

The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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Diary

Annual Luncheon

18th October 2008

The W.F and F.G Froud Annual

Children's Story Competition 2008

31st October 2008

DATA PROTECTION ACT

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

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in the SCPSW Author are those of the contributors and are not necessarily those of the Editor or of the Society.

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Editorial

Adrian Danson

Though sending information by electronic means has advantages, one disadvantage is that words can inadvertently move. In our Summer Author Ethel Corduff's name should have appeared below "Another Member's Success", but migrated to my "Members' Successes" report. Although I did attempt to write a review of Leslie Wilkie's Golden Gnome, I concluded that it was not really good enough to publish (my review that is, not the book). Others have now read it and I hope an appropriate review will be published in the near future.

Sometimes when I feel sorry for myself I think of some of our members who have far greater crosses to bear, everything from death or illness of a loved one to domestic violence. It puts my minor health problems into perspective. The one thing we all have in common is a desire to write. Not only does this activity help to ease our pain, it also provided an opportunity to create a fictional world where everything comes right in the end. Never mind that this is a form of escapism, like religion it can provide the light of hope to illuminate our darkness.

You may wonder what such a view is doing in the editorial. I excuse it by suggesting that those who have sorrow in their lives, take up their pen and write a story or poem and create something. I am sure this will help and may well give others pleasure, who knows perhaps it will win one of our competitions. If you are more fortunate, spare a thought for those who are not and write a story or poem in which the unfortunate find solace and happiness.

Details of the 2008 Froud Memorial Competition on a later page. You will note that it allows entry to those who are not members, as it is Roy Froud's hope that this will attract new members and in this we need your support. If you are able to copy the details and pass this to anyone you know who may be interested, this would be most helpful. Good luck with your own entries.

The post mark on the envelope sent by Ron Jeffreys says 26th June, so why did poems, short stories, etc., arrive through my letterbox in mid August. I didn't see it arrive so I don't know if it was the postman, or some kind neighbour who sat on it for a few weeks. Anyway, it has certainly caused me a problem that I will do my best to remedy by not going to bed for the next few days.

Chairman's Chat

Terry Rickson

Wilfred Owen

Poet - 1893 - 1918

Wilfred Owen was killed on 4th November, 1918, when a platoon of the Manchester Regiment he was leading, came under heavy enemy fire whilst crossing the Sambre-Oise Canal in Northern France.

At the time of his death, Owen, now a recognised poet, was preparing a collection of his poems for publication, subsequently delayed until after the hostilities ended.

It was not war that made Owen a poet; he made war the subject of his poetry. His own words taken from the draft Preface to his war poems, reflect this, 'My subject is war and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the Pity.' There was the anger, of course, expressed by a lot of his contemporaries, at the way the public at home was deceived by the politicians and the jingoistic propaganda of the popular press. Many of Owen's poems exhibit the compassion he felt for his fellow soldiers, fully aware of the dangers and difficulties they all shared.

Owen had shown keen literary interest when at school. He admired Keats, which was reflected in his early work. The greatest influence on his writing and eventual maturity as a poet, was meeting Siegfried Sassoon when they were both patients at the Craig Lockhart Hospital near Edinburgh. Owen had been sent to the hospital suffering from severe shell-shock. He recovered eventually and returned to active service on the Western Front. Two of his most well-known 'Craig Lockhart' poems are, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' and 'Dolce Et Decorum Est,' the latter a biting attack on hypocritical patriotism.

The first edition of Owen's poems, with an introduction by Sassoon, was published in 1920, confirming his reputation as the finest of the War Poets. Edmund Blunden compiled an edition of fifty-nine of Owen's poems in 1931 and later, C. Day-Lewis edited a collection in 1963. Owen's legacy lived on to influence writers such as Keith Douglas and other poets of the Second World War.

Wilfred Owen's parents in Shrewsbury received the news of his death on 11th November, 1918, as the church bells were ringing to celebrate the signing of the Armistice.

SCPSW Annual General Meeting
Saturday 31st May 2008 Civil Service Club 1.30 pm

Present Terry Rickson (Chair) Beryl Jones, Ethel Corduff, Joan Lewis, Roy Froud, Nina Matter, Val Whitmarsh, Michael Smith, Shafi Ahmed.

1. Apologies Alan Watts, Jenny Chamier Grove, Ron Jeffteys, Adrian Danson and Betty Griffin.

2. Minutes of last Annual General Meeting were read and agreed.

3. Matters arising from minutes. Ethel visited Vee Bradley in February. She was more settled in her new nursing home. Sadly Terry Austin, our new committee member, has died since our last meeting.

4. Membership Secretary's Report:

Recruitment has been slow this year I've no evidence of any response to publicity so far. I've enrolled nine new members since our meeting in January. Sources quoted were 'The Writers Handbook, 'The New Writer,' Writers Forum, 'Writers News' and 'Leisure Scene' as well as word of mouth. This would indicate that we pick up more interest from writing magazines than from Civil Service departmental magazines. Our current membership stands at 133. I should expect to pick up some new people from the retirement age group, once publicity goes out.

5. Meeting Secretary's Report:

I have had no response to my article in October re meetings in other parts of the country. So cannot go ahead without a response. New Year's Party very successful. Next year I will be going on a Caribbean Cruise on the 31st January so if agreeable the party will have to be earlier. I can arrange a workshop in November in St. Vincent's Centre for members to bring along any work The Annual Lunch is arranged for 18th October, earlier this year as dining room is already, booked for end of October. In process of putting our website on links i.e. NHS retirement Fellowship, Civil Service Fellowship, CSIS (Civil Service Insurance Society).

Years ago Joan had response from only seven members for a literary weekend which was not viable due to the cost of speakers and venues.

6. Treasurers Report (see annual statement):

Gordon's money earning good interest of £12.07. Income slightly up on last year though members down. No cheques bounced or anything like that. £1,800 in kitty. Donations pay competition prize money £150. We are solvent. Magazine costs £550 a quarter. There were a lot of reminders. Discussion then took place- Joan said publisher charges flat fee for the

publication. Michael. Smith mentioned having magazine on line. Ethel said if we publish it ourselves we could consider it on line for those who want it. (It is already available to anyone who asks me for such – Ed). Roy Froud queried some items on Annual Accounts all of which Beryl explained. Competition prizes had to be cut due to less income. Gordon's money is ring fenced.

7. Publicity Officers Report:

No news on the publicity front I am afraid. I have been making notes about magazines and trade unions to contact them in order to include members of police forces, NHS workers and state school teachers in my publicity list, but when I approach them for the first time I'd like to have something big to publicise. At the moment I think of this as been the annual comps which I like doing on or before 1st September I do hope last years efforts brought in more entries. I read the minutes with interest and couldn't help thinking it might be better to make joining the SCPSW a necessary condition of entering all competitions. What do you think? Sorry not to be able to attend meeting. Joan is sending letter to Writers News about so much information left out when we send in details of competition. They do it free so can't complain too much- Joan said when stuff went out about comps especially annual competitions there are loads of queries that require reply, postage too expensive.

8 Editors Report:

My thanks to all who have assisted in the production of Author by contributing their time and work, without which our magazine would not exist. I regret that my plans to take on the publishing of Author have continued to be thwarted by other commitments, not least of which has been the continuing consequence of moving house. Though it remains my desire, I cannot realistically say that it will come to fruition without a major change in my circumstances, but hope springs eternal..... Although our post office seems to have lost several items that were sent to me. I have been fortunate enough to receive many contributions from our members and I hope they have enjoyed seeing themselves in print It has also been my great pleasure to record the successful publication of several members works, which will surely encourage the rest of us. I would like to thank Terry James and those poets who have assisted him, by providing their work for inclusion in Author as this helps to support our objective of membership involvement in all forms of creative writing. I hope Terry will not lack their continued contributions and also I hope such will be offered by poets who have not recently done so.

9. Competition Secretary's report:

Competition entries for annual competitions Vincent Brennan - 5 Lewis Wright -17 Herbert Spencer -23 George Farley - 18 Val Whitmarsh judged the Lewis Wright short story competition. She said the majority did not follow rules re wordage or presentation. For instance an article of only 600 words rather not using full word allowance and using single spacing on both sides of paper instead of double spacing on one side of paper. Val suggested articles in 'Author' on presentation to professional standard. Angus Livingstone judged the Herbert Spencer poetry competition. Awaiting entries for Gordon Gompers Article Competition - theme 'Markets'. Val suggested an article for a particular magazine might be suitable for the competition next time. It was mentioned some people write for pleasure rather than money.

10. Poetry Workshop Report:

This year's Annual Poetry Workshop Weekend was held at a new venue, the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Selly Oak., Birmingham between 27th and 29th July. The accommodation was comfortable and the grounds around the centre were pleasant and appreciated by members for relaxing walks. The usual good mix of reading, talks, discussions and competition were enjoyed by those attending The winner of the Mini Competition, inspired by Duke Ellington's 'Diminuendo' and 'Crescendo in Blue' was Nina Matter with 'Self'. The runner-up was Ivy's Rudson's 'Crescendo in Black Pepper'. Both of these poems were published in the winter edition of 'Wavelengths'.

A new venture this year was a Poetry Workshop 'Open Day' held at the London Canal Museum, Camden on 12th May. The number who attended was small but it turned out to be a stimulating occasion with readings and 'workshop-ing' plus a performance piece about hats, written by one of the members.

The Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition was judged by Muriel Stammers, the winning poem by Andrew Millican. 'The Neighbour known as Judas' was published in the autumn edition of 'Author' along with the two poems awarded joint second prize.

The Bill Barnes Poetry competition attracted a good number of entries this year; it was judged by Adrian Green. The winner was Alison Michell with 'Cross my Palm' and second and third place went to Sonia Royal's 'Hat' and 'Cassandra' by Sylvia Neumann. These poems will be published in the spring edition of 'Wavelengths' in 2008. The annual Collection," Waves" was published in July with another cover provided by Joanna Crawford.

The workshop's own magazine 'Wavelengths' continues to flourish providing news, articles, poems, and items of interest to members. For the past year or so the magazine has also published the talks given at the Workshop Weekend.

Terry James continues to act as the Poetry Pages Editor for 'The Author' and members are regularly encouraged to send him poems for consideration to be published in the journal.

One of four long-serving members and frequent visitor to the Society's Annual Lunch, Roger De Boer, underwent major surgery during the year; he is now making steady progress towards a recovery and showing great determination.

The Poetry postal folios continue to flourish and new contributors are always to be welcomed.

Liz Rowland, Mike Boland and Terry Rickson were re-elected to serve another year as Chairman/ Waves Editor, Secretary, 'Wavelengths' editor and Treasurer respectively.

The subscription remained at £3 or a further year. It is planned to hold the 2008 weekend at Selly Oak again in July 2008. Some 61 members of the society also subscribed to the Poetry Workshop.

11. Annual lunch:

Will be on Saturday 18th October. Menu decided. Ethel to work out price. Last year was £24. Speaker to be arranged. (Since meeting Jean Bowden, who writes under the name Tessa Barclay, has agreed to talk. She is a prolific Author and president of Croydon Writers).

12 Writer of the year:

At present the committee is reading publications re making decision on this.

13. W.F & F.G Froud Competition 2008:

Children's short story competition ages 6-9. Roy wants the competition to be called the 'The W. F. and F. G. Froud Annual Children's Story Competition'. Closing date 31st October. Max. 2,000 words. (Roy has found a judge since meeting).

14. Election of President and Vice Presidents:

Re-elected -Proposed by Joan Lewis and seconded by Terry Rickson

15. Election of committee:

Chairman Terry Rickson and all officers re-elected.

Members' Successes

I quote the following from Angela Pickering, verbatim as it shows the pleasure of her success and I am sure you all join me in wishing that this continues. A sample of her work is included in this issue.

"I have been doing rather well lately in the short story market, having had pieces accepted by 'Yours', 'Take A Break', 'Woman's Weekly', 'My Weekly', 'The People's Friend' and 'The Weekly News'. I am writing like mad and still enjoying it too

Market Information

Ethel Corduff - Based on contributions by the late Gordon Gompers

Are you interested in the Arts particularly stage and screen? Then there are several publications you can write for. Gordon was very keen on theatre and music, particularly local musical societies. He frequently did a critique for the local paper. Though the only payment might be a complimentary ticket it is an avenue worth going down and having an entertaining evening as well. Why not approach your local paper about going to review a forthcoming production or taking pot luck and doing a review of a recent show you have seen and sending it off. Gordon became so knowledgeable about audio that he became chief contributor on audio topics for 'Amateur Stage'. This is the only national periodical devoted exclusively to the amateur theatre. If you have a particular love for instance in dance why not spend time developing it by reading some specialist magazines and seeing some dance shows and write about an unusual aspect of it. There are a number of arts publications, many of which you can peruse in your local library. Here is some up to date information on some of them.

Amateur Stage

Regular features include 'The Play produced', 'The Musical produced' Reviews of new plays, theatre and books. A sample copy can be obtained contact email magazine@acutheatre.co.uk or Editor Mark Thorburn, Hamden House, 2 Weymouth St., London W1W 5BT,

Critical Quarterly

Renowned for literary criticism, cultural studies, poetry and fiction, welcomes submissions from new researchers and writers. Magazine includes a critical essay of 1,000-3000 words to criticism@gmail.com and poetry to cqpoetry@ginail.com or by post to Editor- Colin McCabe, Critical Quarterly, Newbury. Crediton Devon EX 1 75HA

The Yellow Nib

Literary journal of the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry showcases the best in cultural and creative writing -poetry, essays and short stories from new and well

established artists. Published every October.

Check website www.blackstaffpress.com and plan for next year.

The Organ Magazine

Quarterly magazine includes well illustrated articles on new and historic instruments worldwide, personalities, organists and composers, reviews of concerts, recording and new music. Why not send for a free copy to study -contact subscriptions@theorganmag.com Perhaps there is an interesting organ in your locality that the Organ would like to feature. Items for publication contact editor@theorganmag.com Editor The Organ, Principal Office, The College of St. Mark and St. John, Derrisford Road, Plymouth PL6 8Bh

Apollo

Monthly International magazine for collectors. One of the world's oldest and respected magazines on the visual arts. Covers everything from antiquities to contemporary work. Specialist articles in art, antiques, exhibitions, book reviews. Unsolicited manuscript welcome. Contact editorial@apollomag.com, Editor-michael@apollo.com, Michael Hall Editor Apollo, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP

Flair for Words – ‘You’ve got to have a dream’

I'm just joining the above, a service run by Cass and Janie Jackson. For an annual fee of twenty pounds one receives Flair News, the official journal published six times a year. Cass and Janie launched the service in 1988 and were well known to the Society at that time. In 1993 they acted as judges for one of our annual competitions. They are writers and teachers, with lots of experience.

One may seek advice on any writing problem six times a year and also have a free critique of one piece of work (up to 3000) words in each year of membership. There is a competition in each issue, plus articles and reviews, and a successes page.

The journal seems to me to be manageable – good as some other Writing glossies are, the subs are expensive and I never found time to read them all.

Joan Lewis

Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

The W.F and F.G Froud Annual Children's Story Competition 2008

Short Story for Children aged 6-9

Open to all; up to 2000 words

Prize: **£150 (£100, £30 and £20)** and publication in our magazine 'Author'

Entry fee £5 (£3 for members) those who join the SCPSW this year £2 will be refunded

Results will be posted to website: www.scpsw.co.uk

No entry form required. Please enclose SAE for return of entry and results

Closing date 31 October 2008

(One entry per person)

Entries to be typed, double spaced, on one side of A4. Only pen name, word count and page numbers should be given on manuscript. Name, address and pen name should be recorded on a separate sheet and entries sent to: Competition Secretary, R.C. Jeffreys, 186 Lewis Flats, Lisgar Terrace, London W14 8SQ

Cheques should be made payable to SCPSW. Competition is open to all and entrants who are interested in and eligible for membership i.e. serving or retired members of The Civil Service, Armed Forces, National Health Service, Local Government or any other Public Service, should send an SAE for details to: Joan Lewis, 17 The Green, Corby Glen, Grantham NG33 4NP for details or email joan@lewis5634.fsnet.co.uk

The Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition 2008

Judged by Angus Livingstone, whose report now follows:

I suppose there are four basic aspects to a poem: the subject; the poet; the poem; and the reader. However, there is sometimes a fifth aspect - a sort of black box which contains nebulous items such as: the gap between what the poet intended and what was achieved; what can be read 'between the lines'; the interpretation of metaphorical imagery; and further levels of meaning. Note that all of these items encourage brevity whereas the lack of them tends towards overwriting, one of the biggest faults in poetry and the hardest one for us to correct. Two good, short examples of the type of poem I like are Edwin Muir's *Merlin* and Robert Frost's *Nothing Gold Can Stay*

So, in addition to considering the usual qualities, these thoughts influenced my adjudication of the twenty entries. Thanks to everyone who took part. Competitions help to bump the society round its annual circuit.

My first prize, *Pits* certainly conjured up strong feelings without stating them explicitly - such as feelings of alienation, lack of contact, of a medieval inferno almost. Even the title contributed to the effect. I also sensed that the observer was aware of an uncomfortable ambivalence in his or her own position as observer, verging on the voyeuristic. The poem also painted a good mental picture of the town using just a few well-chosen words. Congratulations to the winner.

My second prize, *off Guinea 1807* is a powerful sonnet of man's inhumanity to man, written with real emotion. Every line of it carries a punch and the poem made a lasting impression with me.

To be commended on my final shortlist were: *On a Truckle Bed*, *Sunbather and Watermelon*, and *In the Hall*.

Poetry Workshop

Mike Boland

Chairman: Liz Rowlands, 19 Arkley Court, Maidenhead, SL6 2YR

Treasurer: Terry Rickson, 48 Marlborough Road, Ashford, TW15 3QA

Secretary: Mike Boland, 11 Boxtree Lane, Harrow Weald, HA3 6JU

Poetry Workshop Weekend

By the time this article appears in “The Author”, the Poetry Workshop will have held its annual Weekend in Birmingham. A report on how the Weekend went features in the autumn issue of “wavelengths”.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Poetry Workshop was held during the Birmingham Weekend. The Statement of Proceedings will appear in “wavelengths”.

Bill Barnes Competition 2008

The closing date for this annual poetry competition exclusive for PW members is 30 September. Rules of Entry appeared in the summer issue of “wavelengths” and will be repeated in the new autumn issue. Enid Zaig is the judge for this year’s competition which, in accordance with our alternating policy, is for poems that rhyme.

Waves 2008

Official publication of this year’s edition of ‘Waves’, the annual anthology of PW members’ work, was scheduled to take place at the Birmingham Weekend. Full details of how to obtain copies will be given in the autumn issue of ‘wavelengths’, on this page in the winter issue of ‘The Author’ and on the Poetry Workshop website (see below for address).

Poems

Don’t forget that Poetry Workshop members have several outlets for their work. There is “The Author” of course, and the Poetry Pages edited by Terry James, which everyone is encouraged to support. Then there is “wavelengths” - poems to Mike Boland (guide for contributors given in each issue of “wavelengths”), and “Waves”, our annual anthology. Rules for submitting poems to the latter publication will appear in the winter issue of “wavelengths”.

Wavelengths #16

The autumn issue of the Poetry Workshop's own magazine, free to all members, will include the text of one of the talks given at Birmingham; poems from members; a report of the Weekend; minutes of the AGM; a letters page; and the PW Newsletter. There are four issues of "wavelengths" a year, each issue containing at least twenty pages. If you are not a member of the Poetry Workshop, you will not receive this lively magazine, so why not join the PW now?

Membership

If you are interested in joining the Poetry Workshop, please contact **Terry Rickson**, whose address appears above. He will be pleased to provide you with further details.

The cost of membership is £3 for members of the Society of Civil & Public Service Writers. Cheques or postal orders are acceptable, but please remember to make out your cheques correctly: they should be made payable to **SCPSW Poetry Workshop Account**.

Membership of the Poetry Workshop provides:

- four issues of our magazine **wavelengths** each year - contributions of poems and articles on poetry are welcomed from PW members
- 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.

Poetry Workshop Web-site

The Poetry Workshop has its own website. Visit us on:

<http://poetryworkshop.mysite.orange.co.uk>

Dates to Remember

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| September 2008 | publication of wavelengths # 16 |
| 30 September 2008 | closing date for entries to the Bill Barnes Competition 2008 |
| 1 November 2008 | deadline for wavelengths # 17 |
| December 2008 | publication of wavelengths # 17 |
| 1 January 2009 | PW subscriptions due. |

Poetry Pages

Edited by Terry James

Death Wish

Norman Bissett

Elderly, bearded, turbaned,
the rancid Ayatollah
calls for unceasing

Jihad, his audience
adolescent boys with
red martyrs' bands

around their foreheads.
Old Father Time,
dragging his scythe.

Angel (of the North)

Phil Ireland

In the evening's silhouette sunlight
An Angel stands
Wings stretched from wide to wide,
Rust-crusting in honour of her magnificent spirit.

Stand. Naked. Open. Protector.
Bid farewell to your children
As they career away to their chosen foreign parts,
Tear-strewn and happy, to remember your face.

Open-armed, in spirit of welcome
Bringing your children back
From places of happiness-sadness memories
To the places belonging to the heart.

Spirit of childhood, adulthood and all other ages;
Spirit of industry, spirit of memory
Raised to remember and remind
In sanctifying summation of all that is of her people, no matter where they bring
that remembrance to mind.
Working. Work. Worked.
Glorious in the history that bares her
And the future that brings her to fruition.

NICE ONE!

Promotion - or Bust!

Fred Jeffery

You're a spirit, free and easy, driving fast along the lane, Open top and bright and breezy, let it rip and let it rain. As a woman, never flustered, you passed all exams, no strife.

But your rival, stupid custard, you betrayed to loving wife.

When you're top, though men will hate you, you will make them toe the line,

To salute, congratulate you, bring best wishes and best wine.

You have snogged the boss (no hermit), spread your favours like a slag.

Though the Chief Con must confirm it, "Traffic-Super's in the bag."

Now, back home your hubby's waiting with the County's upper crust, And soon you'll be celebrating with the best - or so you trust. Full of joy and gin, you're racing, nearing home you feel sublime.

But another car is facing - and you cannot stop in time!

Can your driving save disaster? You hit brakes but hit the dirt.

If he had been going faster more than your pride would be hurt.

Then a man who doubts fast ladies makes you blow into a bag;

For you've piled your blue Mercedes in the police chief's brand new Jag.

I, the Forest

Mike Boland

The Forest breathed;
a moist green breath,
its soft caress
contained a primal trace
of wilderness.

The Forest rolled;
a living sea, breaking free
to clash in verdant surf
against the cliff-like hill
peninsularing me.

The trees stretched like an ocean.
Oak, ash and beech; a swaying motion,
timber threshed against the sky.

Thoughts swell like the restless sea,
sounding, shifting endlessly;
their patterns ebb and flow in waves.

Mine took on a rhythmic surge,
that filled me with a strange, strange urge
to plunge in those arboreal deeps

so I could merge in harmony
within that ancient entity,
earthed in dark fecundity.

The Forest sighed;
wind-thrown leaves leapt
on the breeze like spray,
salt-tainted, from
off the tide.

The Forest called;
I answered, diving down the hill,
drowned in greenness, rooted.
Still we stand,
the trees and I.

Hot Breath at the January Sales

Fred Jeffery

Urging, merging, soon converging on the road to town.

Hobbling, squabbling, cyclists wobbling: drivers fret and frown.

All competing, self-defeating - parking places all closed down.

Shop staff waiting: posters stating 'Sales will start at Nine'.

Done, the stocking; soon unlocking; things are looking fine.

Now they're queuing: charge ensuing when the doors release the line.

Buses, fusses, cab men cusses, traffic queues soon form.

Milling, spilling, shop bags filling. "Buying keeps you warm."

Not surprising, hot breath rising, as assistants stem the swarm.

Hustling, rustling, barging, bustling on the bargain scent.

Fending, spending, weaving, wending; at the sales intent.

Few shop sanely (most inanely) - and their savings soon are spent.

Task completed, shops depleted (wraps and packs remain), Husbands goaded,
overloaded, trudging home again. Bargains heeded, most not needed. Next
year's cash we'll spend in Spain.

Long gone, John

Phil Ireland

Standing on the quay,
Just arrived from Birkenhead.
Ticket in me hand –
Come to see the Liver birds
And Lennon's mystic land.

Strutting out,
Tramping through the streets
To stand
Looking -

A great big kid. Putty in your songs, they said.
Me.
A generation.
Reading.
Ingesting in jest
Just as you would have done.
From above The copper bronze madonna looks down –
Freezing time –
And keeping the city's sons safe
- Save the one that flew away.

And yes, I can imagine, John
That almost I hear you playing
In the car park where you were –
Strumming to the gentle beat
Of the railway trains beneath our feet.

The bridges still remain –
But the walls?
The walls are long gone, John.

In Auvers Cemetary

Norman Bissett

Saint-Paul behind him,
the nightmare interlude,
he seemed well again.
Recovery complete,
production was resumed
at breakneck speed with friends around him
in a fresh new countryside.
The sunflower blazed,
a lantern in the sky.

When Theo and Johanna came,
he raised his baby nephew
to the sun in tribute-offering,
a benison, cocooned in love,
scattering upon him water
from the dam. He made a gift
of lilac blossom, held him aloft
and walked about the yard,
pointing out rabbits, chickens,
the loving face of heaven.

Lunch in the open air,
in the bosom of his family.
The colours flew, his brushes
trapped the universe.
Gardens and landscapes,
wheat and poppy fields,
portraits of peasant girls,
the doctor and his daughter,
the old church at Auvers,
the broiling sun.

June to July, he painted
eighty canvases and planned
to etch his recollections
of Provence. The inconstant sun
vanished once more, storm-clouds
arose, a flock of frenzied crows
tossed by the wind above the turbulent
wheat. He aimed a bullet at his suffering.
Now, at Auvers, he lies at peace, at last,
Theo, his brother, by him, like a bride.

Fools of Morpheus

Angus Livingstone

When I was as young as summer's dawning,
I ran falling and rolling on springy heather
down to a stream no deeper than a dream,
and splashed in its sandy shallows.

I laughed with joy at a moment shared
with the hill, the heather and the stream –
blithe as gambolling lambs I'd watched,
free as a daydream, empty as the sky.

But the water's dream-killing coldness seared
the heather-hewn cuts on my bare legs,
and replaced the gossamer ties of joy
with the barbs of life's dulling embrace.

We fools of Morpheus, who live our clown-sad dreams
in quiet despair of re-tasting the freedom
I found on my tumbling tambourine hill,
wait for a bell to toll at some harlequin's masquerade.

Lisbon to Madrid

Mike Boland

It looks impressive in the Lisbon morning,
this blood-red, bullet-shaped express.
Reality will be a twelve hour trundle up the *Tejo valley*,

Leaving Lisbon behind, we slip sedately through suburbia.
Tejo gleams in the noonday sun, its plain fertile and wide.
Mile after mile, oranges and lemons glow on valley slopes,
As carriages clatter high into the hinterland,
Spain approaches through the heat.

We enter Spaghetti Western land; an adobed station, complete with
siesta-stricken peon, donkey and flies.
The border guard strokes his moustache,
scans our papers, mournfully nods us through.

Long-homed against the sky, a solitary bull gazes,
impassive in his isolation, as we rattle by beneath.

Mountains under low skies gather clouds about their heads,
seem to shrug and turn in sleep, secure, like giants under duvets.
Tejo is the Tagus now, and rails run on high ridges.
Reservoirs lurk in canyons, pewter plates beneath a darkening sky.
People come and go at station stops.
Commuters, school kids, shoppers;
transient companions on this long Iberian trek.

Night, and in some nameless town, the train lingers.
A fun-fair flashes, shrieks and screams heard.
Carnival stalks unseen streets; musicians blare,
moving lights flare off upper storeys, marking its route.

We raise the midnight city; Madrid at last.
Diving underground, we arrow into the city's heart.

Pits

Norman Bissett

I enjoyed this poem very much. In addition to the comments I made in my adjudication report, the poem is mercifully free of cliché but bird's-eye view is close and grated on me a little. Perhaps a local bird's name or different metaphor would be better. First Prize, Congratulations!

From the platform of the leather shop upstairs
there's a bird's-eye view of the tanners' pits-
vast dye-vats--ochre, saffron, madder, murex, indigo—
manned by rheumatic, bare-legged refugees
from the Middle Ages. And from our Bourj viewpoint,
we look out over the medina's suqs and alleyways,
a thick, black pall of smoke from burning olive pits
rising above the drab ceramics works. Squatting inside,
around the walls, a group of sullen, bearded men chip out
mosaic tiles, the size of thumb-nails, and avoid our eyes.

Off Guinea

Don Nixon

It proved there is plenty of life left in the sonnet form. The choice of phrasing and the words fitted the subject well and the poem fairly cracks along. I had three small niggles: I found *windward* confusing as I felt it should be the direction of the reek, i.e. downwind; Not familiar with *blackbirds*, I initially thought *them* belonged to the previous plural noun of *merchants* so perhaps use slaves instead of *them*; lastly I felt it was a bit unfair picking on Bristol as there were many cities involved including Glasgow -perhaps a space for a suitable adjective. Second Prize, Well Done!

Off Guinea 1807

Windward, the putrid stench reeks miles away.
Sliming the breeze, the slaver heaves in sight,
clawing its living carrion cargo tight
in fetid holds far from the light of day.
Slicing the Tropic waves there sounds the crack
of whips. The bastinado cuts the air,
to slash the flesh of the chained few who dare
rebellion. Each tortured bloody back,
oozes release for those who soon will die
and so escape the Middle Passage hell
and auction block. Commodities they sell
to keep fat Bristol merchants living high.
Some call them 'blackbirds' but that name is wrong;
here no joyous notes only death's harsh song.

Lewis Wright Short Story Competition 2008

Judge's Report:

There were 17 entries this year. Out of these only nine gave a word count which in many competitions would have led to immediate disqualification. And out of these nine, only two were over 2000 words and three were under 1000.

This is a great shame because it meant that there were several stories which really would have benefited from being longer, with more description and characterisation. In addition, it is far more difficult to write a 'short-short' story with a tight plot that works than a longer story with depth which holds the reader's attention.

It was hard to choose between the two front runners but in the end the first prize went to *The Forest*, a story with an unusual setting and some excellent creative writing: the writer had, I felt, enjoyed writing it. Second prize was awarded to *The Shadows*, which had an original, darker theme and a well-handled depth to it. Commendations go to *A Celtic Journey*, *Rose of Sharon* and *The Undersecretary*.

Val Whitmarsh

The Forest

Lyn Adlam (2008 Lewis Wright Short Story winning entry)

Archibald Fanshaw stepped out into the yard of his newly acquired Devon farmhouse and surveyed his property with a deep sense of satisfaction. He had bought it unseen - for cash of course, for a song in a London auction and this was his first trip down to view his prize. It needed some work - to stem the tide of nearly twenty years neglect, but it was a bolt hole to which he could escape from the stresses of his London life as well as being a good investment. Archie was not disappointed.

But today he was going to look at part of his land that had been put to a rather bizarre use by the previous owner, a gentleman by the name of Reginald Bartholomew. Archie was at a bit of a loss to know what he was going to do with it.

With farming in decline at the beginning of the 21st century, Mr Bartholomew had set about turning his land into an eco-friendly graveyard. For a not inconsiderable sum, he had ensured that the deceased was buried in a bio-degradable coffin and had the tree of his or her choice planted above them. He had launched his idea at a time when the aged peace-loving drug-fuddled hippies of the 1960s were gradually climbing the 'Stairway to Heaven' on their way to meet the 'Spirit in the Sky' and most of the western world was obsessed with global warming, carbon footprints and generally saving the planet. The graveyard offered a final opportunity to save space, reduce carbon emissions and

plant a forest all at the same time. When Bartholomew died the farm had passed to his nephew. He had chosen to ignore his inheritance for almost 20 years, remembering it only when he suddenly became short of cash, when to Archie's good fortune, he had auctioned it off bidder. Archie could only be grateful that Bartholomew himself had died before any more than two acres of the land had been used. Otherwise, he thought, the whole place could have been one big bone yard.

As the wood came into view, Archie cursed himself for not remembering to bring the plan with him which would have shown him who was buried where. He had looked over it the previous evening and had been amused to note that all of the deceased came from outside the locality. He had reflected that either the locals were too canny to pay over lots of money to be buried in what amounted to a cardboard box or they had been too superstitious to allow themselves to spend eternity under a tree. Archie preferred the former; although he knew the locals tended to avoid the place.

The forest looked a lot more mature than Archie had expected it to. It was only 20 years since the last internment, and yet the trees, mostly English broadleaves, stretched majestically up into the sky, their canopies intertwining and making the place unnaturally dark. Must be the nutrients in the soil, he thought with a shudder.

The forest floor had been taken over by brambles, nettles and bracken and the pathways between the graves were overgrown and unkempt. The whole place needed a good prune - probably some of the trees should come down altogether. He stopped by a large oak and noticed a small wooden plaque in the undergrowth by his feet. He picked it up and tried to read the inscription. CHARLES SMITHERS it looked like. Archie turned the plaque over in his hand and wondered if the trees in some way reflected the characteristics of the dead person beneath. Had Charles Smithers been strong and tall with a heart of oak? It was a strange idea. He discarded the piece of wood and as he moved on, a faint breeze rustled the leaves of the great tree.

Further along was a Tortuosa. Archie's knowledge of trees was sketchy to say the least, but he thought it was a kind of willow. He kicked around the base and found the plaque. This one was easier to read. MABEL WITHERSPOON it announced. Had Mabel been willowy, he wondered or had she been a bent old crone with limbs as twisted as the tortured branches of the tree? As he tossed the plaque away with distaste his attention was caught by a different kind of tree altogether. A beautiful cherry tree, covered in pink blossom. RUPERT CARLTON the plaque stated. Must have been queer! Archie laughed aloud at his own wit as he stared at the tree. It stared back. The breeze that had started off in the great Oak had picked up now and all the trees were whispering and chattering in the branches above except the cherry. It stood in dignified silence, perfectly still. Unaccountably, Archie felt goose bumps breaking out all over him and inwardly scoffed at his stupidity. You can't outstare a tree for God's sake; it

didn't even have any eyes -although, come to think of it, if you looked up nearer the top, you could kind of imagine that there was a sort of a face in the bark with great difficulty, Archie tore his gaze away. This forest was beginning to give him the creeps. The breeze was now a full grown wind and the lovely spring morning had become cold. He resolved to find himself some local help and cut some of these damn trees down and the best place to find local help, Archie knew, was the village pub.

That evening, about 7.00pm, Archie walked into the Dog and Duck and the bar fell silent. Archie wasn't surprised. He was the first newcomer in the village for years.

"Ev'nin Mr Fanshaw," Sam the landlord, a large, jolly looking man in his fifties put down the glass he was cleaning. "What can I get for ye?"

"I'll have a pint of Guinness, please." Archie wasn't surprised that the landlord knew his name, either. These village types seemed to have nothing better to do than gossip. They probably already knew more about him than he did. He settled himself on a bar stool.

"Do you know anyone I could hire for a couple of days work?" He asked.

"I dare say," replied Sam "what would you be wantin' 'em to do?"

"Clear out that damn graveyard and fell some of the trees," said Archie. The atmosphere in the bar froze solid. Archie could have sworn that a drop of Guinness, on its way from the tap to the glass actually stopped in mid-air. Sam cleared his throat.

"I don't know as you should be doin' that sur," he ventured nervously.

"Why ever not?" demanded Archie the place is a mess, some of those trees are positively dangerous."

"That's as maybe," said Sam, putting Archie's pint down on the beer mat in front of him "but folk be buried there. Tis 'allowed ground, like."

"Even so," said Archie, irritably "It's in dire need of tidying up. That's just good land management."

"I'm sure yur right Mr Fanshaw, sur, but I don't think the folk round 'ere will be of the same way of thinkin', still, I'll ask around for'ee."

Archie nodded his thanks drank his pint and left. Surely those down-at-heel country bumpkins weren't going to pass up the chance to earn a bit of cash-in-hand on the grounds of religion. But he waited several days, and no one came forward, so Archie began phoning round the local landscapers and tree surgeons. Everyone it seemed was too busy. Becoming more and more exasperated and casting his net ever wider, Archie finally found someone in a town 40 miles away.

They agreed a date and Archie began to feel a little mollified. That is, until he began giving them his address. There was a loaded silence followed by a few

muttered excuses and then the phone went dead. Archie was furious. Apart from anything else, he wasn't used to having to ask twice. Normally he said 'jump' and everyone around him politely enquired 'how high?'

He stomped moodily out of the house. He would start the job himself. If he felled a tree or two and came to no harm he was convinced that he would soon be inundated with straw-chewing yokels dying to earn some decent cash while they had the chance. In fact, he could lower the rate he was going to pay them - that would teach them!

In one of his barns he found a chain-saw, a ladder and a length of rope and he slung them into the back of his Freelander and set off, still angry, across his fields to the forest.

When he got there, it was obvious that he wouldn't be able to drive through the tangled wood so he carried his equipment in. Looking round it was a job to know where to start. In the end, he chose Charlie Smithers' Oak. It had a low branch he could reach from the ground. Archie decided to begin with that.

A breeze had been souging gently through the trees as he arrived but by the time he got the chainsaw going - on the third attempt, it had become quite strong. He marched determinedly up to the Oak and sliced straight through the offending branch. The limb crashed to the forest floor.

His temper subsiding now that he was taking direct action, Archie switched off the saw and went to admire his handy work. He looked down at the severed branch and noticed that a red viscous sap was seeping out of the end. He smeared some onto his finger to examine it more closely. It felt unpleasantly warm and sticky. He touched his finger to his tongue and spat with disgust. It had a salty, metallic taste; like... well... blood. He looked at the tree where the branch had been attached and the same thick ooze was trickling down the trunk and pooling on the ground at its base.

Unnerved and extremely puzzled, Archie became aware that the temperature in the forest had plummeted and the wind had suddenly stopped. Instead he was surrounded by a silence so complete it deafened him. To his fascinated horror the blood-like substance on the tree trunk was starting to congeal. To hell with it, Archie thought, he had made his point. He had cut off a branch and come to no harm. It was too big a job for him by himself anyway. He would have to think of some other solution for tackling this problem.

His skin prickling he turned to walk out of the wood, leaving his equipment behind, when the wind got up again. This time it grew stronger and stronger, the whispering and chattering of the leaves in the canopy became a roar. The billowing branches creaked and groaned like a large rusty machine being cranked into life after years of inactivity. Every way he turned it seemed that a branch or a tree was blocking his path. His ladder, which he had leant up against the Oak, crashed to the ground. With panic threatening to turn his limbs to lead, Archie tried to shelter in the lee of a tree, but the wind seemed to be coming from

every direction at once. He covered his face and head with his hands as savage, tangled branches whipped and tore at his clothes and body.

Peering between his fingers, he saw that his rope had been hooked by a branch and was uncoiling like a snake. The end thrashed and fish-tailed as it lashed at him. As he tried to dodge it, the free end got caught around his neck. He clawed at it ineffectually with desperate fingers as its grip began to tighten. Eyes bulging and gasping for breath, Archibald Fanshaw's last sensation in this world was that of being jerked off his feet and yanked upwards through the air into the dark and leafy canopy.

It was two weeks before Archie's body was discovered. By then, nature and the elements had taken their toll on him. His eyes were gone and his clothes were in shreds. Initially, it looked as though he had taken a length of rope and a ladder into the woods and for reasons known only to him, had hung himself from the branch of a tree, although quite why he had also taken a chain-saw with him was less easy to explain. Further forensic examination however, revealed deep lacerations all over his body that had traces of bark in them. That wouldn't have been so unusual, except that the bark seemed to come from so many different trees. Foul play was considered, but no evidence could be found to place anyone else in or near the forest. It was a perplexing case but Archie didn't have any family to press for answers, so in the end, an open verdict was recorded and the case was closed.

No-one was unduly perplexed in the Dog and Duck however. Sam had made no comment when he'd heard about it. He had tried to discourage him, he thought as he absentmindedly polished one of his glasses. Perhaps he should have told him what had happened when old Mr Bartholomew had tried a bit of pruning. Found him at the bottom of a tree with his neck broke. It was thought he had fallen off his ladder. Well maybe he had and maybe he hadn't. All things considered, Sam felt quite strongly that dead people should be buried in churchyards; that was what they were there for.

Sam held the glass up to the light and scrutinised it closely. Perfect. He wondered how Archie would have felt about being buried in his own cemetery. His fancy London friends had thought it was 'appropriate'. Bit of an irony that. He wondered what sort of tree they would choose for him. Nothing but the best, of course. He put the sparkling glass back on its shelf and cast a professional eye round his bar. Business was booming. There was nothing quite like a macabre mystery for bringing the tourists flocking in. Fortunate then that the day after he had spoken to Archie, Sam had contacted his supplier and doubled his normal order. Well, after what happened to Mr Bartholomew it didn't hurt to be prepared

The Shadows

Don Nixon (2008 Lewis Wright Short Story runner-up)

When he awoke, the shadows had begun to creep along on the wall. Time had ceased to have any meaning for him. Time now was what they said it was. At the moment he guessed it was late afternoon. The sun must be low.

The rays of the sun, filtering through the branches of the trees outside the high window, threw flickering shadows on the wall. The dappled sunlight seemed real as it slanted down on to the wall but he could no longer trust his perception. Was it all a deception designed to further disorientate him? He had lost count of the days and nights since he had first wakened on the narrow cot which was the only furniture in the bare room. He was still in the limbo between sleep and waking but the pain that shot through his ribcage as he moved brought him sharply awake. The fear suddenly came back and he felt the familiar suffocating dryness in his throat. He winced as he tried to find a more comfortable position lying on his side.

There must be a strong wind outside he thought, watching the intricate patterns of light and shade on the whitewashed wall form and reform as the branches of the trees outside swayed in the breeze. He felt the cool eddy of air from above as the wind changed direction. He forced his mind to concentrate. That must be real. He could feel the breeze on his cheeks. He gulped in the air greedily.

He focused on the shifting shadows on the wall opposite his bunk. They reminded him of the game he had played as a child when he stared into the fire. Like the shadows on the wall, the glowing embers became pictures that he could trace and let his imagination create the dragons and castles of his favourite stories. Through his imagination he had coped with the loneliness of his childhood. It had been his escape from a miserable reality. Through his imagination he could enter a world where his brutal father could not follow. He gazed at the shadows flickering on the wall. Could he now make these a refuge from the reality of his present situation?

He stiffened as heard footsteps in the corridor beyond the door. He breathed deeply, trying to control the sudden stab of pain as his muscles contracted in fear. He listened as he heard them pass the door and then continue down the corridor. A door slammed and there was silence again. Gradually the fear churning in his stomach subsided. It was not his turn. He gazed at the shadows on the wall and blotted out all else as he tried to make them into a picture. It might be a tropical lizard perhaps with a long curving tail and pointed ruff around the throat. One used to come on his balcony when he was stationed in Belize. High outside the branches became still as the wind dropped for a moment and the lizard disappeared and became once more just the shadow of

a long crooked twig on an overhanging branch. It was some kind of fir he thought. They must be in the middle of a pine forest.

He thought of the forest he had wandered through as a child. That had also been pine - a concentrated mass of lodge pole pines that reared like guardsmen to the sky. The forest then had been his friend. It had protected him.

A gust of wind made the tall tree's foliage outside the window shake once more and the shadows on the wall again moved in flickering intricate patterns. He stared at them. Now they could be the dense monster ferns that grew at the base of the great lodge pole pines of his childhood and he formed them in his mind to open into the tunnel he had created through the dense undergrowth. He thought he could smell the sweet smell of the fresh wood. "Am I hallucinating?" he said aloud.

This had been his place of refuge when the situation at home became too bad. Usually his father ignored him. He was puny for his age and was not interested in the physical sports pursuits that his father saw as manly. "Too much imagination, a bit of a cissy," his father had said, describing his son to his cronies, but he left the boy alone for most of the time. It was only when his father was drunk that the torment started and the boy had quickly learnt to keep out of the way. It was then he had found the hiding place in the forest.

In the shadows he saw again the tunnel through the ferns that formed a barrier stretching between the giant pines. He breathed deeply, ignoring the stiletto thrust of pain in his chest as the ribs expanded. The pain reminded him of his father's beatings when he came back from the pub, a bitter disappointed man with only his son on whom to vent his anger. The tunnel had been the pathway of escape.

In his memory he ran along the tunnel. He remembered the cool feel of the ferns as they parted before him and swished against his face. Finally he reached the den he had made in the hollow of tree trunk that had been split by lightning. Here he was safe. It was his refuge from the world.

From far away he heard his father's voice. "Where are you, you snivelling little brat? Come out, come out. I know you're in there."

He crouched doubled in a foetal position and closed his eyes as he heard his father crashing through the undergrowth. But his hiding place had never been discovered and his father had soon given up the search and returned to their cottage where usually he had collapsed in a drunken stupor. The next morning nothing was ever said and it was only the next time he was drunk that the pattern repeated itself. As he grew up the father had ceased to care what happened to his son and the boy had grown too big and strong for him to beat. They came to ignore each other and lived separate lives. But the den had always retained its aura of a safety for him and many times during his army

career when he was in danger, the thought of that refuge had filled him with a sense of security. As he formed the pictures of the den from the shadows on the wall he suddenly craved for that sense of security once more.

The pain returned and he lifted an arm to try and ease it. But he was weak and the arm dropped back to his side. He looked at the bumps on his wrist. How far would they go he wondered yet again. For the first time he thought about how near he was to breaking point. He began to cry soundlessly and the hot tears ran down his bruised cheeks. There was no escape. The window was too high and the bars were thick. The door was made of steel and bolted on the outside. Yet he was determined not give them the information they wanted.

He thought of the training of years ago when they had practised resisting interrogation techniques. In those days they called it brainwashing but the principles were the same. Their Vietnamese teacher had drummed it into them. "Force yourself to focus on something that is totally unconnected with the situation -something you associate with happiness or security and use your yoga breathing techniques to blot out everything else." He remembered the lilting intonation of his teacher's voice and the way he could never master the European consonants. He had managed to keep some control so far but would it be enough to withstand what he knew was to come? He needed a more powerful image to take total control of his mind and blot out the present.

The crack of the bolt as it shot back made his throat constrict in terror. He gagged and struggled to control his breathing. They paused in the doorway, anonymous silent figures in their grey overalls. They moved slowly and unhurriedly. The leader stepped towards the bunk, a syringe in his gloved hand.

The chained figure on the bunk turned his face away and gazed at the wall opposite. Desperately he sought the shadows there. Once more in ever changing patterns they became ferns and he plunged through the tunnel that opened up before him. He blotted out all else. He was running along the uneven path, the fem barrier closing behind him as he ran. He could feel his heart pounding, the breath choking the saliva in his throat. He thought he heard his father shout from far away. The fear suddenly left him and he felt calm and in control. Like his father they would never find him here. The shadows at the end of the tunnel opened and in front of him was the tree and his refuge. The rough bark scratched him as he curled inside the dark hollow.

The needle of the syringe pierced his arm. He was safe. He was beyond their reach. He just disappeared into the shadows.

The George Farley Prize – 2008 Results

It was very difficult to pick the best out of a lovely collection of really good entries, but a short list was agreed and a final choice made, as follows:-

Winner:-

“How dumb can you get?” by Dorothy Pope. A good idea, well completed.

Runners-up:-

“Just wait and see” by Norman Bissett. Longer than we prefer, but excellent language and rhymes sustained, with a droll finish

“At the bus stop” by Norman Bissett. Would have been perfect for us if the scansion of the last line had fitted. A nice neat poem.

Highly Commended:-

“The Envelope” by Angus Livingstone. The story is well followed, and the final couple of lines finish nicely.

It was very pleasing to notice that most of the poems were about the ordinary things in life, or led you up a splendid story with a twist in the tail. If only we could award everybody a prize, we would. But essentially we keep in mind the main aim of the competition is HUMOUR. We have to laugh, or at least chuckle, whether it is for the joke, or the language, or the twist in the tail, or all of these and more.

Well done to all competitors. Keep those entries coming.

Pamela Farley

How Dumb Can You Get?

Dorothy Pope

(Winner George Farley Prize 2008)

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
Well, I ask, what did he expect?
Eggs have no right sitting erect
with no cup or nest for support.
Having no flat base you'd have thought
he'd have utilised better sense,
known a wall (or gate or a fence)
is no place for parking, an oeuf
being one continuous curve.
And, of course, he's brittle as hell
clad in that impractical shell.
Rather save your sympathy for me
Rockabye-ing Baby in a tree.

Just You Wait and See

Norman Bissett

(Runner-up George Farley Prize 2008)

(‘Nat Burton, the American lyricist who wrote The White Cliffs of Dover..’)
Letter to The Times

It's neither picayune nor college-y
but rudimentary ornithology:
NO bluebird has been sighted over
the chalk-white cliffs surmounting Dover.

No bird-watcher has ever seen
a cerulean, aquamarine
or azure seabird on that coast.
White is the hue they favour most

Blue birds in Dover? For God's sake,
it must have been a kittiwake,
an arctic tern, a native gannet,
an albatross en route to Thanet,

a folmar, auk or guillemot
(no indigo about its throat)
sprats by the bellyful in its gut--
the lyricist half-pissed, half-cut--

a cormorant or common skua.
Blue birds in Kent? Of this I'm sure:
Dover does not attract exotics.
The lyricist was on narcotics.

On Tin Pan Alley you often find
that songwriters are colour-blind.
They live on beer and fags and coffee
and couldn't name a bird for toffee,

bemused by booze and high on dope.
It could have been a phalarope,
a herring gull, some flying figment
conventionally white of pigment.

The lyricist called seabirds blue,
a daft, myopic thing to do,
then had them, to compound his sin,
immortalized by Vera Lynn.
binned, wheeled and municipally dumped.

Dean's Oak

Angela Pickering

'It's an outrage. That's what it is, an outrage.' Shirley slammed a bag of sugar onto the kitchen table, where Jonathan was lingering over his lunchtime cup of tea and waited for him to pay attention.

'What is, dear?' Jonathan raised concerned eyes from the newspaper to gaze at his enraged wife as she fumed.

'The tree, the one in Jackson's field,' she said, making the statement sound like a question. 'They're going to cut it down. The Council says its got "dry rot", "wet rot", "foot rot", oh, I don't know, some kind of rotten disease or other. I heard it in the corner shop just now while I was getting the sugar.' She paused for a much-needed breath, 'June told me. It's all over the village apparently. I don't know why I'm always the last to know these things.'

'Jackson's field?' Jonathan was, as always, slow to grasp the seriousness of the situation. 'The big oak tree? The one where we...?'

'Yes,' she interrupted, 'the one where I lost my, lost my, the one where I lost my purse that time.'

'Cut it down?'

'Oh, for pity's sake, man.' Shirley was at boiling point. 'Stay with me, please. They're going to cut down the tree. Our special tree. It's an outrage.' She picked up the bread knife from the table and waved it to punctuate her words. 'We have to stop them. This cannot happen; not to our tree.'

Jonathan put down the paper and gave Shirley his full attention. She could tell that he was finally taking notice by the way he peered over the top of his glasses at her. He only ever peered like that when he was concentrating.

'It could be a good thing, you know, Shirl,' he said, taking his life in his hands since she was still holding the knife. 'For the village, I mean. Think what we could do with Jackson's field without that big tree slap-bang in the middle. A children's playground maybe, a village green or better yet,' he paused, a grin lighting up his face, 'a cricket pitch. A cricket pitch and a pavilion. We could start a team up, challenge other villages. We've never had the facilities before. You could make the teas. Maybe I could be captain. "Jones' eleven" has a certain ring to it, don't you think?'

Shirley put the knife down on the counter top with precision. Her manner became icy, her self-control taking an enormous effort. 'A cricket pitch, is it? A cricket pitch?' Her voice began to squeak with indignation. 'They're not cutting down my tree so you can stand around wearing white every Saturday afternoon gossiping with your cronies from the pub. I simply won't allow it.'

She took a deep breath, preparing to unleash the full measure of her fury upon him, but then realised that Jonathan was already far beyond her reach. He was batting for his team, probably scoring the winning run. She looked at him sitting there, silly expression on his face and knew that, as far as he was concerned, saving the tree would be her job and hers alone. At least it would be more fun than making teas for Jonathan's imaginary cricket team.

Ten minutes and several phone calls later, Shirley was prepared for battle: three flasks of hot tea, paper cups left over from the village fete, and woolly bobble hat ready in her biggest shopping bag. *All the equipment necessary for a newly-born eco-warrior*, she thought. She wasn't too sure about the hat though, her new perm might be squashed beyond repair. It might do for one of the less fashion conscious of the other women though. 'I'm off now, Jon,' she called, opening the front door. 'Back whenever.'

'Okay,' came the faint reply from somewhere upstairs. 'I'll be in the loft.'

'In the loft?' she murmured, turning back and then shouting, 'What are you doing in the loft?'

The answer was no surprise. 'Looking for my cricket gear. I'm sure it's up here somewhere. I've got stumps and pads and everything, not just a bat and ball.'

By the time Shirley reached the hill overlooking Jackson's field, it was late afternoon. The cold winter sun illuminated the field with that clear yellow light which heralds the approach of the festive season. Like her, no one had wasted any time in spreading the terrible news; half the villagers seemed to be there, stamping their feet and blowing onto chilled fingers. From her vantage point, she could see a multitude of coloured woollen hats that seemed to float around the beleaguered tree like fairy lights on an early Christmas pine.

Hurrying down the hill, she manoeuvred her way through the crowd to the front where she could see that Mrs Dean, the butcher's wife, already had things in hand. A ring of women circled the tree chanting 'Save our tree' to the tune of "Here comes the Bride". *That in itself is no mean feat*, thought Shirley, smiling, despite her concern for the tree. Mrs Dean was dressed in what looked like a white sheet and was crowned with a wreath of oak leaves. *She must be frozen; the silly old fool*; the thought brought Shirley not a little pleasure.

'She's a druid, is Mrs Dean,' said a voice at her elbow. 'She knows all about trees. Especially oaks.'

Shirley turned and glared at Mr Simmonds, who had spoken. 'Mrs Dean knows about lamb chops and pork pies,' she snarled and then felt a momentary pang of shame. It didn't really matter who saved the tree, she supposed, but she had rather wanted to do it herself.

She forced a smile and Mr Simmonds, smiled back. ‘The tree must be saved, Mrs Jones,’ he said, demonstrating more understanding than Shirley had ever known he possessed. ‘We all feel the same way about that. Personal feelings must be put aside for the greater good, don’t you think?’

Shirley knew a reprimand when she heard one and lowered her head in graceful submission. The whole village knew about her rivalry with Mrs Dean. The annual Victoria sponge baking competition, the jam making, even the church choir, all provided an arena for the two women to pit themselves against one another, like grey-haired gladiators with a taste for chutney instead of blood.

‘The tree, Mrs Jones, the tree,’ reminded Mr Simmonds. ‘It must be saved. It’s where I lost my, lost my,’ he paused, ‘lost my cigarette lighter, that time. Sentimental value, you know.’ He retreated, flustered.

Shirley pushed further forward, determined to be involved in the action at all costs. This was not a situation for the faint hearted, she felt. As she struggled through the crowds towards the tree, something, some stray thought, was nagging at her mind, some important point about this whole affair that she was missing. It would come to her later, she thought as she finally caught the “druid’s” eye.

‘Shirley dear, come and join in the circle. We must save the oak.’

‘The oak, the oak,’ repeated the circle, dancing a little faster.

‘I’ve brought tea,’ said Shirley, and the circle slowed to a halt while she dispensed the hastily prepared refreshments.

‘What a good idea, Shirley,’ said Mrs Dean. ‘I, myself, never thought to bring supplies. In too much of a hurry to save the tree, I suppose, to think of my own comfort. It’s just the way I am.’

‘Well, someone has to be practical,’ said Shirley, sweetness oozing from every reluctant pore. ‘Bobble hat, anyone?’ Her smile was wide and sunny if totally insincere.

It was quite late before people began to drift away. There was a feeling of impending snow in the air and it eventually became obvious that no-one with a chain saw was going to be in Jackson’s field that day. Without the hope of violent confrontation, people seemed to lose interest.

‘Back again at first light, everyone,’ called Mrs Dean and Shirley heard what she hoped was a note of desperation in her voice.

Leaving the field at last, feeling bloodied if not broken by this latest tangle with the butcher’s wife, Shirley caught up with June, her neighbour and informant of earlier in the day. ‘You made it then, Shirley,’ June said. ‘I’m so glad we had such a good turnout. We must save the oak; everyone in the

village has some fond memory of it, don't they? I hear they're starting to call it "Dean's Oak", in honour of Mrs Dean who is spearheading the campaign.'

Shirley heard her own teeth grind, the sound echoing through her now cold and aching skull. The bobble hat would have helped, but that was long gone, perched on the noticeably thinning hair of the village dentist. The elusive thought that Shirley had been pursuing all afternoon finally registered in her conscious brain. 'I spoke to Mr Simmonds earlier,' she said, stopping dead. 'You know, Councillor Simmonds,' she spaced the words for emphasis, 'the one on the Council. He wants to save the tree too.'

June frowned, 'But . . .'

Shirley continued, 'Just where exactly did you hear about the Council's plan to cut down the tree?'

The answer was obvious before June spoke, 'In the butcher's shop, this morning,' she said and then spluttered, 'Dean's Oak indeed. I'll give her "Dean's Oak"'

Shirley let herself in at the back door and put the kettle on for a victory cup of tea. June could be relied upon to spread the truth about the tree incident. Jonathan bounced into the room, brandishing a dusty bin bag and exuding boyish joy.

'Hello, love, have they cut the tree down yet?'

She hoped he had spent the whole afternoon looking for his cricket bat. 'I heard a rumour in the field that they're going to build a leisure centre,' she improvised, 'no cricket pitch though, tennis courts apparently, six of them.' She was feeling better and better.

Jonathan simply smiled. *There's not a miserable bone in his body*, Shirley thought, almost disappointed.

'Oh well, never mind,' he said. 'Look what I found in the loft.' And he produced from the bin bag the un-strung remains of an old tennis racket. 'I never was any good at cricket, but tennis, ah, that's another story.'

Shirley, overcome by waves of tenderness and guilt, took him in her arms. 'What a lovely man you are,' she said, 'always looking for the good in everything.' Jonathan hugged her tightly and laid his cheek on top of her head. Her perm was being squashed, but this time she didn't mind. 'What ever would I do without you?'

'Who knows indeed, my love?'

She gazed up into his eyes. *I just might be the butcher's wife*, she thought.

Beat the Dutch

Terry Rickson

Liz mason drove to Wrettenham with the pleasurable anticipation of a bite to eat at ‘The Crab and Lobster,’ a natter with her old friend Maisie and a brisk walk along the coast path, before returning home.

The bar was uncrowded except for one or two walkers enjoying a well-earned drink and a few folk from the yachts anchored offshore. In one corner, a sun-weathered young man sat drinking with a companion. Liz was aware of him trying to make eye contact with her as she went up to the bar.

“Liz, hello. Lovely to see you. How’s things? How’s Chris?”

“Hello, Maise. I’m great. He’s fine, his ship’s due at Harwich day after tomorrow.”

“That’ll be nice. Where’s he been this time?”

“The Caribbean.”

“Lucky so-and-so. What’ll you have love?”

“Oh, half of shandy and a round Of your crab sandwiches, please.”

“Right, coming up.”

She and Maisie Woodings had been WPCs together in the Constabulary. Maisie resigned on marrying Sergeant Woodings when he took early retirement. The pair had taken ‘The Crab and Lobster’ at Wrettenham, where it had acquired a reputation for its excellent food and good wine.

“So,” enquired Liz, “who’s God’s gift over in the corner seat?”

“Oh, a Dutch sea-captain, on one of the yachts, a big’n, I gather.”

“Fancy’s himself, does he?”

“You can say that again!” her friend replied. Then out of the side of her mouth, “Watch out, he’s coming over.”

The Dutchman ordered a beer, exchanging a word or two with Maisie. “Hello,” he said to Liz.

Liz, her mouth full of crab sandwich, managed, “Hi.”

“A ver’ nice day. Thees a ver nice place, ya?”

Liz agreed. They chatted for a while, his English was quite good.

“I buy you drink, perhaps?” he said.

“Thanks but no thanks, got to be on my way.”

He smiled, “Another time, perhaps, ya?”

Liz smiled too but said nothing and left the pub.

She set out briskly along the coast path. There was hardly a whisper of breeze off the sea; a warm gentle day. Overall, the vastness of the sky, the Sea and the marsh dotted with sheep, only the round stump of Stallingfleet Church tower, lonely and isolated out on the edge of the marsh, breaking the sky-line.

A land-rover was parked across the path ahead, its nose to the sea. As she drew nearer, Liz could see the Coastguard markings and the occupant looking out to sea through binoculars; she recognised Dave Russell.

Liz waved and called out, "Dave."

He got out, releasing the glasses.

"Liz! Surprise. What are you doing out here?"

"Enjoying a walk and working off a round of sandwiches and a shandy at 'The Crab.'

"Lucky you!" Dave said enviously.

They exchanged bits of news. Dave and her husband were old friends from school days.

"Anyway, what's interesting you so much?"

"That yacht out there, off the Fleet Sands. Been around for several days. Big one; Dutch. Even stranger, a Dutch herring-boat has been glimpsed occasionally but usually keeps well out to sea," Dave said raising his binoculars.

"Dutch you say. Mmm, funny thing, there was a Dutch sea-captain in 'The Crab,' not unusual, I suppose; off one of the yachts, I gather."

Dave looked at Liz sharply.

"What was he like? Tall, well-built. good-looking?"

"Er, well, yes, now I come to think about it; fancied himself."

"I bet! That's Pieter van der Meerts, all right." Dave exclaimed.

"Problem?"

"You bet your sweet life! Not Only us, Customs, the Police. The Dutch Police are being very co-operative."

"Sounds ominous," Liz replied. "Smuggling?"

"Yes. Drugs, guns or possibly illegal immigrants but drugs or guns most likely. He's smart but we'll get the bugger. Quite happy to shoot his way out of trouble, by all accounts."

Liz refrained from mentioning the fact the Dutchman had tried chatting her up in the bar. She bade her goodbyes and resumed her walk.

“No, Andy, no. no, no!”

“Think about it, Liz, please, you were one of our best.”

Inspector Andy Wharmby, her immediate boss before she left the force, was drinking tea in her sunny Sitting-room. He’d gone into his charm offensive mode.

“Andy, it’s out of the question. I’m two months pregnant for one thing. For another, Chris will go absolutely bananas if

“He doesn’t have to know, Liz. well, not yet at any rate. You’ll be OK,” Wharmby continued persuasively. “We’ve had a firm tip-off; a shipment of arms to be landed on Wrettenham beach tomorrow night.”

“What!” exclaimed Liz, “they’re crazy!”

“Think about it,” Andy Wharmby said. “Yachting jollies in ‘The Crab,’ a clear but moonless night forecast, what better cover could you ask for? We want to catch der Meerts red-handed.”

“He’ll never fall for it,” Liz replied.

“Look, they’ve all got a chink in their armour somewhere, his type. His happens to be he can’t resist anything that’s female and attractive, not exactly original, I admit.”

Liz pulled a face.

“You can handle it, Liz,” Wharmby assured her. “Remember the Felixstowe Docks job? You were brilliant.”

“I’d rather not, thanks!” Liz said firmly.

Giving an impish grin, Wharmby said, “Think, you might get a Commendation Or even better, a medal!”

“Big deal. Especially if it’s posthumous!”

Andy Wharmby laughed out loud.

“Don’t worry, Liz, the boys will ride in like the 7th Cavalry before he’s even had a chance to have his wicked way with you, promise,” he said.

“That settles it,” Liz replied, “I definitely won’t do it!”

The look on Maisie Wooding’s face when she entered the bar of ‘The Crab and Lobster’ that evening, in a low cut blouse and pencil slim skirt, almost convinced Liz the whole enterprise was worth it.

“Liz, what on earth Maisie managed with a stammer.

“Don’t ask. I’ve had a visit from Andy Wharmby. Is that Dutch sea-captain here on his own?”

“Er, yes. Liz, are you out of your small Chinese mind!” Maisie said incredulously.

“Yes. Where’s he sitting?”

Liz took her drink to the corner seat Maisie indicated. She could see her and Jack, heads together, whispering-, anxious glances in her direction. “I’ll be OK.” she mouthed.

Van der Meerts came back to his seat. Liz smiled up at him through her lashes. He was wearing a smart, body-hugging tee-shirt that showed off his broad shoulders and slim waist. He was. Liz had to admit, a nice looking guy.

“So, a drink this time, ya?” he said.

“Yes, please. Something long and cool.” Liz replied, running her fingers tightly through her dark hair, leaning back just to emphasise the fit of her blouse.

He’d kissed her before she was halfway through her drink. A nonchalant arm along the back of the settle, allowed his fingers to run gently over her bare upper arm and shoulder. He bent forward for another kiss but Liz held him off.

“I’d like another drink, please,” she said, after a moment, “Pieter.”

He bought the drink. Then he asked her to go back with him to the yacht; it would be quieter there with everyone On shore.

Liz- hesitated, smiled and teasingly ran finger across his cheekbone,” “OK” she said.

der Meerts took Liz’s hand as they scrunched across the shingle. Gaining the protection of one of the groynes, he slid Liz’s arm behind her back, pulling her close to him.

“You kiss ver nice,” he said softly.

Liz would have moved apart from him but his hand had slipped inside her blouse for her breasts, his mouth closing on hers, tongue exploring eagerly.

“That you, der Meerts?” came a hoarse whisper in the darkness.

der Meerts leapt away from her as though he’d been stung.

She sensed rather than saw the gun.

“It’s me, Chapman.

“Chrissus! Chapmans! Why you here?” der Meerts spat out the words.

“cos you’re late, that’s why” the voice said.

Liz recognised London speech.

“You make danger for ship.”

“You should ‘ave showed up afore now,” the owner of the voice said, materialising as a

stubby form from the shelter of the groyne. “Who the ! I might ‘ave guessed, a woman.

“Shuts your mouth,” der Meerts said angrily, “zer plan was

“Bugger the plan! What me and the boys s’posed to do while you’re ‘avin’ a shag and a shave, read ‘The Financial bleedin’ Times?’” Chapman sneered.

“You fuckin’ vate on ship,” der Meerts yelled.

“Me fuckin’ vate, you fuckin’ late,” Chapman retorted, mimicking the Dutchman.

Something snapped inside der Meerts, he smashed Chapman across the mouth with the butt of the gun he was holding, felling him with the blow. Chapman lay writhing and moaning on the shingle.

A blinding beam of light lit up the beach to a yell of “Police!”

Disorientated for a moment, der Meerts recovered. He grabbed Liz and spun her round to face the light, a hand clamped across her mouth, the other held the gun.

“Drop that gun!” came a sharp command.

The Dutchman didn’t move.

He gave a cry of pain and the gun clattered on the shingle. Unseen, one of the police squad had slipped from the darkness of the groyne and with a swift crack across the forearm, made der Meerts release the weapon.

Short work was made of bundling the two men into a waiting police van.

“Liz, you OK? I’m sorry to have put you through that,” Wharmby said, genuinely concerned, “but you were brilliant, Liz, a real professional job.”

Liz, shaking with relief, managed to stutter, “N-n-n-never ask me to d-d-do that anything like again. God! I thought you lot were never going to turn up!”

SCPSW - Annual Statement of Income and Expenditure
April 1st 2007 - March 31st 2008

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| INCOME: | <u>2007-08</u> | <u>2006-07</u> |
| | £ | £ |
| Subscriptions: | 2197-00 | 2107-50 |
| AGM Receipts: | 60-00 | 100-00 |
| NY Party Receipts: | 170-00 | 144-00 |
| Luncheon Receipts: | 528-00 | 608-85 |
| Competition Receipts: | 336-00 | 537-00 |
| Sponsorship | 150-00 | 175-00 |
| Donations: | 1336-50 | 318-00 |
| Bank Interest: | - | 0-31 |
| Bank Charges Reimbursed: | | - |
| 'Author' Sales: | - | - |
| Poetry Workshop: | 162-00 | 155-00 |
| Sundry Income: | 30-90 | 167-00 |
| TOTAL INCOME: | 4970-40 | 4312-66 |
| EXPENDITURE: | | |
| 'Author' Printing & Dist: | 2231-10 | 2296-94 |
| Sub. Refund s/Transfer: | 1000-00 | 91-50 |
| Subs to P/W: | 159-00 | 126-00 |
| Room Hire/Refreshments: | 924-66 | 862-25 |
| Committee Expenses: | 28-27 | 41-48 |
| Competition Prizes: | 310-00 | 510-30 |
| Bank Charge/Unpaid/Cheques. - | | |
| Loan Repayment: | 150-00 | |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURE: | 4803-03 | 3928-47 |
| Income less Expenditure: | 167-37 | 384-19 |
| Balance b/f 1 st April: | 2208-80 | 1824-45 |
| Receipts: 2005/6 | | 0-16 |
| | <u>4970-40</u> | <u>4312-66</u> |
| | 7179-20 | 6137-27 |
| Payments: | <u>4803-03</u> | <u>3928-47</u> |
| Balance c/f 31 st March: | <u>2376-17</u> | <u>2208 - 80</u> |
| TREASURER ACCOUNT: | | |
| Bank Statement: | 2376-17 | 2240-80 |
| Unrep.cheques: | | <u>32-00</u> |
| Available Cash: | <u>2376-17</u> | 2208-80 |
| BUS: MONEY MANAGER: | | |
| Opening Balance: | 68-80 | 66-31 |
| Closing Balance: | 1080-50 | 68-43 |