking in the scene. It was unutterably beautiful. She closed her eyes as a mood of profound happiness engulfed her.

“Muy buenas dias, Senora.” The familiar voice from the other side of the pillar spoke softly, intimately. Eyes still closed, she smiled, and held out her open arms, in welcome. The man moved into her embrace, and held her fiercely, straining to her, his heartbeat pounding against her cheek. They kissed, hungrily, like travellers lost in the desert and dying of thirst.

After a while, she looked up, radiant.

“Hello, Sandy.” She said softly. “So you made it, then?”

“As promised,” he murmured. “Did you ever doubt me?”

She shook her head, and pressed her cheek once more against his chest. Looking out over Lorna’s city, she smiled and pressed her lips passionately to the rose, inhaling its fragrance greedily.

They could relax now. Everything was going to be all right. They had got away with it.

## Letter From Alfred

(2<sup>nd</sup> place, Lewis Wright Competition 2005)

Bill Torrie Douglas

It was soon after her mother died that Carol found the letter. It was in a locked jewellery box which she'd had to burst open, as the key was missing. The envelope was barely hanging together but the 'Windsor' postmark of July 1944 and the blue twopence-halfpenny stamp had both survived.

"You have to read this Uncle Charlie, it's really sad." She stumbled over the words, "it's obviously a wartime romance that mum had." Carol blinked a couple of times, "it's signed by someone called Alfred. You don't know who that could have been, do you?"

She pulled a tissue from the pocket of her leather jacket.

Charlie smiled gently and shook his head. "No, it's a long time past love. Well before your mum and dad married. Mind you, there were men miles from home during the war, posted here, posted there. It may have been somebody she just met a couple of times."

"Maybe, but she kept his letter long enough, didn't she." Carol filled the kettle. She liked visiting her favourite uncle as he always seemed happy to see her.

Charlie nodded. "Let me have a read please love."

The letter was in a clear legible hand and began, 'My dear Sadie, it seems an age since I left you at the Glasgow platform and I wished you had been coming with me. I seem to be wandering around like a lost soul down here. Each day at one o'clock I turn to the north and raise my glass to your distant figure....'

"He was a real romantic sort right enough." Charlie chuckled. "Mind you, he wasn't doing much fighting if he could raise his glass at one o'clock each day."

Carol ignored his scathing comment. Her eyebrows raised, "it's not like mum you know, she was a very down-to-earth sort of person, wasn't she..." she waited while Charlie read the remainder of the letter, "...although she was very young at the time."

The letter was intensely romantic and Alfred had obviously been very keen on her mother. Carol was curious to know what sort of man he had

been. Although easy to read, the lines were a bit uneven as he had written it in a field because, he wrote, he had ‘...wanted to find a quiet lonely place..’.

“He’s a right little Romeo, isn’t he.” Uncle Charlie was clearly amused.

“You can laugh if you want but I think it’s lovely. Especially the bit where he’s looked into the sky and whispered her name and suddenly a star’s appeared. Nobody’s ever written me a letter like that.”

“..and you’re too old and too married to hope for one now, chuck.”

“Thanks very much Uncle Charlie, you’ve just made my day.” Carol made a face and gave him a playful punch.

She had never been close to her dad’s brother when she had been growing up, but the deaths of both her parents, one after the other, had turned Uncle Charlie into a surrogate father. She now regretted those younger years when she had barely known him.

“Do you think Auntie Agnes might know who Alfred was?” She referred to her mum’s sister.

“You could always ask her but I doubt it. Agnes was a good few years younger than your mum.” Charlie placed a plate of biscuits on the coffee table and they sat down to enjoy elevenses.

Carol struck a blank with Auntie Agnes and other priorities pushed the matter from her mind for a few days. It was about a week later, as she was dusting a framed wedding photograph of her parents, that she remembered the letter once more. She supposed that she would never find out who Alfred was; he might even have been killed in the war.

The next day she visited her uncle again. He was tidying up the kitchen so she removed her jacket and dried the dishes for him. She glanced at the upright old man with fondness, “Aunt Agnes didn’t know who he was either.”

“What?”

“The letter to mum. Aunt Agnes didn’t know who Alfred was. I think I’ll have to forget about my mum’s illicit love affair. What are you having for lunch today then...?”

“Why do you call it illicit?” The elderly man frowned. “It must have happened a good couple of years before she met your dad.”

“Yes I suppose so. Maybe a better word is secret.” Carol fingered her wedding ring and helped herself to another biscuit, avoiding the chocolate ones. Her mother used to have a similar fight against temptation. “Anyway, what have you been up to today?”

“Well, I was out for my morning constitutional, brought the paper home for a read and I’m about to start filling in a tax return that I’ve just received. Dashed nuisance!” He nodded towards a brown envelope that was propped up on the mantelpiece. You’d think that they would leave retired guys alone. They must think I’ve got money.”

Carol laughed, her skin creasing at the sides of her eyes. She gave a second glance to the envelope. “Maybe I can help you with it.” She reached over, lifted the envelope and removed the buff-coloured form. She looked at him, her brown eyes focussing on the name.

“Mr C.A. Simpson.” An unbidden thought formed. “C.A.! What’s your middle name Uncle Charlie?”

The old man drew a deep breath. “Alfred. Yes, I’ll admit it I’m Alfred.” Charlie began to blush, but Carol did not notice. She stared at him, uncertain what to think.

“You’ll have to let me explain.”

“Yes, I never thought...” She had difficulty articulating her feelings.

“Your mum and I did have a romantic liaison during the war; you didn’t call them affairs then. It was an innocent thing but I was very much in love with her. And I think she loved me. But life was difficult in wartime. I was in the Navy. We did talk about marriage, but your mum was only seventeen. My ship went down and they all thought I was dead. They even got a letter from the Admiralty. I got stuck up near the Arctic Circle for the rest of the war.”

Carol tried to transport herself back to a time when her mother was a teenager and in love, during a war that filled every day with uncertainty..

“I thought of your mum a lot but I had no way of getting word back. After a time, and quite understandably, your father and Sadie got together and eventually decided to get married. It was quite a shock for

all concerned when I turned up after the war.” Charlie paused, “I do not want you to think that there was anything sordid or underhand in any of this.”

“No...I didn’t think that for a minute...” Carol was trying to absorb this new piece of family history.

“I had too much love for both your mother and your father to want to make things embarrassing. She was as happy as she could be as far as I knew; so was he. And I pretended to be. I had every intention of getting married to some other attractive young woman but she just never turned up.” The old man gathered himself together and continued.

“Mind you, I’ve had great joy in watching you grow up in a loving family; so don’t feel sorry for me.”

Carol’s thoughts were a mixture of curiosity and surprise tempered with sadness.

“Did dad know about you and mum?”

“Yes he did. But I kept well out of their way, especially in the early days. I hardly saw them. So it was a lot easier than you might imagine. Indeed we never spoke about it.”

“Did you ever speak to mum about it?”

“It may seem strange to you, but I did not. I rarely saw your mum on her own and I would never have gone behind your dad’s back to have any secret rendezvous with her. Now and again I would catch her eye and she would give me a smile. You smile just like her you know. I contented myself with loving her from afar.”

Carol wiped her eyes with a tissue. She struggled to find something to express what she felt for her uncle. “Oh Uncle Charlie you are a very special person to me. I didn’t have a clue about all this.”

“I didn’t know that your mum had kept that letter all these years.”

Carol leant across and kissed him on the cheek. She felt even closer to him now that she knew of his concealed love for her mother. She brought the letter from her handbag and read it through again. The last sentence read, ‘...au revoir and dream of me...’

“I’m still going to call you Uncle Charlie but, every so often, I’m going to think of you as Alfred.”

## **The White Knight**

Maureen Mills

(A 3<sup>rd</sup> prize winner, Lewis Wright Competition 2005)

I remember feeling uneasy on the way home that Friday, indeed I often go through the whole experience again and again.

As I looked around, I couldn't see any other passengers on the train. The grinding rhythm of the engine tried its best but every few minutes stopped, as if to gather breath.

At times the lights flickered and the carriage momentarily blacked out, yet outside the dazzling white snow startled the naked eye. Usually I enjoyed observing the dramatic white landscapes of the Yorkshire moors but I felt weak then and very much on my own.

At last the train stopped at a station. I'd hoped other passengers might be waiting on the platform but there was no-one about. The snow falling in great chunks made it difficult to see where we were.

To hear the sound of a human voice would have been a great comfort, although people had been advised not to travel and had obviously obeyed, as I should have done. But what could I do? My husband was in hospital and he needed me there.

Somehow the train struggled on. I was still miles away from home and I was scared. I hated snow. What if the train broke down? In my youth it would have been an adventure but at that time I longed for the peaceful reassurance of aspects familiar to me.

I must have closed my eyes for a while. Suddenly I awoke with a start. Someone had brushed past, lightly touching my shoulder. Was it really someone, or merely my imagination? Still no sign of anyone. A shiver ran through me, although I wasn't cold.

Soon I breathed a sigh of relief, as I recognised the station where I had to get off. I was nearly home.

I sank into virgin snow, which came above my knees, it was then I realised the worst part of my journey was to come. As the lights from the train gradually shuffled away fading like stars, I knew there was nearly a mile to walk. I stood still, trying not to panic, as the snow blinded my vision. This was all so different to where we had lived

before. Winters in the South had been so much milder. How I missed my husband's reassuring presence.

I was startled to hear a muffled voice from behind.

“Don't worry. I'll make a trail, then you can follow in my footsteps.”

I turned to see a tall hooded figure, a scarf covered his mouth. The snow had transformed his outer garments into a white cloak. Although taken aback, I felt enormously relieved someone else was about.

“That is kind of you. But you might not be going my way.”

“Yes, my mother lives in the same lane as you. Follow me.”

I wanted to ask if he had travelled on that train and how he knew where I lived – yet the driving snow and the distance between us made conversation impossible.

Every so often, my companion turned to make sure I was on my feet. Not knowing what was underfoot, I had a dread of falling, yet I didn't want to lose sight of the shape in front.

We had at last reached our road and although it wasn't very long, with each step my snug little home seemed to be tantalizingly the same distance away. I felt I was in a bad dream, where everything is just out of reach. Eventually though, I made headway.

My friend, (for I felt he was a friend) stopped and waited for me to catch up. I felt exhausted, my legs ached so much I wanted to collapse on the soft snowy carpet. I was unable to speak.

“I'll get something to clear a path to your front door,” he called out.

Disappearing from sight, within an instant he was back with a piece of wood and set to work. I stood by watching helplessly.

“Not a day for visiting. My mother will be surprised I've made it,” he said cheerfully.

“Please let me make you a hot drink. I'm so grateful for your help,” I gasped.

“No thanks, I'll be on my way. You'll be fine now.”

He walked towards me and smiled and as I looked into his eyes, I felt I was looking into a mirror of my past. I didn't know it then but that moment was to haunt me for the rest of my life. For I knew his identity.

It took several days for the snow to clear. I had learnt my lesson and waited for radio announcements concerning public transport, before attempting to visit my husband in hospital again.

I was still captivated by the young man who had helped me and I was determined to find out where his mother lived. If only I'd asked him at the time, as I desperately wanted to see him again.

I knew most of the neighbours and even their families, nevertheless I knocked on each door. As I half expected, nobody could give me the information I wanted. I tried every house, except an old cottage at the top of the road which had been unoccupied and neglected for years. There was no point in going there. Feeling downhearted, I felt I had exhausted all the possibilities.

Early the next morning I received a phone call from the Sister looking after my husband.

“There's nothing to worry about physically but he seems very disturbed. It's probably because you haven't been able to visit for a few days.”

“The trains are back to normal now, so I'm coming in to-day,” I assured her.

When I arrived, my husband looked very worried and held my hand tightly.

“I thought you had gone away.” I could see the tears welling up in his eyes.

“Why should I do that?” I enquired, genuinely surprised.

“It was a nightmare, I suppose, but so real. You met someone, you see .....and you went off with him. You said you loved him. Then there was this terrible accident, just like, just like “ his voice trailed off.

“Now don't go on upsetting yourself.” I spoke quickly, I could see he was distressed.

“As if I would go off with anyone at my age. I'm here and always will be.”

For a few seconds I thought of the stranger, my white knight and I felt guilty - because I sensed there had been some sort of electrical charge that passed between us that day. But it no longer felt real, more like a

fantasy. Here was the real world. As I left the hospital, my husband was sleeping soundly.

At the station I handed my ticket to the collector.

“Six thirty's running on time,” he said confidently.

“I'm pleased to hear it. What a change from last Friday.” I responded wearily.

“All trains were stopped at mid-day then,” he said.

I frowned, he must have got the days mixed up but it wasn't worth an argument.

As I walked home, I was surprised to see a light in the dilapidated cottage. I peered through the window and I could see the figure of a very old lady sleeping in a chair. This was very strange, the neighbours hadn't mentioned anything about anyone being there, yet the furniture looked as if it had been in place for years.

When I saw her, I had a strange feeling this would be my chance of finding out about the mysterious young man that befriended me. I knocked on the door, it was a while before it slowly opened and I felt bad about waking her but I had to know.

“So sorry to disturb you but perhaps you can help me. Do you have a son who visited you last Friday? You see, I wanted to thank him for getting me home safely.”

The old lady looked shocked, then became upset.

“You'd better come in” she said. I quickly explained what happened, as my presence was obviously distressing her and I wanted to comfort her. She wept quietly, as I put my arms around her. I was now convinced she was the person I was looking for.

“Last Friday you say,” she said, finally.

“Yes”, I replied, “when the weather was so dreadful.”

Seated in her rocking chair, staring at the floor, she started to speak, at first very hesitantly then the words came rushing out. “Last Friday was nothing compared to 1947. That was the worst year ever, in more ways than one. My boy went off that winter with a young married woman. Never told no-one. They were lovers you see. She was only a young girl. He shouldn't have done it, I know - but he was my only son and he meant everything to me. I couldn't condemn him, or her, come to that.”

There was a pause as she took several deep breaths, then she continued, “he wasn't dressed right for the weather. He never bothered about things like that,” she smiled wistfully. “Their car broke down. He went to get help and fell in a snow drift. By the time they found him, it was too late. The girl survived, she stayed in the car. Last Friday was the fiftieth anniversary of that awful day.”

Lost in our thoughts, neither of us spoke for some time.

“I saw him out there you know, just the other day. That Friday it was, I swear I did but he'd gone by the time I got to the door”, she said sadly.

“Do you know what became of the girl?” I asked eventually.

“Folks said she went back to her husband and they moved down South.”

I nodded and said with head bowed, “Yes, that's right and now I've returned, with my husband. And I too saw your son last Friday. I'm certain of that.”

To this day, that cottage remains empty and I know I will never meet the old lady or her son again, indeed until now I have never disclosed what took place.

As often as I'm able though, I go along to tidy the garden and restore what I can, just in case the rightful owners come back.

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## **Poetry Pages**

Edited by Joyce Thornton

### **To The Editor**

Joyce Thornton

This poem came  
in between breakfast and lunch.  
I'd had a suspicion  
something was going to happen  
when words began arriving  
in most unlikely places.

I suppose I got what I deserved,  
as I had been reading  
poetry competition rules  
and studying form.

I would have preferred  
a sonnet or a villanelle  
or even a rhyme royal,  
but I had no choice  
and a little free verse  
was hard to resist.

Now will you please eat this poem,  
I hope it is to your taste.

### **Man is the Sea**

John Bird

No man is an island,  
he is the sea around it,  
creator and destroyer,  
capricious benefactor,  
a prisoner of the seasons,  
his moods light and dark,  
seething anger, blessed calm,  
brooding and mysterious,  
bright and sparkling,  
spirit ebbing and flowing  
like the tides, disappearing  
in the swells and eddies,  
then emerging once more,  
still concealing secrets  
only nature can know.

### **The Professor**

John Bird

Once he was an academic man;  
now he studies green flock wall paper.  
During daylight hours he sits transfixed  
in his damp-resistant plastic chair.  
Perhaps it is the fleur de lys, embossed.  
French history was his speciality.

Once he wore a gown and mortarboard;  
now he'd go naked if they let him.  
It's not 'Professor' any more  
but 'pet' and 'dear' and first-name terms  
from kids who come on work experience  
and supervise him in the lavatory.

Once he dreamed his name would be revered;  
now he can't remember what it is.  
Most often he is Bonaparte or Mettemich,  
ignoble footnotes to a history man.  
But nice Mrs. Blenkinsop seems to understand;  
for quite a while she's been the Virgin Mary.  
Once he published learned papers;  
now he puzzles over signs on toilet doors.  
Yet in the green room afternoons,  
he silently gathers in the tricks,  
and his regular partners rejoice.  
Somewhere a candle flickers still.

**They Also Serve**  
Albert Thornton

Who only stand  
and wait for buses  
running to a schedule  
from a large print timetable  
cannot see the number  
or the destination  
who cannot cross the road  
to see whether they should go  
in order to come back  
from where they're going-  
so, they shall be waiters,  
wine of course,  
sipping the fag ends of bottles  
from Rhone Villages.

not the cheap Supermarket ones  
but the upper crusts.  
Toasted with Brie  
or a common Wensleydale.  
And they will scatter bits of potato crisps  
on the seats of the 268 or 622

If unfortunate they'll wait in the queue  
of the Chinese takeaway.

### **A Place Called Beautiful Peace**

(Bellapais, Cyprus, (1974)

John Bird

In the mirage of a summer's afternoon  
high above the land crusaders knew,  
I found a place called Beautiful Peace  
slumbering among the orange groves.  
Sheltered by the thatch of tavern vines,  
I sat and watched the creep of shadow  
across the square where poets dreamed.  
Asleep beneath the Tree of Idleness  
a mule lay weary from its early shift.  
Dark-clad women drifted silently by,  
and in the narrow, dusty streets above  
I heard the laughter of children.  
Nodding old men played back gammon,  
creaking in their faithful chairs;  
shrewd eyes watched each roll of dice,  
but were blind to the moving figures  
in the stony meadows to the north.  
A bearded man of God knelt, tending  
the flowers in the abbey garden  
as peasant warriors came silently  
with shouldered guns and simple hearts  
to proclaim their new republic  
in the place called Beautiful Peace.

## **Poetry Workshop**

### **Mike Boland**

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

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### **Bill Barnes Competition 2005**

At the time of writing, the results of this year's Competition aren't known, but we hope they will appear in the winter issue of **wavelengths**, which will be published on 1 December. The competition attracted 35 poems submitted by 11 members. All entries will be printed in the spring issue of **Wavelengths**.

### **Wavelengths Issue no. 5**

As well as containing the results of the Bill Barnes Competition, the winter issue of **Wavelengths** will contain, among other things, the text of the talk given at the PW Weekend by Muriel Stammers on American Poets, an article by Angus Livingstone on 'Humorous Verse', a poem by John Bird, the results of the cinquain competition, and the PW Newsletter. **Wavelengths** is distributed free to all members of the Poetry Workshop.

### **PW Weekend 2006**

Our usual venue at University of Birmingham is fully booked, and they have no space for us. Therefore we are having to seek alternative accommodation for our annual Weekend. The search is on-going at the time of submitting this page to the editor, but we will hopefully have news for PW members in Issue 5 of **Wavelengths** in December. Our target date is 28-30 July 2006, but this will be confirmed later.

### **Waves 2005**

The closing date for submissions to **Waves**, our annual collection of members' work, is 31 March 2006. Full details will appear in issue 5 of **Wavelengths**.

## Subscriptions

Subscriptions for the Poetry Workshop will fall due in January. A renewal form will be enclosed with issue 5 of **Wavelengths**.

The membership fee remains unchanged for yet another year, being **£3** 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 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 above address. He will be pleased to provide further details.

## Dates to Remember

1 January 2006	Poetry Workshop subscriptions due
1 February 2006	<b>Wavelengths</b> Competition Special
31 March 2006	Closing Date for Submissions to <b>Waves</b>
1 May 2006	<b>Wavelengths</b> Spring Issue
28 - 30 July 2006 (tbc)	Poetry Workshop Weekend

## **A History of the Society of Civil Service Authors: continued**

Beryl Jones

### Meeting Places

**D**uring the course of the Society's history, meeting places have been as numerous and as diverse as the members themselves.

The inaugural meeting of the Society took place at H.M. Office of Works, Storey's Gate, in Conference Room 'A' on the 18th February 1936, whilst the second meeting took place a few weeks later, early in March. This second meeting was held at the Two Chairmen, a pub in whose congenial atmosphere, the founder (A.A.Pavey) had first discussed the idea of a Society for Civil Service Authors with his colleagues, I.O.Evans and Bernard Newman, in the latter part of 1935.

However, by 1939 the Committee was meeting at the Cambridge Club, whilst general meetings were being held at the Camera Club which proved a popular meeting place until it was demolished by a German bomb during the height of the Blitz in 1940. The Camera Club had apparently been a cosy meeting place, 'Hung round with productions of photographic art at its best.' (Tommy Martin) Publishers, authors and literary agents gave talks which were usually followed by lively discussions.

During the remainder of the war years meetings were held on a regular basis in a variety of locations. e.g. The Strand Corner House, the National Gallery, M.O.W. & Plumbing (free of course), Lambeth Bridge House and the Library at the Air Ministry, Kingsway. The Society was kept alive by the energy and enthusiasm of the Chairman, Jackson Budd, the Secretary, Miss Maude White and the Treasurer, H.E.Bull. The Chairman commented at this time. 'That although the Society was in cold storage, work was going quietly and new members joining.'

In 1947 the Society began to hold its monthly meetings at the North Court Restaurant which was in the basement room of the North Court block of flats, situated at the Millbank end of Great Peter Street. This restaurant closed to the public at 6.30pm when the meetings began, sometimes with an overlap, thus there was nothing to prevent outsiders from staying on. One member recollected a young man who took a lively interest in the proceedings and, after the speaker had finished, asked a number of questions. The Chairman asked if he was a new member as he did not remember him, at which the young man replied. 'Oh I'm not a member I came in at 4.30 for a cup of tea and a current bun.'

This problem of overlapping with the general public eventually proved unsatisfactory and in 1955 the Society moved to the Bedford Head in Maiden Lane, near Covent Garden. The original 17th century Bedford Head had strong literary associations, being mentioned by both, Alexander Pope and Horace

Walpole. It had also been the meeting place of the famous 'Shilling Rubber Bridge Club' which used to meet there in the 18th century and counted amongst its members such names as Hogarth, Fielding and Churchill.

The Society met in an upper room, the Management of the establishment providing the coffee whilst the Social Secretary provided the sandwiches (@ 1/- per head) and it cost one guinea for the use of the room. This arrangement worked very well until there was a change of management, when members would often find themselves shunted into a smaller room without notice, if the Landlord had a better 'let' for their room.

Complaints did not work and the general feeling was that the Landlord was of the opinion that the members were not spending enough at the bar.

The Society met at the Bedford Head for three years but in May 1958, through the good offices of Vincent Brennan, it was allowed to use the Conference Room and Lounge of the Civil Service Motoring Association at Lotus Chambers, Norris Street, Haymarket. The room, which was approached via a lift, was much more elegantly furnished than the Bedford Head (having carpets etc.) but smaller - in fact it was rather cramped. In the circumstances, due to lack of space, it was decided to dispense with refreshments. Meetings were held at Lotus Chambers from May 1958 to November 1959 when, due to re-organisations within the Motoring Association, the Society once more had to seek further premises.

In December 1960, through the efforts of Bertram Nayland (who was able to chat in Welsh to the Manager) the Society was made welcome at the Welsh Club situated over Studio One, near

Oxford Circus Tube Station. This was a happy time for members but evidently a place to be avoided on Rugby International days when the club would be invaded by crowds of very large young Welshmen, who would then proceed (not maliciously) to eject all foreigners - especially Englishmen. 'But despite the exuberant Welshmen (or perhaps because of them) the Club Y Cymry closed in August 1963.' Thus the Society was on the move once more.

The Chairman, Charles Neilson Gattey, found temporary accommodation at the Interval Club (temporary as it was due to be demolished). Meetings were held there from September 1963 until May 1964 shortly before the building was pulled down.

The Interval Club was a Catholic Club for theatrical people run by Miss Molly Baivairdre Hewett M.B.E. and the Society met in the auditorium theatre on the first floor, and adjourned to the cafe on the floor above for refreshments. Due to the building being under threat of demolition, the rooms and stairways were in a poor state of decoration. 'But the place had an interesting theatrical atmosphere'

and as the auditorium held a stage, the Society was able, during their short tenure, to enjoy several readings of plays written by members.

October 1964 saw the Society once again in new quarters, the Spanish Club at Cavendish Square W.1. Unfortunately this tenancy only lasted one year because the Manager kept increasing the price of his coffee and biscuits and, when he had apparently reached his limit in the price increase, calmly demanded another £2-00 for the use of the restaurant. The Manager a dark morose Spaniard seemed to have a hatred of all "Inglese". It was therefore with little regret that October 1955 found the Society in the Lamont Room at the National Book League in Albermarle Street W.1.

In theory this was the most appropriate meeting place, but in practice it had the disadvantage of the bar closing early, whereas the Society had the use of the room until 10pm. The caretaker would make a point of sweeping the floor and stacking the chairs whilst the Society was still in session. 'Like the Landlord at the Bedford Head he managed to convey the strong impression that we were unwelcome.' Coffee and biscuits were provided from a trolley (@ 1/3d per head) and the Society paid three guineas for Corporate Membership, plus four guineas per night.

The Society, however, stayed at the National Book League from October 1965 until May 1967, when it moved to the Authors' Club at Whitehall Place S.W.1., where they had a splendid room with a panoramic view of the Thames. In the opinion of some members this was 'our best meeting place yet'. Unfortunately their enjoyment did not last long (summer 1967 to summer 1968) for in the summer of 1968 the building was sold, and both the Society and the Authors' Club were ejected.

The next stop was at the nearby National Liberal Club, an imposing building on the corner of Whitehall Place and Northumberland Avenue. Many of the rooms in this building were vast, some with magnificent views of the river, and the National Liberal Club could also boast that it held 'one of the finest staircases in London'.

The Society went to the National Liberal Club as tenants of that Club and continued to meet there until early in 1974 when it moved to the Department of Employment's Social Club. This club was situated in Charles the Second Street, and the move was made because it was felt that the new meeting place would enable the Society to widen its activities and provide more of a club atmosphere than the more august but rather daunting Liberal Club.

Unfortunately the Social Club, situated on the fourth floor, was the only tenant in the huge empty building, so at that time it was not known what was going to happen to the building, the Social Club and, by association, the Society.

## Infidelity at the Pig and Whistle

Paul Williams

**I**t's hard to bring up a daughter these days, especially when one has traditional principles and the daughter in question is far too headstrong for her own good. Angela had been a problem since she was a teenager. She was our only child and, I have to admit, we spoilt her a little. I won't go into detail about some of the people she mixed with, suffice it to say that her choice of boyfriends was not exactly in line with our own views about the ideal partner. Her time at university was particularly worrying for us, given that we hadn't that foggiest idea what she was up to in Manchester, though the youth with the pierced nose and eyebrows she once brought home served as an unwelcome clue.

'God, it's not as if you're old parents,' Angela fumed when we made our feelings plain. 'You're only in your mid forties but you sound as though you're ninety! Stanley Johnson, the vicar's right hand man and his devoted little housewife!'

When Aloysius came to work for me in my stationery shop my faith in the youth of today was instantly restored. Celia and I saw at once that he would be an excellent choice for Angela, who had now graduated and was teaching in a local school. But would Angela see him in the same light? He was good looking for sure, but we knew that she would probably be scornful of his respectable clothes and short back and sides haircut, not to mention his posh accent. So it proved when we invited him to our family Christmas party. She pointedly ignored Aloysius for most of the evening, despite our telling her to be nice to him as he was a bit on the shy side. 'Sounds like a right wimp,' she had retorted, 'if you're trying to match-make forget it. I want something a bit more exciting than that. And he must always be broke if he works for you.'

'He inherited some money and a house,' Celia explained and Angela obviously found this interesting. She had intended to move out but the price of property had meant her having to postpone her plan.

'Actually,' she told us when the party was over, 'Aloysius does have his cute side. I've been invited to a school uniform party on New Year's Eve. I think I'll ask him along. He'd look quite sweet in grey flannel shorts.'

Celia and I were overjoyed at this evidence of traditional values. Our joy was greater still when they tied the knot at St Botolph's a few months later. Nevertheless, Celia cried at the wedding. 'Oh, what have we done?' she said. 'That poor boy!'

Despite our misgivings Angela seemed to fall genuinely in love with Aloysius, albeit a good few months after the wedding. 'He's kind,' she confided to us after her miscarriage. 'I hadn't realised how important that was.'

Yet just as Angela was coming to see his virtues I had occasion to have my doubts. 'Who was that slapper I saw you with in The Pig and Whistle?' a customer, a spotty youth, asked him one day in the shop.

I had nothing against pubs *per se*, though Celia and I rarely frequented them, but the Pig and Whistle is notorious for the class of customer it attracts. Aloysius tried to laugh it off as a case of mistaken identity but I could see he was agitated.

Something else was also worrying me. Just before that episode Aloysius had dispensed with his conventional haircut and had his head cropped. Worse, he had grown a very slight beard, or not so much a beard as a kind of blond stubble on his chin. A lot of the local yobs seemed to be adopting the same style. He also started going to the gym. I noticed that several female customers began to look at him in admiration and even Celia said she quite liked his new image. I was not so sure. What was it for, exactly?

My worst fears were realised one Friday afternoon. I was in the stock room, though as the door was open I could hear his mobile phone ringing and the conversation that ensued. 'Yeah, Kevin 'ere. Hi, Stella!' he said, with obvious delight and in an oddly common accent. 'The Pig and Whistle at six. Great.' Then he made a call of his own, his public school accent restored. 'Angela? Aloysius here. Sorry, I'll be home late. Your father wants me to stay on for stocktaking. See you later.'

I suppressed my fury with superhuman effort. Of late it had been my habit to leave Aloysius to lock up, misguided, trusting soul that I was. I knew that I could not alter the routine that evening. I left at a quarter to six and sat in the café opposite from where I could observe his movements. At least he closed the shop on the dot though his dress astonished me. I had wondered what was in the bag he sometimes brought in with him and now I knew. He had dispensed with his suit and tie in favour of a pair of jeans and a tee-shirt with 'Up for it' printed on

the front. I was particularly bemused by the arrogant, macho walk he adopted as he made his way down the street. His new image, no doubt, what I believe they call 'attitude'. I gave him another ten minutes to make his way to The Pig and Whistle before following.

The place was every bit as ghastly as I had been led to believe. I had to pass a group of youths discussing the previous evening's football match in the foulest of terms as I made for the alcove in which I could see Aloysius (alias Kevin) and his concubine. They were locked in a passionate embrace so I could not see the wretched woman's face straight away, though her vulgar pink blouse said it all. I tapped Aloysius violently on the shoulder.

'What the hell...?' he said, turning round.

His surprise was understandable but it was nothing compared to mine. For as soon as they disengaged I saw the face of the woman he was with. Despite the overdone tarty make-up it was unmistakably ... Angela.

'Dad, what are you doing here?' she asked.

'I know what this is about,' Aloysius laughed. 'You heard me on the phone, didn't you?'

'I heard you having two conversations,' I pointed out severely, 'one with Angela and one with a Stella.'

'That's me,' laughed Angela, 'at least, I'm Stella when I'm out with Kevin here.'

'But why did he ring you again as soon as he'd had that call from you?' I asked, still mystified.

'Gets him in the mood, doesn't it?' she explained. 'Clandestine affairs are so much more fun. I must be one of the few women who can have her cake and eat it. I've got a respectable and reliable husband at home and a sexy hunk here, a married man too,' she added, relishing the naughtiness of it.

They insisted I stay for a drink and under the circumstances I felt I had to agree. I also had to stay to get a round in myself, of course. I must say, I began to see the funny side. Celia did too when I told her about it.

They still go regularly to the Pig and Whistle, as Kevin and Stella of course. Celia and I join them sometimes, though to the regulars we're Babs and Elvis.

## Home from Home

Ethel Corduff

(A 3<sup>rd</sup> prize winner, Lewis Wright Competition 2005)

**A**nna was in the kitchen, trying unsuccessfully to clean the saucepan she had burnt the previous week, when Rob called out to her from the living room. “It would be nice to be able to sit down without having to remove about a dozen items from my chair first.”

Anna smiled to herself, she took no notice of hints like that. She knew Rob was more interested in having a great meal than in minor layers of dust on the crowded mantelpiece. Of course she was terribly disorganised, but she could not seem to do anything about it. However, she did not try too hard to change.

“I second that.” Christine her daughter cried, surveying the very untidy room with an air of disgust. She was always trying to persuade Anna to be house proud, but of late she had got more critical of Anna's house cleaning efforts. Somehow Anna did not seem to see the chaos that Christine kept pointing out to her. She just laughed it off saying.

“You're too fussy for your own good, Christine.” Christine could never understand what she meant by that.

What with her part time job and her involvement with local charities, Anna had little time for housework, which she loathed anyway. She had not even got around to doing last years spring-cleaning, she thought wryly. Another spring would arrive before she started it. She was surprised when Christine offered to help her wash up after supper. She soon found out why.

“Mum, I want to invite Len around Friday evening after the pop concert in the town hall. Our local band The Pop Bops are being supported by a weird group all the way from Liverpool called The Beatles. What a name for a group! I expect they will be as dreary as their name, they even dress in black suits. Can you imagine it, as if they were playing music in undertakers. Anyhow I want to invite Len around here for coffee after, even though we may need something stronger after suffering the Beatles mournful bleating. Please for once, could you make the place look decent for a change. I do want him to have a good impression of us.”

It was the first time Christie had suggested bringing a boy home. Anna felt pleased but not a little scared at the prospect. Now unfortunately she would have to knuckle down to some real elbow greasing.

“Yes darling, I'll have everything clean and tidy Friday evening. I'll be looking forward to meeting Len.” She must have things right for Christine's sake, she sounded serious about this Len. Her own outside interests would have to slide a little this week.

“Thanks, Mum.” Christine said with a grimace. Oh, dear, Anna thought, this week was a particularly busy one, she had promised to help organise that fete for a new unit at the hospital, collecting and sorting things out during the week. She had been planning to store them in the dining room.

She would really have to get herself more in order. Mind you, she said this very time a crisis approached, which was about every week, but it was not so easy to put into practice. For Christine's sake she would really have to try this time. Perhaps her young man was the fussy sort who would be put off by all the clutter. All Anna's friends were used to it, she had given up making excuses for it year ago.

“If only I could get more hours out of the day.” Anna said to her friend and neighbour Julie, after telling her what Christine wanted her to do. “I'll have to cut down on my charity work.”

“Why don't you get up earlier and do your housework before going to work.” Julie suggested.

“I could do that except that I never remember to set the alarm for early.” Anna said laughingly. “ Anyhow I never have much energy first thing in the morning.”

“Well, Christine should help you more.”

“Oh, she does her share, tidies her room and helps with some meals. I can't expect her to do the routine cleaning. After all she has got her job and social life and she's only young. No, it's my business to do that.” She passed Julie the sponge cake, still hot from the oven and bursting with homemade strawberry jam “There much be an easier way, your place always looks so neat.”

“But I do not do any voluntary work, neither do I bake such delicious goodies.” Julie said, her mouth full of cake crumbs.

Anna dashed straight home from work on Thursday, without calling to see any friend or even stopping at one shop. She would start by giving the front room a good turn out. Just as she was getting the carpet sweeper out, the phone ran. It was Julie

“I hate to trouble you Anna, but do you think you could drive me to the hospital, as you know, it is Mum's birthday today and it's lashing down and I would have such trouble getting a bus.”

Julie's Mother had been in hospital for months after a fall down the stairs but was now recovering. “Of course I will Julie, I'll be around in five minutes.”

She couldn't refuse, the hospital was five miles away and the rain was torrential. While there she would visit her too and pick up some more stuff for the fete.

The old lady was pleased to see them and thrilled with the talc and soap Anna had brought. They had some sherry and a slice of the birthday cake Anna had made for her. She would have to do the housework this evening.

“You're an angel.” Julie said as they sped homewards in the battered 1950's Morris Minor.

“Now I'll return your favour. I'm coming in to give you a hand with the cleaning.”

“Thanks, Julie.” Anna said gratefully.

“It won't take the two of us long.” Anna said as they tucked into home made doughnuts and coffee first.

Suddenly the front door bell interrupted their conversation. Anna put down her homemaker cup. “Must be somebody collecting money or jumble.” It usually was. She was renown for never turning anybody from the door empty handed. “I hope they don't delay me talking.”

A young man with long bobbed hair, damp from the pelting rain and squeezed into drainpipes stood there, his finger still on the bell. Anna had never seen him before and wondered what charity he represented. He removed his finger and gripped her right hand. “Mrs. Thompson, I'm Len.”

“Len?” the name sounded familiar, then it struck her. It was Christine's boyfriend!

She stared at him. A feeling of panic rising in her sudden dry throat. Christine had said Friday evening and the place was in a terrible mess! Christine would be furious with her. But what was she to do? She couldn't leave him on the doorstep in the rain.

“I'm pleased to meet you,” she said weakly, releasing her hand. The problem was solved for her. Len was already in the hall, she couldn't have stopped him without being very rude.

“I came around this evening because I couldn't get tickets for the pop concert on Friday only for tonight, they were all sold out, people are curious to see what this peculiar band from Liverpool are like. They must be dreadful, as they have to travel so far to get a booking. Came straight from work to give Christine time to get ready.”

“She should be here any minute.” Anna said weakly.

“I do hope I not disturbing you,” he said a little nervously.

“Of course not.” She felt in turmoil inside. She dreaded Christine's arrival. Even though Len himself looked a bit weird, he seemed a sincere boy.

“Oh, come and have some coffee.” she said bursting open the living room door. Julie looked shocked when Anna introduced him. Julie gulped down her coffee quickly. “I'd better be going,” she said, a minute later. On her way out she whispered to Anna.” I'm so sorry, you'd have it all tidy but for me.”

“Oh, something else would have happened to stop me. Don't worry!” When she went back Len was stretched on the worn, faded once green sofa looking very relaxed, all the newspapers, which had been piled, there, he had put on the floor. The only thing Anna could do was to be her usual self. “You'll stay to supper won't you? “ She called over her shoulder as she went to put some chops under the grill. Before Len had time to reply Christine arrived from work. Anna dashed from the kitchen but it was too late, she was already in the living room Anna saw the surprise spread over her face as she stared at Len and then in stupefied horror at the littered room. Even Anna's beloved cocktail cabinet was covered with junk for the fete.

Anna retreated sadly back to the kitchen, she could not face Christine just yet. Next morning to Anna's astonishment Christine hugged her tightly. “Guess what, Len was charmed with you, the delicious meal and the house. He said it was so homely. His landlady is so fussy he can't relax there, he called this a comfortable welcoming home. Funny I never thought of it like that before.”

“So from now on Mum, it can stay as it is.” Anna could hardly take it all in. “Such a nice boy.” Was all she could murmur. Then she remembered the pop concert.

“What were the weird group from Liverpool like?

“They were not a patch on the Pop Bops but some people were screaming for more, I don't know why! I wouldn't give you four pence for them. I expect we'll never hear of them again.”