

# The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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## Diary

Closing date for most main competitions  
Extended to 1<sup>st</sup> May 2006

## AGM

20<sup>th</sup> May 2006

## Poetry Workshop Weekend

28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> July 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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## **Editorial**

I have been deluged by offers to take over the editor's role. No I must not lie, I received only....well none at all actually, yet I live in hope. My own shortcomings include failure to publish competition details for 2006. For those who needed reminding they are included this time and the closing date has been extended to 1<sup>st</sup> May, i.e. enough time to create another entry. Only the Froud Competition is limited to one entry per person.

So, did Father Christmas bring you a nice new computer? Never mind, a new quill is almost as good and less likely to get a virus, unless it came from an Asian chicken. This should remind you that I asked for humorous contributions, yet so far have received none.

Those who were fortunate enough to be able to attend the New Year Party, ably organised as ever by Ethel Corduff, were able to hear the winning entry of the 2005 Froud Memorial Competition. Though many entries were from writers who were not members of SCPSW, though we hope some will be eligible to join and will do so, it is pleasing to note that Don Nixon, the deserving winner, is a member.

Despite suffering more than her fair share of personal hardship, Clare Gaen generously spared her time to judge the 55 entries for the Froud Memorial Competition. We are very grateful to her for doing so. Her comments and the winning entry are included in this issue.

I recently recalled an experience that members might find interesting. I have recorded it below and invite all members to contribute such snippets of their trips down memory lane.

In 1974 my wife and I moved into a flat that was part of the oldest mansion block in London, its age also led to expensive maintenance charges over the years. Of the many fellow residents with whom we became acquainted, the most interesting was Ethel. Over the years that she came to tea in our flat and we were entertained in hers we related many personal details. Some of hers I share with you now, though I have withheld her full name for reasons that will become apparent.

She was one of at least two daughters of a Channel Islands doctor. Her sister's claim to fame was that she became the mistress of the German Commandant of the Channel Islands during the war, and was saved

embarrassment as she was unaware that we were privy to this fact when we met many years later.

Ethel came to live in Cornwall after marrying a wealthy lawyer and hotelier in the early part of the last century. She was thus acquainted with most of the wealthy people in the region, though she never met Daphne DuMaurier. A fact hardly worthy of a mention in normal circumstances. “So what?” as our transatlantic cousins might say, yet this modest fact is of literary significance.

During one of Ethel’s meeting with friends, several of whom were acquainted with Daphne, Ethel was told that Daphne had become quite agitated at a recent dinner party, because Ethel’s name had come up several times. An exasperated Daphne exploded, “For goodness’ sake, it’s Ethel did this and Ethel did that, yet I’ve never even met this Ethel. It’s as if she’s a ghost, constantly entering into our conversation yet never to be seen. In fact I’m not entirely convinced that she really exists”.

Several months later Daphne declared that she had written a book about a person whose ghost invaded the peace of mind of someone that she had never met, this being inspired by the thought of the still absent Ethel. Perhaps you have come across the book, its title is Rebecca.

Perhaps the title Ethel would have proved less memorable, yet with our own Ethel Corduff busy producing work, only time will tell.

The script writers of ITV soap “The Bill” have a Chief Inspector saying, “Listen up”. As he is neither a citizen of the USA, nor monitor of aircraft noise, this phrase appears inappropriate. I have also recently heard repeated misuse of the legal phrase, “Time is of the essence”. In legal use this means that time is an element in the transaction to which it refers, that it is to all intents and purposes a contractual condition and failure to comply with it has financial implications. The phrase is thus not interchangeable with, “Time is important” and, in my opinion, should not be used as if it is.

You will be aware that I question modern loquaciousness and trendy colloquial expressions, such as, “At the minute”, instead of at the moment, but I believe creative writers have a role to play in keeping such perverse use of our language under control. However, I also realise that changing moment to minute may reflect a variation of expression peculiar to a particular region of Britain, whose use as such is then

entirely appropriate. I hope I have stirred a little controversy again here and look forward to your letters. I welcome controversial opinions from any member and would consider such for future publication.

On the subject of loquaciousness, I must reduce the length of my editorials, or there will be no room for your stories and poetry. Of the former, anything you wish to see in print is welcome; of the latter Joyce Thornton is in continual need of your poetic creations.

Poetry Workshop members will be aware that Joyce cannot continue in her role of Poetry Editor and has sent me the following (slightly amended) comment on the matter.

Reluctantly, due to the difficulties which arise domestically through Albert's ill-health and blindness, I now have to relinquish the editorship. I have provided poems for the Spring edition and hope someone else will take on the job for future editions. I wish to thank everyone who has submitted poetry for consideration and to apologise to those whose work has not yet appeared either because they are of too personal a nature, strongly controversial or too long. Where I have stamped addressed envelopes I will return the unused poems.

I am sure all members will join me in expressing regret that such circumstances have arisen and understandably caused Joyce to give up her role of poetry editor. To this we must add our gratitude for her significant contribution to Author during the last five years and our best wishes for the future. That hackneyed expression, "She'll be a hard act to follow" springs to mind, but hope that someone will rise to the occasion.

I believe the subject of publishing a collection of stories from "Author" has been voiced in the past and the anticipated cost of such ensured that the idea did not progress. I intend to investigate the economics of this. Assuming it is viable I welcome ideas on the contents. Perhaps members could identify their favourite story. This would have the drawback that recent members would only be aware of recently published work, but members who have been with us for many years such as John Gatrell in Alderney, who has been a member for some 50 years, will perhaps identify worthy entries from earlier times. We can then look for a panel of judges to select those they believe most worthy of inclusion. That probably ensures the exclusion of my work, but I would still be happy to buy such a book and I hope others will feel the

same. If this matter progresses as I hope it will, I intend to ask for nominations on the back of the membership renewal forms next December, so be prepared. Dib, dib, dib.

As I am currently trying to master voice recognition computer software that will enable me to speak to the beast and for it to convert this into the written word (a sort of audio-typist) I also hope this may lead to my creating "Author" as a tape recording for members with impaired vision. I would be happy to accept taped contributions from such members now.

### **Member's Successes:**

We congratulate Margaret Pelling, who now describes her success story:

In June this year, Starborn Books of West Wales brought out my novel *Work For Four Hands*. This is the first novel I've had published but the fifth I've written - and behind that lies the usual tale of filing cabinets full of rejection slips stretching back over many years. I'd tried 50 or so agents and publishers for the current book before Starborn said 'Yes.' (Only 50? Many would consider this a paltry score, I know!)

The first totally independent review of the book came out just recently on the New Books Magazine website, and very favourable it was. ('A wonderful, cleverly written novel.' The full review is at [www.newbooksmag.com](http://www.newbooksmag.com): click on 'online directory'.) I say 'totally independent' because I'm acquainted with the two reviewers who've given the book five stars on Amazon (though they're not my best friends!)

The task now is to get *Work For Four Hands* in front of as many readers as limited resources allow. 'Small publisher, first-time author' is a combination which presents tough marketing challenges - as everybody knows, but only now am I discovering how true it is. And how much of the time-consuming hassle and hustle falls on the author's shoulders. ( I began writing because I like *writing*... ) If that weren't enough, I've heard it said that 90 per cent of a book-marketing campaign is wasted effort in terms of generating sales. The trouble is, you don't know which 90 per cent of your effort it's going to be.

Very briefly: *Work For Four Hands* falls into the broad category of literary fiction. It's about two people who were going to be playing

piano duets for as long as they lived, but forty years ago something happened to stop the music. Now, those two people have become three, for one of them harbours a parasite: the woman she takes herself to be. The music won't start again unless that woman dies.

The book is available direct from the publisher; through Amazon and Blackwells Online; and at The Book House, Oxford. It can of course be ordered from any bookshop. The ISBN is 1 899530 23 1. *Work For Four Hands* out now (see [www.starbornbooks.co.uk](http://www.starbornbooks.co.uk))

### **President's Competition**

Alan Watts wishes to mark his becoming President of the Society by holding a competition. He will award a prize of £100 to the writer of the best composition/piece of prose on the following topic "Myself when Young" maximum length 1,000 words. The competition is for members only and the closing date for entries is 31<sup>st</sup> July 2006. The normal rules for our competitions apply.

Please send your entry with pen-name and S.A.E., if you wish it to be returned, plus £2 fee, made payable to SCPSW, to cover expenses:

To Ethel Corduff,  
10 Malcolm Road,  
Woodside, South Norwood,  
London, SE25 5HG.

### SCPSW ANNUAL COMPETITIONS 2006

#### **Lewis Wright Short Story Competition**

Maximum length 3,000 words, double spaced on A4 paper. Entries will be returned if accompanied by s.a.e. Entry Fee £4.00 per story. Total prize money for best seven entries, £150 (5 3rds £5).

#### **Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition**

No restriction on theme or form, but maximum forty lines and one poem per sheet of paper. (Writers of humorous verse should consider the George Farley Prize.) Entries will be returned if accompanied by s.a.e. Entry Fee £2.00 for first and £1.50 for each subsequent poem. 1<sup>st</sup> prize £50, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize £30, 3<sup>rd</sup> prize £15.

## **Vincent Brennan Travel Article**

Maximum length 2,000 words, double spaced on A4 paper. Entries will be returned if accompanied by s.a.e. Entry Fee £2.50 per entry. 1<sup>st</sup> prize £30, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize £20, 3<sup>rd</sup> prize £10.

## **George Farley Prize**

For light humorous verse only. Judges and sponsors, Pamela Farley, Aline Shee and Jean Squires (daughters of George Farley). Judges look for the qualities their father valued in humorous verse — “wit, clever construction and interesting language”. Entries returned if accompanied by s.a.e. Prize £25.

## **Notes for Entrants to all Competitions**

1. Unless entrants state on entering competitions that do not wish their entry to be published, all winning entries will be published in *Author* if space permits. The entrant’s name will also be quoted, unless entrants advise on entry that they prefer to use a pen name.
2. Entries must be the original work of the entrant and must not have been published at the time of submission. Entries exceeding specified number of lines or words will be disqualified
3. All entries should bear only the pen name (which should be varied to avoid recognition) and a separate sheet quoting: pen name used, title of entry, real name and address. (Optional for serving members, Department and staff association for potential publicity use.)
4. All entries should be sent to Competition Secretary, Ron Jeffreys, 186 Lewis Flats, Lisgar Terrace, London W14 8SQ not later than 1<sup>st</sup> May 2006

R C Jeffreys

Competition Secretary

## **The Book Prize Competition:**

Those of you with long memories will recall that in 2003 I invited members to submit short stories with the prize being a set of Joseph Conrad books, or a set of Russian Classics. Either the prize was not attractive enough, or there were other reasons why so few entered. The matter was then caught up in the complexities of my house move, but we have now progressed to the conclusion.



As I thought I may have to judge the entries myself, I meticulously separated the cheques from the entries to ensure I did not know the name of the author. It would have been far simpler if I had asked Ron Jeffreys to effect this, but I didn't. Consequently I am now publishing the winning story but need the author to identify themselves to arrange for the books to be sent to them. Will the winner also please decide which set of books they would like and (unless they live within 30 miles of London) any ideas on how we might transfer the books to you, as the weight is quite substantial.

I asked a friend to act as judge, on the basis of which did he enjoy reading the most. As a classics scholar and a great reader, being unfortunately confined to his chair for much of his time, I was not sure what to expect. The following are his comments and perhaps reflect the high standard of his usual reading material.

None of the short stories, in my view, is well written. Each writer has progressed to the smart ending, the dénouement, the sting in the tail-tale, and has plodded to his or her climax with a minimum of style. A little more style would have lifted each story to a more acceptable level.

Having made my humble criticism, I am now required to choose the entry which is the most worthy for appearance in your magazine.

My choice finally rests with *The Banana Spider* by Anthony Fitzpatrick

L M. Morgan

### **The Banana Spider**

Anthony Fitzpatrick

**I**f only I had known the colonel was afraid of spiders, I would never have ended up in front of the firing-squad."

I dropped my note pad and goggled at the old man. Seeing my astonished look, he burst out laughing, and didn't stop until his face had turned puce. He had a curiously loud laugh for such a slightly built man, and a few other diners in the restaurant turned to stare at him. I picked up my notepad from the floor and, not knowing what else to say, asked:

"Carlos Castillo was afraid of spiders?"

He sucked down what was left of his Chablis and nodded. "Terrified of them. I heard he was brought up in a hacienda with three sisters who

were much bigger than him, and it seems they used to torture him by putting daddy long legs up his trousers, then tying them tight at the trouser-cuff so the little beasties had to crawl all the way up to try and get out. It's a horrible thing of course, but most of us go through similar things in childhood without growing up to be fascist dictators."

As he said the words "fascist dictators" an image of my editor at The Daily Beast flashed across my mind. If I didn't get this interview written up and in on time, daddy long legs in my pants would be nothing compared to what she'd do to me. I decided to press the old fellow on his story.

"You have to understand that at this time, in 1954, these small Central American countries could be owned outright, the same way you can own a shooting estate in the Highlands. Honduras was the original 'Banana Republic', but Guatemala was in exactly the same position. The United Fruit Company owned Guatemala. I mean they literally owned about half the country with their plantations, and the company's annual income was about five times that of the State, so they could really buy the government outright. Our own elections are going the same way these days, but even we're not quite as blatant as that. Yet."

He took another swig of wine.

"So that was that situation. You've heard about Big Oil? Well, this was Big Bananas."

A twinkling smile, another mouthful of wine, and then he was off again.

"For years the company had run the country through a caudillo, a strongman, called Ubico. Think Franco, Pinochet, Galtieri - these chaps are all much of a muchness, really. Anyway, he did all right by them for about thirty years, then there was a revolution, a new liberal constitution, and genuinely free elections. All of which was about as welcome to United Fruit as a fart in a spacesuit. But when the new government suggested nationalising some land, albeit land the company had never used, the you-know-what really hit the fan. "So they complained to John Foster Dulles, the Yank secretary of state. He talks to his brother, Alien Foster Dulles, head of the CIA, and they organise a counterrevolutionary army in the jungle. Since Ubico had shot his bolt they looked around for a local to act as figurehead, and Castillo was made for the job, being brutal and stupid in fairly equal measure.

"We had no real idea about any of this in the British Embassy. Latin America has always been a pretty exclusively Yankee sphere, and they didn't feel the need to share much with us. But when Castillo's revolt got going we could see what way the wind was blowing, so we decided to send someone over to his HQ to butter him up a bit. For some reason I was given this task - possibly because the head of the station had been to Rugby and had a grudge against Winchester, I don't know. So I cantilevered myself into the embassy's rustbucket and got old Malanafey, the gardener, to drive me the eighty or so miles to Casa Castillo."

"When we got to his camp it was heaving with all sorts - mercenaries mostly, from Ecuador and Nicaragua, but a fair sprinkling of fair-skinned types whom I took to be CIA spooks. We were shown into the great man's presence, and I must say he was pretty offhand with us. Of course, the sun was already setting on the Empire, and the Falklands were still thirty years in the future, so even this puffed-up little greaseball felt he could take liberties with an Ingles. He ruffled through the papers I'd brought him, then looked up and asked me quite curtly if there was anything else.

Before I could answer he'd picked up my briefcase from the table and lifted the lid to check for himself. He gave a tremendous yell and leapt about a foot in the air. I was astonished, until I remembered the banana spider.

"You see, one of my colleagues at the embassy, Cuthbert Brimelow, fancied himself as a bit of an expert on flora and fauna. When he'd heard I was off out into the bush he'd asked me to get one of these *Heteropia Venatori*, or banana spiders, so-called because they're usually found in banana plantations, for him to show off at the next talk he gave on Guatemala back in London. As it happened, I'd noticed one prowling around our car when Malanafey had pulled over for petrol, and I'd popped it in my case and thought no more about it."

"Until now."

"Quite; until now. As for Castillo, he stood absolutely still and rigid, like a statue, pointing his arm straight at me. If he had been a statue, the inscription ought to have been *Et tu quoque me fili!*"

"Sorry, I didn't catch that?"

It means, 'you too, my son?' The last words of Julius Caesar. Most people think it was 'you too, Brutus?' because JC thought Brutus was his illegitimate son. Actually, if you believe Plutarch, the last thing Caesar said was 'This is violence!'. Which was frightfully perceptive of him, don't you think?"

My head was spinning a little at this point. "Urn ... where were we?"

"Sorry, I digress. Get a Wykehamist talking about the classics and you'd be here all night. Anyway, Castillo was pointing accusingly at me - he seemed to have trouble catching his breath for a moment or two. Then it all came flooding out. I can honestly say I've never heard so many Spanish profanities in all my life. I'm not sure he didn't use the phrase 'Perfidious Albion' at one stage, bless his cotton socks. I started to feel a bit like Sir Francis Drake. He ranted on for a good few minutes, then one of his chums - Ygidoras by name, frightful little tick but the only one dressed in civvies - anyway, he piped up and tried to calm the colonel down. He had a very soothing, persuasive way about him - which you'd expect of an insurance salesman as he was. Anyway, he was pouring oil on the troubled colonel and all was going well until the sodding spider, which had lain doggo since the box was opened, started slowly walking across the table towards a bowl of fruit."

I thought those spiders were carnivorous<sup>7</sup>

"They could well be; the 'fruit' was made of wax. Anyway, off it went, in a minute. I think part of the creepiness of these bally things is simply that slow, deliberate way they move. Can't say I cared for it myself. But Castillo! I mean, it just sent him off the deep end completely. He gave a high pitched scream, then pulled out this enormous revolver and emptied all six chambers of it into our eight-legged friend. The thing was spattered all over the shop, and Castillo collapsed into an armchair, breathing heavily like Macbeth does after settling Banquo's hash. Then, and this was the killer, he holstered the gun and stuck his hand into his tunic the way you see Napoleon doing in those old paintings.

"That was it for me; I absolutely collapsed in laughter. Here was this little twerp, five foot nothing and wrapped in more gold braid than the Duke of Wellington, leader of a military coup without ever hearing a shot fired in anger; until now, when he gloriously dispatches a fearsome enemy about the size of his hand. It was pathetic, and it was ludicrous.

But also it was dangerous, for your correspondent. All the others in the room, including Ygidoras, who'd been willing to give me the benefit of the doubt before, now saw me as an arrogant, mocking gringo. And Castillo's reaction, shooting the thing, somehow made everything more serious. Who could say? Maybe he was right and I had brought the spider to kill or incapacitate him in what would look like an 'accident'. Anyway, I got cuffed about a bit and then they dragged me off to the central prison."

He signalled to the waiter to bring us a second bottle. I asked him how he had felt when he was thrown into gaol.

"Not too bad, actually. Luckily I was put into Pabellon Politico, the section for political prisoners, not among the hard-nut convicts; I mean, those chaps used to throw scorpions at each other for fun. But Pabellon reminded me of public school more than anything. Even the nurses had moustaches, just like matron. I was in two days, then they dragged me out into a courtyard and tied me to a post. There were eight young boys in tatty camouflage facing me, holding their rifles as if they were cobras and looking as if they were about to puke. I felt sorrier for them than I did for myself, funnily enough. Then their officer, flat-faced little martinet gave the order "ready," and they shuffled to attention. I stood straight too, chin up, shoulders back, all Good Queen Bess damning the dagoes. "Aim!", and I thought 'goodbye Piccadilly', and then suddenly there was dear old Malanafey and a chap I knew from the US embassy."

"Apparently Malanafey had been interrogated a bit, but as an octogenarian Irishman with no Spanish he had simply replied "Phwat's dat ye say?" to all questions and they'd got fed up and let him go. He tooled off to the Americans, they'd got flustered at the thought of their golden boy polishing off a British diplomat and sent one of their men round to put a stop to it. So instead of the little lieutenant giving the order to fire he gave me a cigarillo instead. Filthy thing, but a nice gesture. My Yankee saviour was very apologetic, and gave me a lift back into town. He even lent me one of his comic-books to read on the way. American's are very serious types, and I'm not sure he saw the funny side."

"The funny side of what?"

The old man grinned. "The comic-book was "The Adventures of Spiderman."

## **Report on New Year Party 2006**

The New Year party was held in the Civil Service Club on the 28th January and attended by seventeen members and guests. Members came from Liverpool, Dorset, Lincolnshire, Rutland, Kent, Essex, Middlesex and London.

After a buffet lunch, Roy Froud the generous sponsor of the WF & FG Froud Competition in memory of his parents, was present to hear the splendid winning entry "The Sentinal" read by Joan Lewis This was written by Don Nixon from Wolverhampton who unfortunately was unable to be present.

"Parties" was our theme for the competition on the day. Book prizes were presented to the winners - Short story 1st Adrian Danson, 2nd Paul Williams and for poetry 1st Joanna Crawford and 2nd Charles Butler a new member.

A raffle was held before tea. Ethel informed those who attend the annual lunch about the recent untimely death of Ann Woodman. She had been coming for years with Yvonne Tomkinson and the Austins. She will be sadly missed

### **Parties**

Adrian Danson

Parties? I don't know nothing about parties? I don't give a monkey's about politics. I told 'im, the bloke at the door, but did that stop 'im? Not a bit, 'e just keeps rabbitin' on 'til I shuts the door on 'im. Stroof there's just so much a bloke can take. Bloody parties, you can stuff the lot of 'em where the sun don't shine, if you ask me. Cut down on them bureaucrats, do something about stoppin' our blokes fishin' when them Frogs and Dago's get away with murder. Then they'd get my vote. Huh! Fat chance.

"You were out 'til all hours again last night," shouted my wife Mabel during our usual slangin' match at breakfast. "Another bridge party I suppose and you lording it over everybody with all your master points I'll be bound. They should see the side of you that I see, then they wouldn't be so impressed, then you wouldn't be so high and mighty. It's one bridge party after another. You're never at home to give me a bit of company. I don't know why you married me, I really don't. When I met

you at Aunt Doris's birthday party you sounded really interesting. He's a writer they said. Never told me you only ever wrote about bridge. Never told me your bridge crowd would see more of you than I ever would. Never told me you'd scream at me when I made a mistake when you tried to teach me the stupid game. Oh no, never told me that did they. I should have known when we got to our honeymoon hotel in Guernsey and before we'd even been to our room you were looking at the notice board. Bridge party, all guests invited it said. As if you needed an invitation, wild horses wouldn't have kept you away. I cried all night. Well 'til one o'clock when you came to bed. And did you want to tell me how beautiful I was, how my beautiful body excited you, like any normal man? Not a bit of it. All you wanted to tell me was how you made three slams and won a bottle of whisky. You knew I didn't like whisky, but did you care?"

She stormed off then and I thought about when we met. I lived in a block of flats then and we used to buy a seventy two pint barrel from the local Brewery every Saturday, put on a three hour tape of trad' jazz and party 'til dawn. There was always birds there, of course, and the bedrooms was kept busy, but that weren't where I met 'er. Bill Foster, my bridge partner most nights, 'cept Saturdays, asked me to go to his Aunty Doris's birthday party, "Just to keep me company, stop me goin' round the bend with all them women goin' on like a bunch of old hens. Just as a favour mate. Wouldn't ask if I weren't desperate". Well he was my mate then, but not for much longer, not when 'e owned up 'e'd brought me round to meet 'is cousin Mabel.

I read the daily paper. Nothing but politics of course and how we were all going to be dead by Christmas from some new sort of Asian flu. I went into the front room to catch up with some new bidding system in the Bridge Magazine. I leant against the wall. Only a partition wall of course, or party-wall as they call it, not brick built like a proper flat, but what d'you expect from a jerry builder converting old houses. Still at least we managed to buy it, which is something these days with the ridiculous prices they're asking now.

I could hear voices through the party wall. I'd heard voices before, but never had my head against the wall before; never realised you could hear every word.

“Don’t worry about George. He’s got his nose in a bridge magazine by now and you won’t hear a peep from him for hours. ‘Ere stop it you’ll break my bra strap, you’re so impatient. All these years and you still want your bit of slap and tickle. Seven years now, ain’t it, since you came to my room on the first night of my honeymoon? Course I knew we’d be safe, they told me all about George and his passion for bridge and he’s given us plenty of time for our passion, ain’t he you naughty boy?”

Bloody Chalky White and my wife! I’ll kill the bastard and I’ll kill ‘er too, the naggin’ bitch. Hang about, I thought, come to think of it, I could carry on enjoying me bridge and she could carry on enjoying her passion. She don’t know what I know, an’ I ain’t gonna tell ‘er am I? I mean I know everythin’ and they say knowledge is power, don’t they?... ‘Ere, I’m gonna enjoy this. He! He! I heard every word through the party wall and I’m gonna be listenin’ some more.

Now I got to make a plan. Plenty of time for me bridge and their passion, plenty of time to make me plan perfect. Got to get ‘em both and it got to be an accident. Now let me think, maybe drinking somethin’ that don’t agree with ‘em, somethin’ nasty like, somethin’ really nasty. I gotta find some way to get in there and top up his gin bottle, ‘cos I know they both likes gin and I bet ‘e’s got a bottle. Mustn’t leave no finger prints and mustn’t be seen. Wait ‘til next time Chalky says he’s gonna have a party. I’ll make sure I’m too busy playin’ bridge to be there. Usually am anyway, but I don’t want ‘em pointin’ the finger at me. But they wouldn’t would they? Couldn’t be me could it, ‘cos, like I said, I don’t know nothing about parties.

## **The W.F. and F.G. Froud Memorial Competition 2005**

### **Judge's Report**

There were 55 entries. Numerically this represented a good entry although the standard of writing was highly variable with entries ranging from poor to excellent. With rare exception, entries would have benefited from a better attention to presentational detail.



Entries were Judged on a wide range of criteria, including aptness and originality of theme and expression, plot and plot development, characterisation, appropriateness of dialogue and linguistic devices, overall balance, flow and pace, readability, use of imagery, imaginative detail, in addition to basic spelling, grammar and punctuation.

The fantasy brief was widely interpreted with a range of story genres. There were, for example, nightmare, ghost and horror fantasies, comic and everyday fantasies, sci-fi and futuristic fantasies, fairytales, animal fantasies, mental and surrealist fantasies, and as the competition brief didn't specifically exclude it, several erotic fantasies. A few entries failed to include a clear fantasy element and were therefore ruled out.

I decided to rule out any stories that could not be published in "Author" magazine because they contained material "liable to offend". This included those with pornographic elements or which over-stepped the bounds of taste in their use of lavatorial/defecatory humour not justified on plot or character development grounds. Competitors are reminded here of the need to bear in mind potential readership and target publication when submitting work.

Common errors among entries included confusion between "your" and "you're" and "their" and "they're", poor punctuation (especially around dialogue), double punctuation (there is no need for a full-stop after a question mark or exclamation mark), tense errors, awkward scene shifts, a failure to paragraph effectively (spoiling flow and readability), the use of hackneyed themes or imagery, the use of an overly pedestrian pace and style, verbosity and author intrusiveness. There was a tendency for authors to make unnecessary asides/ comments which spoil the flow of a story and were in some instances plain irritating.

Having carefully read all entries from start to finish (some Judges would not have bothered given the careless presentation of several entries including three glaring errors in just one sentence of an opening paragraph), I selected a short-list of six stories for more detailed review. Subject to minor amendment, a number of other entries which, for a variety of reasons, failed to make the short-list, were also of publishable standard.

The six short-listed entries were as follows:

"Illusions", "Beyond", "The Sentinel", "One of Those Days", "Under a Fat-Bellied Moon", "The Clog Factory".

Third place was difficult to decide as I was Judging stories of very disparate type and genre with a variety of minor faults. "Under a Fat-Bellied Moon" was a strong piece of fantasy writing representing an unusual reworking of "Little Red Riding Hood". However, it contained some glaring punctuation errors and the plot was less to my personal taste than other short-listed entries: I wasn't entirely convinced by the piece although passages were of very high quality. I loved the basic plot of "Illusions" with its wicked fairy manipulating a middle-aged woman full of self-delusion but felt this piece was marred by a couple of tense errors, several uncorrected typos, punctuation errors around dialogue and a slightly clumsy flow in places. Third place therefore came down to a choice between "Beyond" and "One of Those Days". I opted for "One of Those Days" both because I felt this story had wide appeal and because I found elements of the visual imagery especially appealing. Both "Beyond" and "One of Those Days" contained minor presentational error (as did the majority of entries in this competition).

Final placings were as follows:

3. "One of Those Days"
2. "The Clog Factory"
1. "The Sentinel".

I am torn between extolling the virtues of each winner's piece or allowing the stories to speak for themselves. I have chosen the latter. I hope others will enjoy reading them as much as I have done several times over.

Thank you to all who have contributed to or otherwise helped organise this competition.

Clare Gaen

(Some of you may recognise your work from the above, in case you did not provide an sae for return of your entry with Judge's comment, but we might all profit from Clare's comments on presentation, punctuation, etc. – Ed)

## **The Sentinel**

Don Nixon

(The W. F. and F. G. Froud Memorial Competition winning entry)

**M**idsummer Night. The even light picked out the cracks in the wall where the edges of the old bricks stood out, giving him an easy foothold. Below him, the new swimming pool nestled in the curve of the river.

In the moonlight the stark concrete outlines of the locker rooms were softened and the water was still. In spite of the drought, water had been diverted from the river by the builders to feed the pool and now the river level had fallen sharply, exposing a rock, like an obelisk, jutting out from the bank. In the distance the jagged silhouette of the mountains of North Wales formed an eerie backdrop in the silvery light. Far to the West, the sea glinted and the dark mass of the Druid island of Anglesey hovered on the horizon. There, before the Romans had come to Britain, the Druids had performed their sacrificial rites in the sacred groves of oak trees.

A warm breeze from the sea gently wafted up through the valley rippling the surface of the river and gently stirring the reed beds. He could still feel the heat of the day beneath his bare feet and seemed to sense pulses of energy rising from the dry parched earth and coursing through his body. The soft hooting of an owl overhead broke the silence and he heard a rustling in the bushes as a fox left its lair and set out on its nightly hunt. He looked up to the and high moors and the mountains beyond and for the first time since arriving in this remote corner of Wales, momentarily felt a strange calm, almost a oneness with the natural world around him. It was a sensation he had almost approached in the days when he had been high on drugs but never before experienced to this extent. He watched the fox as it padded slowly up the hillside until the white flash at the end of its bushy tail disappeared into the darkness.

The sudden almost human scream of a rabbit caught in a snare was quickly silenced and in the stillness he could hear his own laboured breathing. He shivered. The night now belonged to the hunters and the hunted.

It was the last night of the vacation. The others had already left the camp. He was glad to see them go, tired of their endless criticism and lectures about his drug addiction. The camping holiday which had

seemed such a good idea in the limbo of boredom at college after the exams had not worked out and early on in the holiday in Wales he had started to slip away each night from the petty wrangling around the campfire and swim in the deserted pool. The others had parted from him that afternoon in sullen silence but he had stayed on to have one final swim. Tomorrow he would have to return to the real world of suits and job interviews.

The ground was still warm beneath his feet as he slithered down the slope to the edge of the pool. He threw off his tee shirt and shorts. His skin prickled at the caress of the moonlight. He breathed deeply and gazed at the light shimmering on the water. It seemed almost a desecration to disturb the smooth glassy surface. He slipped the last of his tablets under his tongue and dived.

Above him stretched the silver canopy of the water. The refracted glow on the green tiles gave him the feeling of being in a vast subterranean cave. He seemed to be moving weightlessly in an ocean of light. A fragment of verse nudged his mind.

"Where Alph the sacred river ran  
Through caverns measureless to man,  
Down to a sunless sea."

Coleridge had been one of the set authors on his college course and he remembered he had quoted from "Kubla Khan" in his final examination paper. He felt he had somehow connected with the poet's drug fuelled imagination. A kindred spirit he had thought at the time.

"Down to a sunless sea."

The words reverberated in his head. Suddenly they seemed threatening and sinister. Fear flickered and his chest tightened. For a moment the water was icy cold. He kicked hard. Eyes closed, he reached for the rail. Startled he pulled back and rose spluttering to the surface. He had grasped a human foot.

She was sitting on the edge of the pool. Thick reddish hair fell to her shoulders and was held back from her forehead by a decorated copper band. Her large oval eyes studied him intently. The moonlight gave her creamy skin a luminous sheen. She smiled down at him. "I hope I didn't startle you."

Her voice was low with a hint of foreign intonation. There was the lilting cadence of Welsh but he could not place the guttural overlay. There might be a touch of Gaelic in the thick consonants. He shrank back in the water, embarrassed under her frank gaze, suddenly conscious of his nakedness.

"I know this is a private pool," he stammered. 'Are you the owner? I'll gladly pay –“

“And what would you be willing to pay?”

Her tone was teasing. He realised he was blushing and felt the heat coursing in his cheeks. She seemed to come to a decision and slid into the pool beside him. "How about a wager? Race me. Whoever wins decides the payment? That is fair? Do you agree?"

He felt a sudden stab of desire as he felt her closeness. He nodded. She laughed and was gone.

He had been a strong swimmer before the drugs had started to take their toll. Now he could only follow in her wake. When he reached the far side she was already out of the pool. He breathed hard as a spasm of pain tore his chest and a wave of dizziness came and went. He had put all his effort into the race and felt a touch of humiliation at his abject failure. "Well done," he gasped. "You're too good for me."

She smiled that slow curving smile that seemed to tell him she could read his thoughts. Again he felt a surge of desire. "Now to our wager," she said briskly. She threw him a towel. "Here, dry yourself and meet me outside the gate"

Again he struggled for breath as his chest tightened. He briefly wondered if the drug tablet had been contaminated. He had never felt like this before, this mixture of euphoria punctured by shards of pain. Gradually the pain subsided. He walked eagerly to the gate.

She was wearing a long green robe and her hair, held in the copper band, glistened in the white light that cast no shadows. It seemed natural that she should take his arm and together they walked to the bend in the river where the great stone he had seen earlier had been exposed. Intricate vertical and horizontal patterns were carved in the granite column. Droplets of water in the grooves shimmered in the moonlight. She traced the lines with her fingers. "It's the ancient script," she whispered. "It's called Oghma after the god of the Celts. He was the one

who gave the human race writing. It says the stone is the sentinel, sacred to the Daghdha, father of the gods."

As he touched the inscription, he recalled fragments of old lecture notes.

"I did a Celtic module in my degree course but I never heard that they went in for standing stones in rivers. On land, yes, like at Stonehenge. I know they went in for burning people in wicker baskets at the summer solstice? Human sacrifice. I saw a horror film about it on television." She laughed and shook her head. "That was later when the Druid priests took over the rituals. In the early days the river gods were the protectors. They nourished the land. They made sure the crops were safe. They delivered the harvests. In all the lands of the Celts they were honoured. Life first came from the water. The fire was much later. Much later."

He examined the stone more closely. At the base was the carving of a woman roughly chiselled into the black granite. The heavy pendulous breasts hung down over the swollen belly.

"That is Anu, the earth mother," she whispered.

In the moonlight the moisture on the stone gleamed and it seemed as if the huge bulbous eyes of the goddess flickered and the thick fingers reached out to him. He examined the carving more closely.

"I've seen stone figures like that in museums. I remember now. She was the Great Mother. She has different names of course but she comes up in most ancient religions. The Germans called her Erda. The Greeks had Diana at Ephesus and the Babylonians had Astarte. They worshipped her as the symbol of fertility. Without intonation had grown much stronger. The consonants now were thick and slurred. her blessing, the harvests would fail. And women prayed to her in childbirth."

He recalled headings from his anthropology course notes.

"Anu was the Celtic Irish goddess, the giver of life."

She nodded.

"And also its taker. Next to the Daghdha himself, she wields the greatest power. She spins the threads of life and also cuts them to bring it to an end."

She gripped his hand and pressed it against the figure. Suddenly the granite seemed to yield and was soft to his touch. The palm of his hand

sank into the stone breast. Again there was the sharp pain cutting into his chest. Again the momentary dizziness. He would have fallen but his companion held his arm and steadied him. Her voice now was so low he could only just make out her words. The foreign intonation had grown much stronger. The consonants

Now were thick and slurred.

"She is the spirit of the stone. The Sentinel. When the river falls and the land is starved of water, she demands reparation from those who have abused the gift. This swimming pool is a desecration of the land here. It steals the water which is the life force. You had your chance but you lost your wager. Now is the time to pay the price."

All warmth left him. Her grip was icy and he realised he could not move. He was freezing cold.

"Who are you?" He forced out the words.

"I have many names. In some lands I am Undina, in others Rusalka. Here I am Nema. We are the spirits of those who gladly died by drowning to placate the Earth Mother. We serve her. When she calls, we obey. It is now time."

The stone was hard again and he could feel the gritty edges of the carving biting into his palm. He looked down and saw a thread of blood oozing from his hand and trickling down the side of the stone., He suddenly felt as if he were encased in ice.

She drew him gently to the riverbank. The freezing cold ebbed away and a warm glow now seemed to surround his heart. He felt no fear as they entered the water and he slowly sank- Her hold on him now was soft and comforting. From far away he heard the echoing lines of the Coleridge poem once more.

"Through caverns measureless to man.

Down to a sunless sea."

This time the words held no terror but were warm and welcoming. He did not struggle and when he could hold his breath no longer it was with a sense of relief that he let the water flood into his lungs. He felt his face enveloped in her hair.

In the morning they found him. The pool attendant saw him floating face upwards in the swimming pool. The body was still. They said he seemed to be smiling.

## **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**

The results of the 2005 Bill Barnes Poetry Competition were:

1st prize: **Norman Bissett** 2nd prize: **Andrew Millican** 3rd prize: **Ann Froggatt**

### **Wavelengths Issue no. 6**

The next issue of the Poetry Workshop's magazine, **wavelengths**, will be the Competition Special. It will contain the judges' report, plus all poems entered to the competition. A bumper edition indeed! **Wavelengths** is distributed free to all members of the Poetry Workshop.

### **PW Weekend 2006**

The annual Poetry Workshop Weekend will take place on 28-30 July 2006 at the University of Central England, which is in Perry Bar, Birmingham. The cost will be about £152 per person, which includes all meals, en-suite accommodation and meeting room. As usual, we ask for a deposit of £30, with the balance payable in May. Alternatively, you may pay by instalments, by arrangement with our Treasurer, **Terry Rickson**. A Booking Form was enclosed with the winter issue of **wavelengths**. This should be returned with your deposit to Terry.

If you have any queries about any aspect of the Weekend, please contact me, Mike Boland, at the address given above.

### **Waves 2006**

Contributions for **Waves 2006**, the annual collection of PW members' work, should be sent to **Liz Rowlands**, (address at page heading) by **31 March 2006**. Poems may be rhymed or unrhymed. There are no restrictions on form, but entries should be no more than 30 lines including stanza breaks and should not have been published previously. Due to rising printing costs, it was decided at the last AGM to increase the price per copy to £2.50 from 2006. So, to assist with marketing costs, contributors of published poems will be asked to purchase 6 copies @ £15.

### **Subscriptions 2006**

Subscriptions to the Poetry Workshop fell due on 1 January 2006. The cost of membership remains unchanged for yet another year, being £3 for members of the Society of Civil & Public Service Writers. A Renewal Form was enclosed with the winter issue of **wavelengths**. Please complete and send it with your cheques/postal orders 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**.



## **Poetry Pages**

Edited by Joyce Thornton

### **WINTER MEETING**

Alan S Watts

The sun was shining in my eyes  
As I walked down the wintry lane.  
I did not see her, when, surprised,  
She spoke and took my hand again.  
I knew then, all those words were lies.

Those bitter words were merely lies,  
Those words which drove us two apart.  
I did not try to shield my eyes  
Or quell the beating of my heart.  
It came to me as no surprise.

But time had gone; the days were fled.  
We had been young but now were old.  
All those bright dreams of ours were dead  
And all our youthful spirits cold.  
I said: "Hello." "Good-day," she said.

### **TRIOLET**

Bill Torrie Douglas

When you carve your name in words of love  
so deep should be the etching.  
A star has spoken from above  
when you carve your name in words of love.  
Your hand should wear a velvet glove,  
your gaze should be far-stretching  
when you carve your name in words of love  
so deep should be the etching.

## **OPERATION SYCAMORE**

Roy D. Stevens

The airborne troops are massed,  
Poised for the assault,  
Waiting for a fair wind.

When it comes,  
They parachute in their hundreds,  
Silently, down to the dropping zones.

Most are disposed of  
Soon after they land,  
But a cunning few,  
Camouflaged in the longer grass,  
Dig themselves in and survive.

There will be three seasons' respite  
Before the 'Brown Devil' brigades  
Inevitably, strike again.

## **I Spent My Days Confined by Little Men**

Mike Boland

I spent my days confined by little men.  
Not by their inches do I measure them,  
nor is it lack of weight that I condemn.  
They do not care for things they do not ken,  
but mark their worth in status, goods or wealth.  
They may be surly, cheerful, kind or fools,  
they may rebel, or blindly follow rules,  
but each is deeply locked within himself  
and dull, dull horizons. They are so small!  
They cannot see there's more to know..Oh, Lord!  
If my mind, my visions ever shrink, call  
me back from sleep. I'd run upon a sword,  
tear myself apart. If I live at all,  
my soul must roam through regions high and broad.

## **PUB WITH NO TIME**

Ethel Corduff

Pubs were once like clubs,  
where friends could meet  
at leisure, and pass  
the time with pleasure.

But what a change has evolved.  
The Rose and Crown  
is now the Rat and Carrot,  
The prince of Wales transformed  
to the Bed of Nails.

The blaring noise, which passes for music,  
drowns any chance of conversation;  
the happy hour and two for one,  
encourages the young.

The problem now, is the likes of me,  
have abandoned these glitzy monstrosities.  
Supping at home,  
we miss the social tone.

Now what's in store?  
The twenty-four hour pub,  
calling time will be history.

## **H.M.S. VICTORY**

Terry Rickson

Tangled spars,  
the red stain spreading;  
my gunners, blackened by smoke,  
streaming sweat,  
still raised a loud huzza  
when the cry went up,  
"The French have struck!"

Ay, an end  
to roaring defiance all the day.  
Below, a man weeping silently  
for a dead companion;  
and poor Tom blown to smithereens.

## **Conjunction**

Mike Boland

Multi-coloured triangles form,  
create celestial spectacle.  
Mercury, Venus, Mars;  
Saturn, Jupiter, Moon.  
Signs of ill-omen,  
harbingers of change;  
so our ancestors would have thought.

'And us? We watch, awed,  
but struggle to apportion meaning  
to these sigils in the sky.  
The stars wheel silent on their course.  
Time, they whisper, Time answers all.

## **PEGASUS RISING**

Bill Torrie Douglas

Pegasus stirs, stamps the hard sand,  
eyes and nostrils flare, blood of Medusa pulses,  
muscles and wings flex, he stares towards heaven.  
Born of the fountain, nurtured by the Gods,  
Pegasus snorts impatiently, whilst bound to the earth.

Zhera lays her face into his ebony mane,  
her white silken robe pure against his midnight blackness,  
her eyes blue like sapphire, her beauty untouchable.  
With a jaunt of the head, she lets her tresses fall  
to his flanks, her laugh pitches into the night  
and jerking the rein, she releases the winged stallion  
on their quest for the unattainable grail.

Zhera whispers in his ear, the golden bridle tightens,  
Pegasus responds to the plea, clenches on the bit,  
and finally snaps them free from the bonds  
of the encompassed planet.  
Stars remain distant and beckoning,  
the grail concealed in the infinite and inviting void.

## **Morley Days**

Reminiscences of Morley College

Gordon E G Gompers

(Foreword by Nathaniel Curitas MA)

Review by Alan S Watts

I have known Gordon for a number of years during which time he has often spoken to me of his involvement with Morley College, and knowing of my interest in Emma Cons he even gave me a book on the founding of the college. So I was very pleased to read the typescript of these reminiscences and to agree to review them.

Many of them are very personal opinions, upon which I cannot comment, as I do not know the people concerned.

Mr Gompers has faithfully recorded the ups and downs of life at Morley College, including the time that the Tutor of the Public Speaking class fell off the dais when talking to a student at an award ceremony!

Mr Gompers entered the College in 1957 as a student, and progressed to become the Accredited Music Critic in 1972.

Having written articles for Hobbies Weekly; Meccano Magazine, The Lady, and other publications, he began writing for the Morley Magazine.

He reviewed many of the musical events held at the College during his time as critic, and writes of the strong musical traditions and the famous performers associated with Morley over the years.

Mr Gompers has interspersed his article with amusing anecdotes and verses.

Mr Gompers belongs to a breed of civil servant which is dying out and being replaced by products of schools of computer whizkids who talk a jargon incomprehensible to those of us who still recall reciting our tables. I doubt whether future generations will have much time for characters such as Mr Gompers with his endearing eccentricities. So we must be glad to be able to delight in them now, especially when, like Mr Wegg in 'Our Mutual Friend, he drops into poetry.

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

Beryl Jones

### Social Occasions

**A**s with most Societies there is usually a social side to their activities and the Society of Civil Service Authors was no exception. In the early days there were both Dinners and outings. The very first Dinner was held on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1937 at the Comedy 'Restaurant and the guests of honour on this inaugural occasion were, Sir Noel Curtis Bennett and Mr Humbert Wolfe. Unfortunately, due to the war, although there were a couple of informal dinners held at Soho restaurants in 1940 and 1942, the next formal dinner was not held until the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1946. This was at Frascati's Restaurant and amongst the guests of honour were Lady Vansittart, Ursula Bloom, James Laver and Louis Golding. In 1949 the Annual Dinner was held at the Criterion Restaurant in Picadilly and marked the first presentation of the Lord Vansittart Drama Trophy and was attended by over one hundred and twenty members and guests.

The cost of the dinner was 17/- per head and the guests of honour were Miss Pamela Hansford Johnson, Mr Clifford Bax and Mr Stephen Graham.

For the next twenty nine years (with breaks between 1951/1954 and 1957) Dinners were held at various restaurants around Central London, the most popular of which appeared to have been the Paviour's Arms, Westminster and the Eccleston Hotel, Victoria. These Annual Dinners were always well attended and the Guests of Honour read like the Who's Who of the literary, publishing and entertainment world. For instance, Christianna Prand whose book 'Green for Danger' was turned into a film, R.J.Minney (one of Charlie Chaplin's close friends) editor, author of 'Carve Her Name with Pride' and producer of the film 'The Wicked Lady' (which starred Margaret Lockwood and James Mason), and Dr.Jacob Bronowski (Director General of the National Coal Board) whose radio play 'The Face of Violence' won the Italia Prize; were all Guests of Honour in 19653.

This Dinner was held at the Phoenix Restaurant in Cavendish Square where guests dined on Cream of Tomato Soup, Roast Beef and Yorkshire Pudding and finishing off with Fruit Pie and Ice Cream. Incidentally the menu was the same for the following year, whilst the

main course for the next seven years at the Paviour's Arms was always Roast Chicken with Bacon.

Further distinguished guests included Lesley Storm (1951), Denise Robins (1952), Barbara Kelly (1954) Vera Britten and Wynford Vaughan Thomas (1965), Marguerite Steen (1967), Baroness Summerskill and John Creasey (1968), Margaret Drabble (1971), Sir Geoffrey Jackson, Dame Anna Neagle, Dame Rebecca West and Herbert Wilcox (1974) Charmian Innes and Sir John Hunt (1975) and Dr. Shirley Summerskill (1977).

The thirty fifth anniversary of the Society was celebrated in May 1970 and the Dinner for this occasion was held at the Paviour's Arms. Ninety two members and friends attended, the highest since 1949, and the distinguished guests were Mrs Muriel Box, His Honour Judge Henry Cecil Leon and Mr Maurice Edeleman M.P. In proposing the health of the Society, Muriel Box said that she had at long last discovered some connection between herself and the Civil Service. She qualified as a Civil Service Reject. Apparently the elderly gentlemen who had interviewed her considered that acting, dancing and a desire to write poetry 'were not quite suitable attributes for a position in the Civil Service'.

Prices for the Dinners had risen from 17/- per head in 1949 (although it only cost 9/6d in 1950 when the Dinner was held in the Civil Service Building in Burlington Gardens), but remained under £1 per head until 1952. However, there was then a gradual rise to 1972 when it was 35/- per head culminating in 1977 when it reached £5 per head and this, plus the cost of travel and hotel expenses, proved too expensive for many country members. Due to these rising costs the last annual Dinner was held on the 20th May 1979 at the Eccleston hotel when the guests of honour were Lord Gore-Booth, Judge Christmas Humphries and Dilys Powell.

To fill the gap it was decided to hold a Literary Luncheon the following year (1979). This was held on the 19th May and the Distinguished Guests on this occasion were Lord Boothby, Lord Snow (presiding), Muriel Box (now Lady Gardiner) Lord Gardiner (a former Lord Chancellor) and Mrs P.D. James (a Vice-President of the Society).

However the following year (1980) a 'Conversazione' was held instead of a Luncheon. This Conversazione (defined in the dictionary as a 'soiree held by a learned society' took place at Coram's Field, a unique

childrens' park and playing field in Bloomsbury. Charles Neilson Gattey (Chairman) told the guests that the building was on the site of a Foundling Hospital which had been founded in the 1740s by a Captain Coram a Merchant Sailor, and the original purpose of the hospital was to take in and care for abandoned children. By 1930 the Coram's Field Foundation (The Friends of Coram's Field of whom Arthur Burton-Stibbon was Chairman) assisted in child welfare on a world wide basis. Entertainment for the afternoon began with a graceful, traditional Chinese dance performed by Miss Li Hui Lin from Taiwan and was followed by a demonstration of flower arranging by Mrs Sheila Palmer. Mrs P.D.James (acclaimed by the Press as Agatha Christie's successor to the title Queen of Crime) proposed the vote of thanks.

In 1991 the Society reverted to the Literary Luncheon (held at the Paviour's Arms) to provide a more formal tone for an important presentation - namely the welcoming of a new President ~ Charles Neilson Gattey.

In the early days of the Society as well as Dinners and Luncheons, excursions were organised and theatre visits arranged. From 1948 to 1959 there were outings to Penshurst Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, Canterbury, Syon House, Ham House, Royal Maritime Museum, Oxford, Windsor Castle, Shaw's Corner, a trip on Regent's Canal, Hampton Court, four pre-Wren London Churches, Lambeth Palace, Lullingstone Silk Farm,; plus garden parties organised by various members of the Society. i.e. Mr & Mrs George Farley at Woking, Mr & Mrs Bowles at Walton-on-Thames and Sir George and Lady Rostrevor-Hamilton at Blackheath.

Theatre tickets could be purchased for half price for parties of eight or more but apparently come the night of the performance only four or five of the eight would turn up; which left the Social Secretary, Bertram Neyland, rushing around trying to bring the numbers up to requirements, often paying for the extra out of his own pocket. According to records, after doing this more than half a dozen times, Bertram gave up 'he should really have got payment for the tickets beforehand, but being a decent chap he never did'.

After 1959 the enthusiasm for visiting stately homes and the theatre seemed to have waned and after Bertram Neyland resigned in 1952, no one else was prepared to take on the job so this side of the Society's activities ceased.



## The Clog Factory

**T**errible, terrible pain in my head. Jaws aching, gums black, soft as liquorice, only eight teeth left, all loose. Boils on my neck and arms leaking a black-green pus that smells of mice. Frau Klopper warned us that suffering would fall like rain in the desert: hard as nails, swift as eels, bringing in its harvest overnight. She said the new factory was the devil's work. Said she heard the birds talking about it. She's mad of course, but sometimes we listen anyway. She still talks about the old times, when everyone went to the city to work and had wads of money and smart clothes and ate food out of packets that was all ready to eat. She used to work in the stock exchange she says. Whatever that is. I told you she was mad.

"What did the birds say, mother!" we laugh at the cracked old woman who sees apocalypse in a snowflake, cries murder! for every tree that falls in the forest. "Chirp chirp chirp! They were telling you to put in your teeth!" we throw a handful of peelings at the old hobbler, running her ragged halfway down the street. A rotten cabbage flies through the air and catches her on the shoulder. She trips and rolls into a puddle. Old Fizzle runs across and picks her up. Brushes her down with his little broom, gives her a penny, growls at us and shakes his fist. "Have some respect, you pair of gutter-crawlers! You don't go round knocking down old women in the street, not outside my shop, you don't;" We whistle and hoot and throw a mud-ball at him, then turn and run. Old Fizzle has beaten the backside off many a boy with that broom of his. Frau Klopper has scuttled into her hovel at the end of the alley, so the fun's gone anyway. Not that we don't believe in the Science of Signs and Wonders - of course we do. You'd be a fool not to. Ever since the world exploded all those years ago, we've nothing left to hang on to. It's just that Frau Klopper's so obviously insane and smells of fermented beetroot. Still, it seems that this once she got it right. Just when we thought things couldn't get any worse.

They came from the town and set up the factory. Brought their own workers. Built a razor-wire fence ten foot high to keep us out.

"Perfectly safe," they assured us, "we have to experiment. Be ready to fight back when the enemy next attacks."

"What do you make?" asked the Baron, the rest of us at his tails.

"Oh," the man in charge looked round at us, or rather, not at us, but above our heads, "clogs," he said, "we make clog's."

Then he closed the gate.

But then the plague worm crept into our village on its long thin belly and left two months later fat as a fig. It got to most of us one way or another, gnawing its way through every house in every street, even to the Baron's

mansion up beyond the mill. Frau. Klopper was one of the first to go, followed by the cobbler's infant, then Elise's boy, who was always sickly and had skin the colour of a forest moon. After that went old Herr Ghentschon, Tante Illiana, and then Herr Milchen's wife, who'd been so pregnant we all thought she would burst. Doctor Pinkeln sliced into her like a grapefruit and scooped out four tiny children, one of whom though plum-blue, shrieked like a shot rabbit and pummelled its way out of the bloody glair and made it into the world. He was smartly walloped on his little blue behind to shut him up and dragged off to Frau Gilpin's house because, having eleven children already, one more would hardly make a difference.

Doctor Pinkeln was enjoying himself immensely. Immediately one soul passed from this world into the next, its body was slapped onto the marble slab he had pilfered from the bakers, and had itself skinned from top to bottom, left to right, its innards, still warm, looped out and measured, steaming in bowls and buckets. He once told me that if you sewed all the veins in your body into one vast thread, you could throw it twice around the earth and end up where you started. Mind you, he also told me that not only is this world of ours spinning faster than a bobbin on a loom, but that the galaxy itself spins like a wheel, and is only one of many wheels all rolling through the blackness of space towards extinction. So, make of that what you will.

Throughout the whole Time of Illness, Pinkeln cut and hacked his way through the bodies of the dead, young and old, man or woman, uncovering their secrets, peeling away their skin, sawing through their skulls. Amazingly, even when he himself was sick and sweating, and all his teeth fell out, and his head hurt so much he swore he'd been struck by lightning, he carried on. And what's more, made me carry on as well. I was his assistant at the time, and the only one fit enough in his household to do more than crawl around making bowls of soup and cry.

"Keep active, boy, that's the secret. Force the blood to move around your body, make your heart do some work. Don't let it lie like a slug, for that is where our problems originate. From my studies of these unfortunates, I have determined that they have died from a lack of blood to the brain, or alternately, a surfeit. See this here , boy? Look closer! Closer, lad. They won't bite!"

I lean over the body of Frau Kemperer, which is the rather odd colour of carrots. I see dried crusts of serum and blood marking the sheets, following the lines of Doctor PinkeIn's knife.

"See?" he jabs into a mass of brain, and deep down in the folds I see a clot of blood, little strings spiralling out like the arms of a feather-star, waving its fronded arms in a pool.

After the plague had flushed through us like a dose of salts, we sent a few of the more presentable of us out to the nearby villages. We found we couldn't get through. There were road-blocks manned by people wearing white suits and brandishing guns. Some of us tried to sneak through the woods and out to Henseburg, but we were shot dead within the hour, the bodies rolled into foil sacks and dragged away. We rather kept to ourselves after that, and began to have our suspicions. Especially when the helicopter came over.

We had a meeting in the old church. Fizzle and the Doctor and anyone else over sixty explained what a helicopter was, talked about the old days when there were planes and trains and cars and computers. That was before the war of course, before the world was blown in two. The rest of us remembered nothing of this, although the Doctor still had a few books which had survived the winds and floods and ice and cold, and there were surely some strange things in there.

"You can bet your back teeth it's the military again," said Old Fizzle. "We don't have any back teeth!" shouted Juan-Paulo. Everyone laughed and began stamping their feet. Pinkeln stood up and raised his arms.

"Laugh, laugh! It's good for the heart! But let me tell you this - I remember the old days, and I remember no illness like this. It is not a natural illness. It has too many symptoms. It is too localised. I blame The Factory."

This was what we wanted to hear, what we all believed to be true. We all started shouting at once. We piled through the back doors and stamped out over the frozen earth and stood outside The Factory. We rattled the ring-fence, we yelled, we threw our hats over the razor-wire. The Baron even went to the part of the fence that looked like a gate and posted a hastily scribbled letter of protest through the holes. The windows remained dark and blank. 'Mere was no one to be seen. Not even a trickle of smoke leaving the chimney.

After half an hour, our feet began to freeze and we all went home. After all, where else could we go?

The Baron built a small hospital in the back of Joris's apple barn, and purchased the baker's slab of which the Doctor had been so fond. The plague hasn't returned but we still get boils and bad gums and other ailments that linger. Uberto no longer recognises his wife, and Sisel can't tell an apple from an orange. Henrik sees the world in shades of grey. We are still trying to find a cure and the instant one of us quits his mortal coil it's off to the slab to be sliced, which puts one off dying rather, so we try to hang on as long as we can. I myself have reached the ripe old age of fifty-six and am Doctor-in-Chief. I do not have many contemporaries, for it seems we die younger these days.

We were right about The Factory. Or at least that is the only thing that makes sense. Every few months a helicopter lands in front of the apple barn. Several men in white suits leap out, barge their way through the doors of my surgery and demand the recent samples I have taken. Occasionally they'll take a body with them. At first I objected strongly, tried to bar their way. Oppi, Uberto's boy and my assistant, got a pistol shot through the head. So now, I do as they ask. Occasionally they leave me medical supplies, and I have persuaded them to drop certain essentials off in the village - things we cannot grow or make ourselves. For we are still not allowed to leave. The old rats-in-a-cage adage comes to mind. Our contribution to the war effort. Although I wonder sometimes if there is still a war going on out there. Or if indeed, out there, there is still a world.

Johann, one of the Baron's boys, is hatching a plan.

"We should take the helicopter hostage!" he is young and excitable, "tie up the others, capture the pilot, force him to fly us out of here!" "We could hit them over the head with pieces of wood as they come into the apple barn!"

"We could use cheese-wire to throttle the first and threaten the rest!"

"We could use sexy Cecelia to throw them off guard!"

"Unless they're women. ..."

"Then we'll use Boris. He's far too pretty to be a boy anyway...."

A few of us agree, and whisper insane conspiracies, but mostly we just shrug our shoulders and say, "And you think they would actually let us go? They sacrificed a whole village - our village - you think they would blink about blowing up a helicopter?"

Besides, there are worse things. Or I'm guessing there are. We are like nits in a nest here. High up in the tree. Alone. But at least we're alive.

And then one night, we hear the sound of a truck. Once we've explained what a truck is, we all pile out of the village and onto the road. It's not really a road anymore because it doesn't get used, so the grass has grown up and the last of the tarmac has been ruined by ragwort and mushrooms. We're still wearing our dressing-gowns and slippers, whispering, jostling one another.

Aghast, we watch in silence as the lights go back on in the factory.

I hear bats.

I hear shuffling, slippered feet.

I hear Frau Klopper whispering to me in the dark.

So, it's the end of the world after all. At least, the end of ours.

## One of Those Days

'Sceptic'

Only the plants and I know that the world has gone mad, I try to tell the doctors but they will not listen. They are too impatient, too busy.

Time passes quickly here in the hospital; a rapid series of events; nurse, thermometer, tea, pills, meals on trays, nurse, baths, doctors, blood tests, injections, visitors. John, my partner, drops in every day. But he does not stay long. Nobody stays long. They are all so hard-pressed, rushed off their feet. I alone have leisure to gaze through my window, to reflect on the clouds forming and reforming their montages in the sky, the buds opening on the branches. I have nothing to do but watch and dream, yet the days go so fast. No sooner has morning daylight advanced into my room, than it is retreating again. I have no clock but I do not need one.

It was the clock that woke me that day - the day it happened. I believe it was the clock. It sounded as though a mosquito was buzzing my ear. I feared that my heart was racing but soon I detected another slower beat, regular and reassuring, and dared to open my eyes. The clock was right by my face. I stretched for the off switch but it did not respond. I pressed again. Still it shrilled. It registered twenty past seven - but only briefly. It moved steadily on to the half hour. It was going much too fast.

At first I thought I had confused the minute and second hands but then remembered that our cheap little alarm does not register seconds. I started to count. By the time I reached fifty the minute hand was at the eight and as I intoned one hundred it touched the nine. All the time it kept up a high-pitched ululation, thinner than its usual ring.

At last my sleepy brain grasped the situation. I realised that the alarm was stuck and the clock was racing. At that moment the bedroom door burst open and John charged in. I thought he was going to throw the tea over me but, despite his speed, he managed to place the mug, unspilt, on the bedside table.

"What's happened to the clock?" I started to ask.

But, before I could get the question out, he gabbled something incomprehensible and ran from the room. A moment later I heard the outer door shut and knew I was alone in the flat.

He must have overslept on account of the clock's misbehaviour. That meant I would be late too. What a nuisance, particularly after that disagreement with my boss. Now he would feel justified in his decision

not to give me a raise. I could picture his smug expression when I arrived in nice time for tea break.

I decided that I wouldn't give him the satisfaction. If I had missed my bus, I would telephone with an excuse - stomach upset perhaps - and treat myself to a day's truancy. I salved my conscience by reasoning that I probably was suffering from exhaustion after all the extra work I had done -for him that had gone unrewarded. Anyhow it might not come to that. With luck I would still catch the bus and, if not, I would find a taxi to get me there on time.

I dressed quickly, went into the living room and switched on the radio. But it was no longer tuned in. All I could get was a high-pitched jabber in some foreign language. This was going to be one of those days.

Not wanting to waste more time, I switched the radio off and went out. The lift, for once, was on our floor. As I pressed 'G' for ground it dropped like a stone, heaving my stomach into my mouth. It was terrifying. I stumbled out at the bottom, leant against the wall and burst into tears. I felt so shaken, I was ready to give up. The 'tummy upset' story was now coming true. But, after a while, I began to feel better. Telling myself not to be feeble, I pushed through the glass doors into the sunshine.

The path between the tower blocks was ominously deserted, the morning rush to work clearly over. There was no point in hurrying now but I thought that I might as well carry on to the High Street, where I could check the Post Office clock and use the public phone box for my untruthful call,

I began to relax a little. It was a glorious day. The roses smelt like - well like roses - and the clear light gave an illusion that one could actually watch the petals opening. By the time I reached the High Street my mood was as sunny as the morning.

But I turned the corner into another world - a hectic, nightmare world. Cars were racing up and down at about a hundred miles an hour, screeching to a stop then revving up again immediately. Pedestrians scurried about the pavements like ants. The traffic lights on my corner flashed from red to green and back again every second. No sane person would dare cross that road yet people actually were making suicide attempts against those madly fluctuating lights. It was horrible. Was I going mad or what? I backed against a building and shut my eyes, hoping it was all some optical illusion.

I opened them again to see Mr Clark from the flat below, crossing towards me on his crutches, with a weird, ungainly action. He was moving at an impressive speed but all the same he would surely be mown down in the rush of traffic. I ran to help him but he somehow reached the kerb before me. He flashed a smile.

"Hallo, my dear, not at work today?"

Mr Clark usually drawls his words in a painful wheeze but this morning his speech was brisk.

"Are you coming my way?" he rattled.

Knowing, from past experience, that it took the poor old chap a good hour to cover the distance back to our tower block, my first reaction was relief that I was going in the other direction. But another glance at the bedlam in the High Street changed my mind. No way could I face that chaos. The very sight made me feel ill again.

The old man's irksome slowness seemed comforting by contrast. It would be safe and pleasant to wander home through the rose beds, enjoying the sunshine in his company. I prepared to adjust my steps to his. But far from slowing down to Mr Clark's pace, I found that I had to speed up. In fact I developed a stitch in my side jogging to keep up with him.

"Please, Mr Clark, not so fast!"

He stopped and turned towards me, staring in concern.

'My dear, are you ill?'

"-I'm fine ..." I protested, but with a sudden movement, he pushed me onto a bench at the side of the path.

"You rest there! I'll get help."

Before I could stop him, he galloped off on his crutches and within moments rounded the corner out of sight. I felt foolish sitting there, gasping for breath, while a crippled old man took charge of me.

I buried my face in my hands. What was happening? The whole morning had been so weird. There was no explanation. It was easier not to think about it. Perhaps I was ill but I did not want a load of ambulance people fussing round me. All I wanted was to be quiet and alone. I had better get home.

As I stood up, my eye caught a movement on the periphery of my vision, something on the path to my left. It was a snail, its yellow and black spiral shell pretty in the sunshine - to all appearances an ordinary

little field snail - but it was steaming along at a pace that would have done credit to a beetle. I could see its muscles rippling with the effort, I had never thought about it before but now I realised that snails do not slither or slide but hump themselves along. It looked like hard work. This revelation distracted me from my predicament for a moment, but as it manoeuvred itself past my feet, leaving a silver trail, a realisation came to me.

The more I thought about it, the more it made sense. Each odd event of that odd day fitted my theory in a perverted sort of way. I looked up at the sun. Sure enough it was far lower in the sky than I would have expected. If I watched closely I could actually see it creeping westward toward the spire of St. Martin's.

I knew then that I was right. It was as I thought. The whole world, indeed the whole universe, had speeded up. Everything was running on fast forward; clocks, radios, lifts, roses, traffic lights, snails, even people apparently – everyone but me. I needed time to think. I knew I must get home but suddenly the ambulance men were upon me.

I tried to tell the doctors but they would not listen. They were too impatient, too busy. All they would do was gibber on about my amazingly slow metabolism.

Time passes quickly here in the hospital; a rapid series of events; nurse, thermometer, tea, pills, meals on trays, nurse, baths, doctors, blood tests, injections, visitors. John drops in occasionally. He never stays long. Nobody stays long. They are all so hard-pressed, all rushed off their feet. I alone have leisure to gaze through my window, to reflect on the clouds forming and reforming their montages in the sky, the buds opening on the branches. I have nothing to do but watch and dream, yet the days go so fast. No sooner has morning daylight advanced into my room, than it is retreating again. I have no clock but I do not need one.

Time seems unimportant. The plants are my best friends now - the trees outside my window, the flowers beside my bed. They stretch out their little green tendrils to the first light, Their petals yawn at the morning. All their movements are graceful. Their leaves unfurl methodically from their muscular centre, bend themselves outwards then curl carefully back. The tendrils move in to protect the stems. The petals close. And they wail their tuneful dirge, their song of sorrow. Sometimes I sing along with them. Only the plants and I know that the world has gone mad.