

The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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Lord Vansittart (1940-57)
Sir George Rostrevor
Hamilton (1957-67)
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Diary

Annual Luncheon, Civil Service
Club:

Saturday 23rd October 2010

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

Please forgive me for raising first the subject of computers. Talktalk bought out Onetel, who previously forwarded emails addresses to adriand etc. With neither advice nor warning Talktalk cut me off and caused me to waste four days searching for a none existent computer defect. I confess that when a TalkTalk sales person stopped me in the High Street and invited me to subscribe to TalkTalk, I was not my usual polite self. Please note my new email address, which is dansona@ntlworld.com.

For those of you who had email returned of late, you now know the reason. Don't think I can't see you through my satellite spying machine, Yes you. You with that knowing smile on your face; you who continue to avoid using computers.

As I write these words, the sun is shining, the strawberries are smiling, the apples are glowing, the gooseberries are blushing and the Annual Luncheon seems far away. I hope to see many of you there to share our 75th Anniversary celebrations at CS Club on 23rd October.

How good it is to see our numbers rising again and I hope to find contributions sent to me for publishing from our new members, preferably as an attachment to an email. Letters, stories, or articles. All poems to Terry James, our Poetry Editor please, even those who are not subscribers to Poetry Workshop. The high standard of the content of Author remains dependant upon such contributions, in addition to the prize winning entries.

Chairman's Chat

Terry Rickson

I have been reading an article in 'The Independent' about a literary agent with a tot of clout, who has set up a company to publish e-books. The news has caused uproar in the book trade which sees its business under threat, such, that even your 'un-reconstructed' Chairman can appreciate the alarm being felt! Customers or potential customers, it is claimed, are visiting bookshops, making notes of titles and then ordering the items from the likes of Amazon. Now, this may not exactly be 'news' to many of you but it does highlight a problem. One of the great joys for me has been and still is, enjoying a good browse in a bookshop and purchasing if I see something I like. I wouldn't care to think the bookshop is under immediate threat and, hopefully, it won't come about. So, members/bookshop lovers, support your local bookshop!*

In July the Poetry Workshop held its annual Weekend in Birmingham, an enjoyable affair as always. There was the usual fare of readings, discussions and talks together with a Poetry Siam and two competitions - the food wasn't bad either! To any PW member, both 'old' or new, who has not tried the Weekend, why not give it a try, you'd be assured of a warm welcome.

To all the members, I trust you will enjoy the rest of the summer whether in a deck-chair in the garden, on the beach, walking in mountains or visiting friends and family. You'll be surprised at what you absorb and translate the sounds, colours and experiences into words, then overwhelm our editor with stories, poems and articles for the 'Author,' not forgetting, of course, any Society competitions that are running.

* [Should I mention that our Chairman doesn't have a computer, so does not have access to e-books? No, you're right, I should keep such views to myself. So, members of the jury, you will ignore that last remark. -Ed]

Member's Successes

Oliver Eade's book Moon Rabbit, a colour-illustrated children's (7-12 years) novel set in the Scottish Borders and Mythological China, was published in November 2009 by Delancey Press, price £7.99. It is also available from bookshops and Amazon.uk, ISBN: 978-1-907205-12-5.

It was one of the winners of the 2007 Writers' and Artists' Yearbook New Novel competition and long-listed for the Waterstone's 2008 Children's Book Prize. Oliver has also had another children's novel accepted for publication, called 'Northwards'.

Not since the leather jackets associated with lawless biker gangs in the 60s has any single item of clothing managed to symbolise trouble and provoke a knee-jerk reaction of fear and condemnation amongst otherwise rational citizens as the innocent hoodie.

This media-hyped view was the basis for **Brendon Lancaster's** first novel 'Hoodie', published by Authorhouse. The novel provides an antidote to alarmist Daily Mail reporting of youth issues, exploring the problems facing modern day Britain from the perspective of a disempowered, disaffected teenager.

Hoodie is available for order worldwide in paperback and eBook format from Authorhouse, and other online retailers, including Amazon, or by order through local bookshops.

Email: info@brendonlancaster.com Website:
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Poetry Workshop

Mike Boland

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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 will feature 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 2010

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. The judge for this year’s competition will be Bill Douglas.

Waves 2010

The Poetry Workshop’s annual anthology of members’ work has now been published. Running to 30 pages, it contains 45 poems by 23 poets and is, as usual, of a very high standard. Congratulations to this year’s editor Angus Livingstone. Copies of Waves 2010 are available at a price of £2.50 (inc p&p) from Terry Rickson (address above).

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 Waves 2011 will appear in the winter issue of “wavelengths”.

Wavelengths #24

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; the Rules of the Bill Barnes Competition; an article on 'Poets on Poets'; 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 £5* 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**.

* cost of membership correct at time of submission, but may be subject to changes agreed at the AGM - watch this page and 'wavelengths' for confirmation.

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
- access to the new e-folio
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition (open exclusively to PW members)
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend.

Dates to Remember

September 2010	publication of wavelengths # 24
30 September 2010	closing date for entries to the Bill Barnes Competition 2010
1 November 2010	deadline for wavelengths # 25
December 2010	publication of wavelengths # 25
1 January 2011	PW subscriptions due.

Summary of Annual General Meeting held on 22nd May 2010.

Those present: Terry Rickson (Chair) Nina Matter, Ethel Corduff, Adrian Danson, Roy Froud, Beryl Jones, Michael Smith, Paul Williams, Shafi Ahmed, Una McMorran, Val Tigwell and Brian Scott.

1. Apologies for absence: Joan Lewis, Wendy O'Mahoney.
2. Minutes of last AGM were read, proposed for acceptance by Roy Froud seconded by Brian Scott and passed nem. con.
3. Matters arising. Roy said he had some, but would raise them later.
4. Membership Secretary's Report

I apologise for my absence from the AGM but mobility problems prevent me from making the journey from Lincolnshire.

I'm very pleased to report a surge in membership numbers this year. Due in part to the excellent publicity arranged by Jenny Chamier Grove. I had many enquires at the beginning of 2010, resulting in quite a few new members. The current figure stands at 183. Roy Froud's now well-known children's story competition has also helped recruitment.

5. Meeting Secretary's report

This year pleased that 12 people have attended the AGM, which is more than the last few years. We also have several new members thanks to Jenny's hard work. Speakers. We invited the Jacksons, who run Flair for Words but there are unable to attend. An alternative has now been arranged. Any suggestions to celebrate our 75th anniversary in addition to our Anthology would be welcome. Copies remain for sale at £5 each, plus p&p. I would be grateful if someone would volunteer to work in parallel with me next year to a view to eventually taking over.

Brian said, "You are doing a good job".

6. Treasurer's Report

Accounts are with auditor. We now have 183 members, a net rise of 46. There are two renewals from a deceased member, Beryl is unable to trace bank. It is possible he had stipulated the payment in his will.

Donations were £264.65. We also have Roy's sponsorship for Fraud Comp and Vee Bradley sponsorship. Money manager has £565 in it and our financial position has improved. Ethel said perhaps committee might be able to get expenses now. Beryl and others agreed with this.

7. Publicity Officer's Report

Jenny is in France, continues to publicise the Society continuously and get new members. She is meticulous in all she does and keeps us informed. We have gained 70 new members. She also recently judged the Lewis Wright competition.

Roy asked if we get in touch with unions. This will be referred to Jenny.

8. Editor's Report

Thanks to those who contribute items in addition to competition winning entries, I have avoided the need to resort to my own work. I will be handing over at the end of the year to Paul Williams, after surviving ten years as editor and several house moves. I wish Paul good luck.

9. Poetry Workshop Report

This had proved to be quite an interesting year for the Poetry Workshop, a new venue for the Annual Workshop weekend and a new editor for 'Waves'. It was sad to report the death, during the year, of a long-standing member of the Society and Poetry Workshop, Vee Bradley. Vee was a stalwart of the Society and the Poetry Workshop and contributed to both as a poetry and prose writer and in addition, attended many society meeting and functions.

The Annual Bill Barnes Competition was judged by Norman Bissett. The form this year was free verse and Muriel Stammer's poem 'Will's heritage' was awarded first place. Second and third were 'Supertime' by Sonia Royal and 'Poison Pen' by Shelia Nichols. Andrew Milligan's poem 'Winter' was commended. All four will be published in the Spring 2010 'Wavelengths'.

The Herbert Spencer Competition was judged by Mike Boland . There were only sixteen entries this year, which was disappointing. The first second places went to Angus Livingstone's poems 'Eclipse' and 'Breaking Glass'. Third 'D'n'A' by Andrew Millican. 'Transcendence' by Angus Livingstone and 'Castle Ruins at Dusk' by Don Nixon were commended.

The annual PW Weekend was held at the Hills Court Conference Centre located at Rednal, to the south of Birmingham I was prevented from attending this year through illness, but I was however, assured that the weekend was enjoyed by those who took part and participated in it's activities. Talks were given by Joanna Crawford on Ogden Nash and on Hilaire Belloc by Roger De Boer. Ivy Hudson very kindly read my poem

about the modern poet, Owen Sheers. The acrostic competition, based on the word 'Birmingham' was won by Val Tigwell. Barbara Stewart was confirmed in the post of Chairman of the Poetry Workshop at the AGM and Steve Pilley as Co-ordinator for the 2010 weekend. The AGM agreed that I should continue in the post of treasurer.

The new editor for 'Waves' Angus Livingstone, produced his first edition of the annual anthology, which was well received. It was good to see several names new to the publication. There are four poetry folios in circulation at present and to which new contributors are always to be welcomed. The e-folio operated by Sylvia Neumann, is now up and running with four members taking part so far. The 2010 weekend will be held at the Hillscourt Conference Centre once again, between 16th and 18th July.

64 members of the society contributed to the Poetry Workshop,

I am pleased to conclude this report on behalf of the Poetry workshop

10. Competition Secretary's Report

As Ethel said there is a lot of sorting out to do. If no s.a.e. entry will not be returned. Entries not accompanied by appropriate fee are not sent for judging. Nina said she has highly commended articles to pass on to Adrian. Ethel said Nina is doing a good job as it can be complex especially the annual competitions.

11. Vee Bradley/ Gordon Gompers competitions

Reminder that Vee Bradley humorous poem with free entry closing date end of May. After discussion is extended by a week. Nina only received about 7 entries so far.

12. Froud Children's Competition

Roy Froud wanted to know how many members had joined as a result of Froud comp. Beryl not sure of exact figure. We will find out from Joan. Roy wanted to bring up the point about not finding the Froud competition on the Society website. He said if you look at the website and check competition you get only competitions open to members. A link is needed on website. The competition should be put in and should come up when you press search. If that is done I guarantee you will get hundreds of entries. Nina said she could not cope with hundreds of entries. Roy asked why society did not want a large amount of entries. It would make a lot of money.

Adrian said the amount of work done would be considerable for Nina and for the judge, as the competition is open to everyone. Nina felt the Froud comp should be open to members only Paul suggested the Froud comp may need another secretary to deal with it alone if there were large numbers. Adrian suggested sending entries straight to the judges i.e. the Jackson's. Roy thought this was a good idea and will contact the Jacksons to see if they agree.

Ethel will check website and contact Joan.

13. 75th Anniversary Lunch October 23rd Civil Service Club. Discussed asking Vice President John Le Carre or PD James. Shafi asked which other name is used by John Le Carre. Informed that it is David Cornwell Ethel said we now have a speaker.

14. Writer of the Year- Adrian said we have had two particularly successful writers this year, both of whom he believes to be eligible. He will forward the information to the committee.

(The committee subsequently decided that the title 'Writer of the Year 2010' would be awarded to Oliver Eade.)

15. Election of President and Vice Presidents

All re-elected unanimously.

16. Election of Committee

Brian Scott proposed and seconded by Michael Smith that all be re-elected. Paul Williams is taking over as Editor from Adrian Danson next year.

17. Any other Business

Roy Froud proposed that the committee should have expenses and that we should have honorarium of £50 per annum, seconded by Brian Scott, seven against and three abstentions. Beryl felt it is too early to have honorarium. We should leave it for 12 months. Adrian said this would be a committee decision, as it would eat into our reserves but all should claim expenses. He said we need to raise the prize money. Shafi said we should not give money in anticipation only at the end, subject to sufficient funds remaining.

Anthology - Copies were on sale at meeting for £5. We still have many remaining for sale.

Date of next Annual General Meeting to be arranged.

Vee Bradley Humorous Poetry Competition

Report by the judge, Val Tigwell.

“Man for all Seasons” was a worthy winner. It stood out and arrested my attention, holding my interest throughout. The formal rousing tone, in contrast with the *tongue in cheek* humour, extolled the virtues of the postman on his daily round, describing most colourfully, what might be faced delivering mail. Great fun and clever use of language.

Man for all Seasons (The winning poem)

Man for all seasons, a fluorescent friend
who braves the icy cold and blazing sun
and does not cease until the battle's won.
Ignoring insults and the jeers of those
who leer and castigate - “You're late!”
and “Not known here!” and “Shut that gate!”

Approved by dint of regal head on stamp,
descendant of archaic Penny Black,
you are the one who every morning gets the sack.
You walk the streets, but solicit not your trade,
And flit like bee from house to house with precious load
deciphering the enigmatic code.

Ignoring ache of blistered, bunioned soles
and spring-ed letter-box which snaps your hand.
Brave infantry! Defy the odds and
shun all dangers lurking over gate, of
snarling, gnarling dogs, lips lashing for a bone,
or wanton women, alluring, home alone.

And when the round extends too far for feet
and daily tasks resemble ten-mile hike,
you heed the Tebbit creed - get on your bike!
Your sturdy two-wheeled frame a steed
to carry all your treasured cargo
like a pedalling Wells Fargo.

Proud history. 'Twas your forefather who delivered epistolically from home
to Ephesus and Corinth and to Rome.
Man for all seasons, nobility surrounds
your craft. You know you must not fail.
Man for all seasons, anointed royal male.

The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers are pleased to announce:

The W.F. & F.G. Froud Annual Children's Story Competition 2010

Short Story Of Up To 2000 Words for Children of Any Age

Open To All

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

Entry fee £5 (£3 for members of SCPSW and refund of £2 for entrants who join now)

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

No entry form is required. Enclose s.a.e. if you wish your entry to be returned.

Closing date 31 October 2010 (Restricted to one entry per person)

Entries should be typed, double spaced and on one side of A4. Only pen name, word count and page numbers should be annotated on manuscripts. Your name, address and pen name should be attached on a separate sheet and sent to:

Competition Secretary

Nina Mattar, 4 Redruth House, Grange Road, Sutton SM6 6RT

Cheques should be made payable to SCPSW. Competition is open to all but those interested in and eligible for membership i.e. serving or retired members of Civil Service, Armed Forces, N.H.S., Local Government or other Public Service, should send s.a.e. to:

Joan Lewis, 17 The Green, Corby Glen, Grantham NG33 4NP for details or email joan@lewis5634.fsnet.co.uk

Life's Too Short: True Stories of Life at Work

Foreword by Val McDermid

Whether we love it or hate it, work has a huge impact on our lives. From builder to baker to social care worker, these writers tell us what life is really like at work today. The one thing that all these true stories prove is that you never know what your working day will bring.

Union members were invited to submit a short true-life story about your work experience for inclusion in this book and one of our members, whose name I do not yet know, was one of the ten chosen for inclusion. More information is available on www.quickreads.org.uk

New member **Malcolm Noble** went to school in Shropshire and consequently earned a review of his seventh novel by the “Shropshire Star” newspaper, from which I quote:

This is the sixth novel featuring likeable Detective Bill Woodcock, unsurprisingly known to all as Timberdick. Constable Machray, whose consuming passion is train sets, is approached by the vicar with a locked room mystery. Sharing similarities with several recent local deaths, Machray is convinced the answer to the mystery lies in the church cellar. Capable though he is, this needs other brains than his to solve the mystery – bring on Timberdick, crime solver extraordinaire.

This is parochial policing at its best – bumbling coppers, ascerbic locals, dotty hobbies, seedy pubs and an endearingly down-to-earth main character. Good fun and a fast enjoyable read.”

Poetry Pages - Edited by Terry James

Snowdrop - Symbol of Hope by A E Hobbs

When the snowdrops are in flower,
Their quiet beauty to behold.
The spring is not so far away,
With its colours green and gold.

Then as the snowdrops fade away,
Other flowers come along.
Drifts of bluebells grace the woods,
And the birds are full of song.

Thus the seasons come and go,
each in their different ways.
From the cool of springtime,
To the long hot Summer days.

Now the leaves are turning,
From green to red and gold.
A sign that the season is ending,
And the year is getting old.

So when in the cold days,
That winter will surely bring.
Think of the brave snowdrop,
The harbinger of Spring.

Quest for Meaning by Margaret Chisman

We're living at a time of universal death
From the bomb of the terrorists, the sniper in wait,
Political intrigue, aircraft disaster, madness on roads,
From poverty, from pestilence and plague,
From sadness and loneliness, alienation and fear,
Yet men still plant trees for their children to love.

One woman on death, wants her body for compost;
A man, for his corpse to be frozen come the day
When science finds a cure for all ills.
Yet men still plant trees for their children to love.

Should I leave my mark on this earth ere I die?
Will this recompense for the death of myself?
Our brains cannot cope with what they invent.
In computers we've made a poor offprint
Of ourselves and mock life. Our purpose
Is learning to love truth and live simply with joy.
Computers have no such feelings and thoughts.
They mirror the faults of their makers,
Seeking binary logic excluding subjective
Phenomena. Yet men still plant trees.

Some want to cover the world with cement,
Supermarkets and runways, conurbations joined up,
Skyscrapers, factories, arsenals and the like.
They try to cover our soul in concrete too,
That in the monolithic madness we lose
All ability to escape from this prison.

Look-for the pattern – I'm part of the whole.
Is the 'I' in mean indestructible 'I'?
We must search out the cracks in the pavements
The walls and the roads, the towering, blocks,
The crevices in ourselves we must also seek out
And there plant a sapling that will flourish and grow
And crack open the bonds that keep us from love.

The Author

Song Of The Earth by Norman Bissett

Helvellyn and Skiddaw are a glorious backdrop
to the standing stones of Castlerigg,
more venerable and ancient than Stonehenge.
Derwentwater scintillates below
and Bassenthwaite is a silver sheen.

Toiling, we crest the brow of Whinlatter,
with buzzards, peregrines and falcons hovering,
heads among clouds and wreathed about by heaven,
then freewheel down to Buttermere
to stroll in sunshine around its fabled shore.

Toiling, we crest the brow of slate-scarred Honister,
stopping to quaff the ambrosia of the air. A land
of eagles, cumuli and slumbering giants-Haystacks,
Great Gable, Brandreth, Glaramara. We freewheel
down to Borrowdale, to Stonethwaite Beck

and to the Derwent, chuckling among disused plumbago
mines. A picnic bench beside the colossal Bowderstone,
shaded by mighty oaks, singing the song of the earth.
Two cuckoos engage in colloquy, across the woods.
Beethoven joins us for a sandwich and a cup of tea.

Little Miss Pumfret by Terry Rickson

Little Miss Pumfret died last night,
when a sliver of pane caught the pale moonlight.

Little Miss Pumfret's little black cat
mewling on the staircase sat.

Little Miss Pumfret's china dogs
shall reflect no more the flickering logs.

Little Miss Pumfret's silver and glass
will to a Cape Town cousin pass.

Little Miss Pumfret's grandfather clock
tells the hour. Tick, tock, tick, tock.

Endorphins by Ivy Hudson

Take it up
one, two.
Keep going –
easy oars,
bowside only,
silt in river.

Fishermen –
just ignore,
altogether
here's the bridge,
concentrate
nearly there.

Off again,
drive with the legs,
blasted four
in the way.
River traffic
more delay.

Dissertation
overdue,

mustn't think
round this bit.
Desperation
mustn't think.

Here's the boathouse,
easy oars,
easy oars,
easy, easy
now.

(Quite how this Herbert Spencer competition entry came into my hands is a mystery, but I have included it as it triggered some childhood memories – Ed)

Wartime Lullaby by Roy Stevens

Sweltering in my bed,
Late on a stifling summer's eve,
An eight year old boy,
Cheated of sleep,
By Double Summer Time.

Through, the open window,
Listlessly,
I hear my father,
Watering his thirsty plants,
in the garden below.

Then, punctuating the still, warm air,
Staccato bursts of fire,
As cannon are tested.
At the Ordnance factory,
A mile down the road.

With the rhythm, of the guns,
Permeating my brain.,
And dulling my senses.
I'm lulled, at last,
To sleep.

Last Dance

Oliver Eade

Carmen Ruiz glanced at her watch for the hundredth time. Forty-five minutes late! That might have been well within the bounds of punctuality for most Spanish men, but not Pedro. He was *never* late. Something was wrong. An accident, maybe? Impossible! Pedro was the safest driver in Andalucia. How she loved being driven home by him, for she knew no harm could come to her with Pedro at the wheel.

And she felt safe in his arms when they danced. Life had become hollow, all those years living alone. She used to get an awful feeling that something would leap out of that hollowness and destroy her, but after meeting Pedro at the *salon de baile* one Saturday evening the hollowness and the fear left her. Life had a new purpose. To dance!

They say true dancing partnerships are born out of a yearning of two souls to move together as one, not a forcing together of two separate beings, opposing forces on the dance floor. So it was with Carmen and Pedro. They danced as one all that very first evening ... and the week after and the week after that.

Pedro was an organic farmer and inordinately shy off the dance floor. One week he brought along a bag of organic vegetables for Carmen after she'd owned up to being an excellent cook. He gave her the vegetables with only a smile and a nod of the head, but when she told him she couldn't possibly carry the bag home on the bus, for her back would give her hell, his face lit up. His expression told her everything. The vegetable offering was his way of saying their relationship should shift upwards a gear or two, and her response a request that he drive her home. Thereafter he drove her home every week, and she would invite him in for a little tapas and a glass of *Malaga*.

The conversation was always one way. Pedro would sit, keeping a respectable distance and listening intently to Carmen's life history delivered in widow-sized instalments. Some evenings he'd be sitting there for two or more hours, but he'd not change his position and one glass of wine was his limit. He prided himself in never having been drunk in all his sixty-eight years.

Carmen's husband, Pablo, had died from alcohol poisoning of the liver some ten years before she'd met Pedro. Their last fifteen years as husband and wife had been spent living apart in the same house, Pablo upstairs and Carmen downstairs. It was the only way she could tolerate him, and they communicated through their son in Seville ... eighty kilometres away. Occasionally they would pass each other in the entrance hall as one came in and the other went out, but not a word would be exchanged.

And Pablo never danced.

Ten years a widow and fifteen years in the same house as Pablo ... that was twenty-five years of loneliness to make up with Pedro, and she savoured every second of their times together, especially on the dance floor. There was no dance they couldn't master together ... waltz, fox-trot, jive, pasodoble, quickstep ... anything ... and he told her it was truly remarkable she'd never danced before and that she must be a natural. His shyness, of course, melted when he held her close, and she often wondered how many other women he'd held like that, for one thing was certain: he'd been an expert dancer long before they first tripped the light fantastic together.

She had no idea whether he was a bachelor or a widower. He'd never said and she'd never asked. She only knew he lived by himself, like her ... and that he was very wealthy judging by the extent of his lands.

She began cooking for him. The tapas was only the starter, to tempt him. He loved her *pollo*, her *papas a la pobre* and her cakes. He would turn up mid-afternoon, every Saturday, and they would eat together, no wine, as she spilled out her heart, and then he would drive her to the dance hall and they would dance and dance and dance; he would drive her home and she would give him tapas and a glass of *Malaga* and talk some more and in the early hours he would leave and she would hold on to the memory of him and, once asleep, would dream again of dancing.

Perhaps if Pablo had danced things would have turned out differently. Unlike Pedro, the man talked incessantly ... and drank. At first, as a young woman, she'd felt sorry for him. As a child in Franco's dark and sorrowful Spain, all opportunities for success had been denied him because his family happened to be on the wrong side

of the divide. He was skilful with his hands, and should have been a cabinet maker like his father before Franco's thugs killed the man, but the authorities saw to it he got nowhere in his career. He ended up a labourer on the roads. A labourer who could recite Lorca, who crafted small animals out of bits of old wood for children, and probably she did love him then, perhaps to mother him and turn him into what he should have been, but gradually, as their son grew up and diverted that love away from her husband, the alcohol thing progressed from habit to addiction. Initially it was shame that caused her to banish the drunken Pablo upstairs ... shame that she'd failed him in some way and that the neighbours would blame her for the rows ... but the shame turned to disgust and the disgust remained with her till Pablo's death, his body rotted by alcohol.

At seventy-two years of age she should have known that happiness is an illusion, that it wouldn't last and that the loneliness would return, its bleakness reinforced by that brief interlude of illusion. At the very least she should have read the warning signs the week before, when they danced the last dance together. It was a waltz. Pedro kept looking over her right shoulder, steering her purposively around other gliding couples to keep a certain person within his sights: an elegant dyed-brunette not a day over sixty, with legs that could have belonged to a woman half her age. Carmen noticed the exchange of smiles between them after that dance; she tried to persuade herself they were already acquainted and that these were no more than smiles of recognition, and she offered him her very special *pollo* the following week. It should have been so very obvious when he phoned to say he was busy that afternoon, and he would collect her on the way to the *salon de baile*. But her mind refused to accept the pain of deceit. She'd had enough of that in the past ... pain.

After an hour had passed she could deny the pain no longer. She returned her dance shoes to their box in her shoe cupboard, slipped out of her dance dress, hung it at the far end of her wardrobe, never to be worn again, and prepared for herself some *tapas*. And perhaps, she thought, she should allow herself two glasses of *Malaga* this time to soften the pain. And then she could tell herself that one day those youthful-looking legs would grow old and he'd realise once again what a magical thing their dancing partnership had been.

Side Tracked

Alan Jones

As Tony watched the four- carriage train snaking it's way towards the platform, he knew that another all- to- predictable day was just beginning. Although the sun was shining, it did little to lift his spirits as he contemplated the things he needed to do at work .The train dutifully stopped and he opened the carriage door and found a seat. For some reason, the train was slightly less busy today than usual, and he sat opposite an empty seat where someone had earlier discarded a newspaper. "I suppose that's yesterday's paper", he muttered to himself as he stretched across to retrieve it. Having unfolded it, he was surprised to see that it bore the current date, Wednesday, 9th. September 1998. As was his usual practice when reading newspapers, he turned straight to the sports section at the back, glimpsed about last night's football and then turned to the racing page. He was just about to turn to the next item, when a name caught his eye. Random King was running in the 3.20 at Newbury. Although not an habitual gambler, Tony was familiar with the exploits of this horse. He had seen it run a while ago when it had been well- fancied, but had been blocked in on the rails, and it's apprentice jockey could only deliver an all-to-late challenge, finishing a close-up third. Impressed by the horse's speed, Tony had backed him next time out, only for Random King to run poorly, largely due to the state of the ground, following a heavy downpour before racing, which had turned the track very tacky. The horse had clearly been unable to act on it. Today he was being ridden by a more experienced rider. The going and distance was ideal. This, Tony felt, was his chance to win some serious money. He replaced the newspaper on the still unoccupied seat opposite and felt a sense of satisfaction washing over him. Today was going to be a bit different. The empty seat, the newspaper, it was all an omen that today things were going to go his way.

On arriving at the office, he put Random King to the back of his mind and carried on with his usual mundane tasks. At lunchtime, he broke with tradition and left his sandwiches in his desk drawer, put on his jacket and walked out into the busy, sunlit street. It was surprisingly warm and Tony made the short trip to the cash machine outside the local bank. After waiting a while for a woman who seemed to be having some trouble with a statement, he finally got to the

machine and drew out some money, The walk to the betting shop was considerably further, but Tony was confident that it would be a worthwhile expedition. Crossing the road, he could see the red sign outside the shop and marched smartly towards it. On pushing open the door, he was greeted by a wave of cigarette smoke which caught his breath. In the corner, two rather downtrodden looking chaps were staring at a racecard on the wall. Tony took out a betting slip from its plastic holder and wrote out “£100 win Random King (3.20 Newbury)”. He had never risked so much money before in his life, but made his way determinedly to the counter and pushed the slip and the money across to the girl that was serving. She picked it up without speaking and fed the slip into the machine, returning the undercopy of the bet to Tony as evidence that the wager had been placed. “Thanks” said Tony, finally breaking the silence. The girl continued to say nothing and instead went back to reading a magazine, which she had made a poor job of trying to hide under the counter.

Tony returned to work and made preparations for a meeting that he was due to attend upstairs in the boardroom at two o'clock After the usual ceremony of reading out the minutes of the previous meeting, the chairman opened discussions on the plans for the new warehouse and the necessary changes to procedures. As usual, Robert dominated the meeting. Tony tried to make an input, but gave up in the end and rather switched off from the whole thing. His sense of lethargy was shaken, when he looked up and noticed the time. The clinical steel-rimmed clock on the wall pointed to 3.17. The horses would be on their way down to the start for the 3.20. He gazed at the clock. The deflated skin of a blue balloon dangled pathetically from one side of its face, the remaining evidence of a retirement party, staged last week for Tommy Davis from Accounts. Tommy was probably far away now, enjoying himself somewhere nice. “Lucky sod”, thought Tony. From his seat in the boardroom, Tony could see outside the window. A pigeon fluttered past against a patch of blue sky, framed by the tall, adjacent buildings. He glanced at the clock again. 3.22 – the race should be underway!. Looking at the patch of sky, he imagined in his mind's eye, the race unfolding before him. He could see the horses coming into view. Two ran closely together, followed by a third, about one length behind. They were approaching the final furlong now and the jockeys were getting more animated. The two leading horses raced against the rails, neck and neck. The winning post was coming into

view. Suddenly another horse came swooping down on the outside, passing the leaders in a final burst of speed and winning by a length and a half. Could it be Random King?...

Tony suddenly became aware that a number of his colleagues were staring at him. In his daydream, he had been tapping his pen on the desk, simulating the rhythm of the galloping horses. He smiled weakly, released his grip and allowed the pen to fall gently back to onto the desk. His boss glared at him. Tony, in an attempt to avoid further eye contact, glanced again at the clock. It was almost half-past three. He felt very alone and isolated, unable to share with any of his colleagues the thoughts that were pre-occupying his mind. They wouldn't understand and would hardly condone the type of reckless gamble which he had undertaken. Eventually, a sense of calm came over him, realising that by now, there was nothing that he could do to alter the situation. The race had been run and that was it. He couldn't change or alter anything.

Whether he had won or lost was entirely beyond his control.

“So can you update us of the situation, Tony?”.... He was suddenly aware that the chairman had asked him a question and that everyone was awaiting his response, although what the question was, he had no idea as he hadn't been listening.

“Well”, started Tony. “Erm. Er, I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch that last bit”. An embarrassed silence followed, finally broken by his boss who said “I'll answer that one. I'll bring Tony up to speed at the end of the meeting”. Another scolding look was cast in his direction. Robert smirked, rubbed his chin and pretended to write something down.

The meeting finally was brought to an end just before five o'clock. Tony made his way out of the room, avoiding eye contact with everyone, particularly his boss who was now unofficially continuing the discussions with a number of others in the far corner of the room. He went downstairs to his office, returned a couple of phone calls, locked his papers away and headed for the door.

Outside, the weather had changed. It was now raining hard, totally in contrast to the sunshine in the earlier part of the day. Feeling humiliated by the events of the meeting, Tony's mood was now changing as well. He wanted to find out the result of his race, but all of the earlier optimism had now disappeared. What if it had been raining

heavily all afternoon at Newbury? That would have scuppered any chance that Random Prince would have had. He cursed himself for not checking the weather forecast. As he made his way towards the betting shop, his mood became more sombre. He had thrown away good money he could ill afford to lose. He had made a fool of himself at the meeting. He had upset his boss and let himself down, all over this stupid bet. If only he hadn't had sat opposite that empty seat on the train. If only he hadn't picked up the newspaper, none of this would have happened. "stupid, stupid, stupid!" he said aloud to himself as he marched along. He kicked a discarded Coke can along the pavement in frustration. It skimmed into a nearby puddle, showering a couple of passers-by as it did so. He crossed the road. In a doorway, a young lad was sitting, begging for money. Tony never normally gave money to street beggars, but on this occasion, he put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a coin. He thought that perhaps if he were to show some generosity to someone in need, then maybe, just maybe, the deed would be reciprocated in a few moments. In any case, he had just thrown away £100. What difference would another £1 make?

By now, he was feeling quite ill at his stupidity. He could see in the distance the red sign above the bookmaker's door and knew that in just a few moments he would know his fate. He felt his heart beat increasing as he got within sight of the shop door. His mouth felt very dry as with a deep breath he pushed the door of the shop open. He couldn't get in, as his way was blocked by a rather large man who was pushing his way out. The man belched rather loudly, seemingly without embarrassment. When Tony finally got inside the shop it was full of punters, all of them it seemed focused upon the screening of the last race of the day. Many of them were animated, shouting out, swearing and waving at the television screen, in an attempt to recoup their earlier losses. Tony realised that he was the only person in the shop who was not interested in the current events taking place. What he wanted was the earlier results. He fought his way through the crowd to get within sight of the bank of screens which held the results of the previous races. He could see greyhound results, fixed odds for football, results from the meeting at Newcastle. Where was Newbury?. He frantically searched, but could not see it. He desperately needed to know that result more than anything, yet couldn't bear to look. Where was it? The noise behind him built to a crescendo as the televised race reached its climax.

Then he spotted a screen on the right-hand side at the top. It said:- Result – Newbury 3.20 – 1st. Random King 7/2.

It had won. It had bloody won!!!!

A Contribution from Harry Chadwick

It was a dull day, raining outside. He felt dull himself

He slowly opened the envelope. Inside was a letter and two pieces of written work. He decided to read the letter first:

Dear Editor

Nearing the end of my days, and ceasing to care very much what I do or say any more, I enclose, mischievously, a couple of Improperities. I could say of the prose piece, however, that it says in a verbal nutshell much of what I have written in my *Book of Life*, a philosophical and psychological treatise dealing with human behaviour and relationships in the context of the emotionally diseased state of the society in which we live..

As for the travesty of a poem - a villanelle as you will doubtless be aware - it is a response to much of the largely amateur poetry I come across these days. I have in mind an article on the subject.

Yours etc.

Harry Chadwick

‘Hm!’ muttered the Editor, dully, as he began to read the piece of prose, following it with the verse.

Write-Off

‘I’m writing,’ she answered. ‘A story.’

She looked up at this fourteen-year-old, a local boy who had befriended her son, frequently bounding across the field between her own new home and his family’s cottage in the village proper. As he sprawled across the arm of the sagging easy chair, she noticed the lean angularity of his form, the hollow of a well-muscled thigh beneath his jeans. There was a special sensuousness to the curves around his almost-bare shoulders, the loose way they linked to a chest that was almost manly. And his eyes shone intently. Confusedly, she longed to hold, to touch, and the word ‘desire’ insisted on pounding her brain. Overcome with guilt, she made hurried, unnecessary movements to papers on the table, tapped gibberish into the keyboard.

‘Why?’ she echoed, ‘Why, I hope to interest a few people, help them see some things in a different way, perhaps.’ It had taken a long time to gain a more or less regular niche on a semi-literary venture, mostly of appeal to women.

‘So, what’s it about?’

‘It’s about a woman who falls in love with a man who’s accused by his stepdaughter of abuse in the past. The police are involved, the man drowns himself, and then the woman enters into a significant relationship with the step-daughter.’

‘That’s silly, isn’t it?’

She was hurt, taken aback, found it difficult to compose her voice.

‘Toby’s not in at the moment.’

He saw her flushed face, was confused by the misunderstanding, lacking the words to undo it. He was always putting his foot in it. And he looked at her intently, flushing himself. She wasn’t all that much younger than his mother, but there was something especially beautifully girlish about her mouth and the crinkle around her eyes. He hardly dared look down to her breasts, which often wobbled beneath her bra-less dress. The image lingered in his mind of three naked bodies on the greenest of grass under the warmest of suns. His own was in the middle. On one side lay Toby, on the other Toby’s mother. His hands, seemingly able to reach wherever they wanted, were fondling the crevices and protuberances of both of them. It was a beautiful thought. He was, after all, innocent.

‘I didn’t mean your writing’s silly, only that it’s silly, isn’t it, to make up anything that’s wildly unrealistic at all? Like on the telly an’ that, with hundreds of cops and robbers, shootings and crimes galore. Not like real life, like with us. We ought to be writing about one another. Real things.’

He was bursting with an even more crimson glow as he tried to undo the hurt he had caused. She melted towards him, could have drawn him into her.

'I'll go search out Toby' And he bounded through the open patio door, leapt over the already-precarious timber fence, ran across the field to the stile in its far corner, disappeared.

After a lull, she continued to write, forgetting the truth - and love, beauty, rose petals, torture, desire and death.

Mush

Poetry's mush, man, you know what I mean?
It's pansies pushing words with so-called flair,
Avoiding all that's real, what's there to be seen?

Though life is gritty, and shitty and dead unclean,
They dredge up flamin' false feelings for their
Poetry's mush man, you know what I mean?

And what's it all for in the end, for they've never been
Anywhere but Arty-Farty Land, there
Avoiding all that's real, what's there to be seen?

There's life in the raw, all its naked passions obscene,
Yet these gits find it fearful, so have to flee where
Poetry's mush, man, you know what I mean?

There's life to be led, you - Poets! Wherever you've been,
It's gotta be explored. But you, you just don't dare,
Avoiding all that's real, what's there to be seen.

Don't give me all that bull about flowers on the green,
Tell me why pain is common, tenderness rare.
Poetry's mush, man, you know what I mean?
Avoiding all that's real, what's there to be seen?

The Editor leaned back a little, gathered together the envelope and its entire contents, which he tipped then into the waste bin beneath his desk.

'Hm!' he muttered gleefully, noticing that the rain had stopped.

This is the Cadogan Hotel

Una McMorran

(A Lewis Wright Commended story)

In the afternoon of an April day in 1902 a horse drawn cab, occupied by an elegantly dressed couple, drew up at the door of The Cadogan Hotel. It was obvious to the liveried doorman that they were newly married. The tip would be generous; he opened the door of the cab with a flourish. When the couple arrived at the door of their room, the bridegroom hesitated for a moment, then overcoming his shyness, bent down, scooped up his bride into his arms and made to enter through the door. However, he had not reckoned upon the length of the feather in her hat, the complexity and bulk of her skirt or the loss of one of her shoes, so it took several attempts to negotiate the doorway. By then both were overcome by barely suppressed mirth. Eventually the door closed behind them but their laughter could be heard through the door, which bore the inscription, 'The Oscar Wilde Room'.

It was March 1907, the ladies arrived at The Cadogan Hotel in time of luncheon; an onlooker could see that this sedate pair were mother and daughter. They ate very little of their meal but talked a great deal. The ladies had reserved two rooms and had stipulated that one room must be 'The Oscar Wilde Room' and the other room should be adjacent. They were assured that the rooms were facing the front of the hotel and overlooking the street. Later that afternoon the doorman was seated in his porters' chair, taking the weight off his feet, when he became aware that people were gathering outside the hotel and looking upwards. He muttered to himself, "you only need one idle person to stand still and look upwards and in no time you have a crowd." He was reluctant to move but after a while, when people began to point upwards, he decided to take a look. He was horrified to see a long banner, in green, white and purple, stretched between two windows of the hotel and bearing the words,

'The importance of being earnest about VOTES FOR WOMEN'.

The doorman almost ran to the manager's office. The manager accompanied by the assistant-manager and a porter knocked once and without waiting for permission to enter immediately opened the door to 'The Oscar Wilde Room'. The ladies were seated side by side but

their eyes were fixed on whoever was sitting opposite to them in a large high-backed chair. The manager, his curiosity aroused, glanced to see who it was. The chair was empty! The manager looked at his assistant and then for a brief moment allowed his eyes to roll heavenwards. Within minutes the banner had been retrieved. The ladies, already prepared for what they knew would be a hasty exit, moved to the door. The elder of the two ladies paused, then turned and looked towards the large high-backed chair with a faint smile. The younger lady was seen to wink as she passed through the door bearing the inscription, 'The Oscar Wilde Room'.

The year was 1917 and it was January. They had been married for barely six hours before he left to re-join his regiment in France. She continued to live at home with her mother and work at the local hospital as a voluntary nurse. The months that followed felt very long and filled with dread. Then last week that wonderful news arrived by telegram. *Forty-eight hours leave stop Honeymoon stop Meet Tuesday at noon Cadogan Hotel Knightsbridge stop All my love David*. She was at the Cadogan Hotel by half past ten and waited hour after hour. It was eight o'clock in the evening when a telegram arrived - redirected by her mother - stating that David had been killed in action.

Some hours later having lost track of time, she stood outside, what was to have been their honeymoon bedroom, in utter misery and thought, if David had been here he would have carried me over the threshold. In the night muffled sobbing could just be heard through the door bearing the inscription 'The Oscar Wilde Room'.

On a bright October day in 1942 two young RAF officers arrived at The Cadogan Hotel within minutes of each other. They met exchanging warm smiles and hand shakes but without words, their hands and eyes holding for a long lingering moment. This did not go unnoticed by an elderly grim faced clergyman passing through the hotel lobby. He paused for a moment, changed direction and made for a comfortable looking chair where he sat, looking thoughtful, for a considerable time. His grim face now had an added sourness about the mouth. He stood for a moment then purposely made for the reception desk and asked for The Manager.

Outside room 118 - 'The Oscar Wilde Room' - the airmen paused and the fair-haired young man, who had been a well-known actor

before volunteering for The Royal Air force, said, “who is having the Oscar Wilde room?” They looked at each other, grinned and then said in unison, ‘we both are!’ Laughing, they linked arms and entered the room together.

Shortly after midnight there came a knock at the door of ‘The Oscar Wilde Room’. After a lengthy pause the actor’s companion, wearing a dressing gown, his legs and feet bare, unlocked the door.

“*Police!*” Called one of the two plainclothes policemen on the threshold then they strode into the room. The actor, who was sitting up in bed, appeared calm and composed and murmured to himself, “two days ago I was in aerial combat with a Messerschmitt - infinitely preferable to this.” He took in the scene and was heard to say, “*Betjeman, you were spot on old lad*”

Then in a voice completely unlike his own the actor declaimed -

“A thump and a murmur of voices,
Oh, why must they make such a din?
As the door of the bedroom swung open
And two plainclothes policemen came in.
“Mr Wilde, we ‘ave come for tew take yew
Where felons and criminals dwell
We must ask yew tew leave with us *quietly*
For this is the Cadogan Hotel.”

A sound like a faint chuckle was heard - it appeared to come from a large high-backed chair on the far side of the room. An hour later the two policemen and the two airmen left the room, as they did so, the actor’s hand lingered for a moment on the door bearing the inscription, ‘The Oscar Wilde Room’.

It was a beautiful May morning 1965 and the Manager of The Cadogan Hotel happened to be at the Reception Desk when the couple arrived. ‘Welcome Mr and Mrs Fingal. You *have* come a long way. Geralton, I believe, is in Western Australia?’

“Thank you,” William Fingal said. “Yes. Geralton is north of Perth, Western Australia.”

“Is this your first visit to London?”

“The first for my wife, I passed through a few times during the war.”

“I wish you a pleasant stay. Mrs Fingal was most insistent that you should occupy ‘The Oscar Wilde Room’ and we were happy that it was available.”

Jane Fingal gave the manager a tight little smile.

“It was to be a surprise for my husband.”

The moment the door closed William, his face white, turned to Jane.

“This room - its rather rubbing it in isn’t it? I don’t need to be reminded of my inadequacies.

“Darling! I thought that it would be interesting - even thrilling for you.

“He did not have *my* problem.”

“No! He had a great many more!”

“Sorry! I’m an ungrateful sod.”

“You know this is only a temporary thi...”

“Temporary! *Temporary!* It’s five years since this *so-called* ‘brilliant Australian writer’ has been able to write a word! William Fingal, his face strained and unhappy, jerked open, then strode through the door bearing the inscription ‘The Oscar Wilde Room’.

Jane collapsed into the large high-backed chair and sobbed until she fell into an exhausted sleep.

When William returned he took Jane in his arms.

“I’m so sorry - again. This is a great room and I’m really looking forward staying here; just look at that chair - can’t wait to try it.”

Comfortably sprawled in the chair he looked at Jane and said teasingly,

“By-the-way, taking *this* room at *this* Hotel has nothing to do with that entirely bogus story about the Fingal family and the *supposed* Irish connection with Oscar Wilde’s forebears - has it?”

Jane Fingal found London everything that she hoped it would be. They did all the usual sight-seeing things together. However, when it came to shopping William opted to remain at the hotel. On her return Jane noted that William, looking relaxed, would be seated in the large high-backed chair.

On their last day in London Jane went shopping for gifts to take home and on her return to their room found William scribbling in a notebook that she had not seen in years. She did not interrupt. Later, William looked at his wife and said, “Jane Fingal, you are amazing! This room has had the strangest effect on me. Twice I have fallen asleep in that chair and awoken with a great idea for a play!

I’m longing to start writing again. I’m terribly rusty, but...”

William Fingal laughed. Jane laughed too and just for a moment she thought that she heard someone else joining in.

It was a September day in 1998, a man and a woman with astonishingly beautiful bodies, enhanced by a golden tan, strolled, hand in hand, out of the venue hosting **The World Body Builders’ Congress**. It was obvious to all that they were in love. They sauntered along Sloane Street, the late autumn sun glinting on the large gold ring in the man’s left ear as they leisurely entered The Cadogan Hotel.

The liveried doorman eyed their flat, taut stomachs and shuddered at the thought of the number of ‘sit-ups’ that must have been involved. He stood tall, pulled in his own stomach as far as possible and saluted. Outside their room the couple paused, then with a swift, seemingly effortless movement the woman threw the man over her shoulder and entered the room. A sound like the sharp intake of breath appeared to come from the large high-backed chair as the woman with a backward flick of her heel, firmly closed the door bearing the inscription,

‘The Oscar Wild Room’.

Police! The young policewoman threw open the door and entered the room at a run, rushed across the hotel bedroom and flung herself into the waiting arms of her husband.

“Hi! So sorry, Babe, an emergency at the ‘nick’ as I was about to leave.”

Her husband grinned. “You’re here now and that’s all that matters. However, I did wonder if history was repeating itself. The old story concerning this room did cross my mind while I was waiting.”

“Tell me,” she urged.

“It’s sad,” he countered.

“You can’t stop now,” she said.

“Sad *and scary*.”

“Policewomen don’t scare easy.”

“My Great-grandmother spent the first night of what was to be her honeymoon in this room - *alone*. Her husband never made it - the year was 1917, he was killed in France. The story is that a voice, eloquent and consoling, spoke to her, helping her through that terrible night.

She believed that it was the voice of Oscar Wilde.

Fortunately for me Great-grandmother married again!”

He noticed a slight mistiness about his wife’s eyes and said lightly,

“Glad you made it as I was just about to make a list of other beautiful women that I could take to the theatre tonight - to celebrate our wedding anniversary!”

They looked at each other as only a man and women who love each other can look.

She changed quickly and hardly had time to admire the room before it was time to leave for the theatre. She was so looking forward to the play - then returning to this beautiful room.

They were about to leave when the young policewoman addressed the room, her glance appeared to linger for a moment on the large high-backed chair. “This ‘Ideal Husband’ of mine, is taking me to see you play ‘Lady Windermere’s Fan’.

We love yer Oscar!”

Outside their room, the policewoman, standing alongside her plainclothes policeman husband, gave a smart little salute to the door bearing the inscription,

‘The Oscar Wild Room’.

If anyone had been passing that particular door a moment later, they would have heard a low chuckle that eventually turned into a laugh. After a pause, a voice, tinged with a hint of bitterness murmured, “I never thought I would hear the *Police* say, ‘*I love you Oscar*’. True it’s been a long time coming - but infinitely worth the wait.”

The Evans's

Alan S. Watts

I was looking down the entries for 'Evans' in the "Who's Who in Dickens" and it brought to my mind the elderly couple with whom I was billeted on the outbreak of war in 1939. None of the characters listed in the "Who's Who" matched the description of my erstwhile hosts. Mr Evans was in the cotton trade, and although in his late 70's, still travelled up to Manchester almost every day. He was a jovial man with many acquaintances in the Manchester business. This led him to seek the society of his fellow cotton merchants, and as a result he very often came home inebriated. He would excuse himself to me by saying "I'm not a bad man really, - just stupid". His poor wife went through agonies waiting for him to come home. Her trials were not abbreviated by the first symptoms of the coming war. Whether the explosions were due to our own gunfire or to enemy action was never very clear; it hardly mattered to poor Mrs Evans. Whenever there was a loud bang, she seemed to disintegrate. She became a flabby, spineless sort of a creature. Indeed I have never seen anybody so terrified, and this mark you, was long before any bombing began.

Mr Evans had a habit of clinging on to the mantelpiece when he was drunk, and working his way along it, and then when he was over his favourite chair he would let go, and fall down into it with a loud twanging of the springs.

Then came a day when Mr Evans was later than usual. He arrived home in his usual state accompanied by a friendly black and white dog.

"What's that?" asked Mrs Evans.

"That's Fido" said her husband. "Where did he come from?" she demanded. "I'm not quite sure" said her husband, in his thick drunken tones.

"Well, wherever he's come from", said Mrs Evans, "he's going back there straight away!"

"Oh, no", said her husband "He's walked miles with me, from Bury and Bess's of the Barn, and the poor little chap is tired out!"

"I don't care if it's tired out or not." said Mrs Evans "I'm not letting him stay here" "We can't just leave him in the cold" said her husband "Poor little Fido, aren't you. He'll have to stay the night with me. You want to stay the night with me, don't you Fido?" And as the dog jumped up to show his affection, Mr Evans put his arm around him and hugged him.

"Leave him alone!" said Mrs Evans, "You don't know where that thing's been. He's got no collar on and nothing to tell us his name or ownership"

“But he’s a nice chap” said Mr Evans, “Aren’t you Fido?”

“You don’t know his name is Fido” said Mrs Evans.

“All dogs are called Fido,” returned her husband, “It’s as if they were related to one another” Mr Evans had some difficulty in saying this last phrase.

“I don’t know why you have to trouble me with bringing dogs home” said Mrs Evans, “as if I haven’t got enough things to worry me with this man Hitler. Oh”, she wailed, “life is terribly hard!”

“It’s hard for the dog too” said Mr Evans

“Oh toss the dog!” said Mrs Evans, and I really thought she was going to burst into tears, “Now you’ve brought him here what are we going to do with him?”

“He can sleep on my bed” said Mr Evans.

“He can NOT” said his wife emphatically, “I’m not going to share the bed with a dog, as well as a drunken husband!”

“Poor Fido, poor, poor Fido” he said plaintively.” And you’re such a nice dog too”

“If he’s such a nice dog” said Mrs Evans “he won’t mind staying in the wash-house” “He’ll find it cold, poor chap.” said Mr Evans

“Don’t try and play on my sympathies” said his wife. “I should have thrown this creature out, as soon as I saw him. I suppose you’ll want me to find him something to eat, next?”

“That’s an idea” said Mr Evans, “I don’t think poor Fido has had anything to eat all day, and I’m sure we’ve got something in the cupboard which would suit him”

“You’re sure I’ve got something in the cupboard!” snapped Mrs Evans, “Don’t you think I’ve been really charitable in consenting to allow this animal to stay the night? I don’t need you to suggest that we give him a meal”

“I wonder where you did come from?” said Mr Evans, bending down to look into Fido’s eyes. “You didn’t come into the “Star and Garter” with me, did you?”

‘Now don’t expect a dog to give you answers to your questions” said Mrs Evans.

“That was more in the way of a ret ... ret ... rhetorical question” said Mr Evans, who was finding some difficulty with his speech. “I didn’t expect him to answer me”

“A pity he can’t” said Mrs Evans “He’s got more sense than you, and most of your drinking pals!”

When Mrs Evans saw how bleak and bare the wash-house was, she relented somewhat and found an old blanket for Fido to sleep on.

He showed his gratitude, not only by wagging his tail, but in jumping up at her as she spread the blanket out for him, a mark of appreciation which she could well have done without.

It took a minute or two for Fido to realise that the blanket was intended only for him and not for the Evans’s as well, and whenever they tried to shut the door, he was in the way, but eventually they succeeded in getting Fido bedded down for the night.

The following morning, to their amazement, there was no sign of the dog. He had disappeared, probably because Mr Evans, still in an inebriated condition, had gone down to see if Fido was alright and left the door open.

As to what happened to Mr and Mrs Evans I cannot say, anymore than I can report on Fido. I was posted to another unit and my brief experience of the Lancashire cotton tradesmen came to a close.

The Retirement

Ruth Sear

My Grandad, Peter Penrose Payne, didn’t celebrate his seventieth birthday in 1957. He was proud of the fact that he’d never celebrated any birthdays in all his adult life!

“What’s the use of it all? Cards get chucked away after they’ve collected dust on the mantelpiece, and prezzies are usually something you don’t want.”

So he never gave cards or presents to my Gran or any other family member -including me!

My grandparents lived in the next street. I was ten years old then, and popped in to visit the couple one Saturday evening. Grandad glared at the wireless as if it was responsible for the football results. My Gran silently concentrated on her mending, knowing not to disturb the listener. Grandad’s attention, as he sat at the table with pen and paper, focused on the voice emitting from the machine. As usual it was the highlight of his week; tonight he might win!

At the end of the results Grandad threw down his pen in disgust and switched off the wireless. He screwed the paper into a ball and flung it into the fire.

“Stupid players don’t know how to score. Eleven years after the War and they’ve forgotten how to play! Nothing this week, never mind; might be lucky next week.”

He stared at the card I’d made, the colours of the wax crayons bright and garish.

“Happy Seventeenth! In my day, any kid who got their spellings wrong had to stand on a stool in the corner of the classroom and wear a dunce’s cap. And do they still use the birch? That was effective, believe me. None of us dare misbehave then...”

He glared at the card. “Seventy! Me, Peter Payne, I’m seventy years old. I can’t believe how time flies.” He sighed. “I don’t know what on earth I’m going to do with my days, now.”

For it was only last week that he’d closed his shop door for the last time, and announced to anyone who might be interested: “I’m retiring.”

Peter Penrose Payne had started “t’ business”, as he called the shop, in 1925. By then he’d managed to evade death three times; he survived the Great War without mishap; he recovered from the pandemic flu that followed, and he narrowly missed being caught by an angry (and hungry) escaped circus lion in 1921.

Known simply as *PAYNE*, “t’ business” sold all sorts of useful items that included: tea cosies, egg cosies, antimacassars, chair back covers, doilies, dusters, hot water bottles, bed socks, golf club covers, potholders, firelighters, men’s collars, collar studs, ladies’ stockings, bicycle clips, candles, mouse traps, towels, handkerchiefs and tablecloths. And chamber pots! Those, commonly referred to as “Payne’s pots”, were a best seller for many years.

When Grandad’s son was old enough to join “t’ business”, two extra words were added to the shop front, and it became *PA YNE AND SON*. But the son, unlike his father, was unable to evade death (he was killed by a speeding car.) Peter never bothered to have the name changed even though my Gran had been told there would be no further little Paynes after my mum was born.

“T’ business” made a modest income until World War Two. The shop closed and the proprietor joined the Home Guard. In 1948 the shop re-opened and its trade, although slow, nevertheless managed to survive. But only just. For as the years went by, times changed; the type of goods

sold in the shop became old fashioned and obsolete. Britain boomed; Britain had never had it so good, but *PAYNE AND SON* did neither.

Grandad watched people walking in and out of the nearest Co-op. The goods there were cheaper, offered more choice, were modern, and of course offered the divi! Never cheerful at the best of times he became increasingly pessimistic about the future of “t’ business.”

How did he spend most of his working day? By sitting behind the long wooden counter, reading the racing pages of the newspaper, with a gloomy expression on his face. Or in the office-cum-warehouse at the back of the shop, smoking. He always flicked the cigarette ash on the floor; it was a miracle how the premises never caught fire. He had nothing to do, just sit and wait for the consumers that never came to consume. He now moved slowly and lethargically, and was given to exhaling heavy melancholy sighs with his heavily nicotine laden breath.

“Wore meself out, when I were a youth,” he often said to me.

I was puzzled. Wore himself out doing what? One boring day in the school holidays I had to stay in the shop with him whilst my parents went to visit someone, miles away. I asked him what he meant by wearing himself out. He lit a cigarette, his twelfth that day, shook his head mournfully and sighed.

“Time for a cuppa. Put the kettle on, child.”

Only four people had entered the shop that morning, making me jump as the loud bell jangled each time the door opened. They consisted of, a browser who bought nothing, a little boy who bought some firelighters, and two housewives. One bought a box of men’s white handkerchiefs, and the other bought a tie.

“I want a grey one, Mr Payne,” she said. There was only one box of ties in the shop. And they were all grey; there was never a large range of stock, and most of it was mainly left over from before the war.

After she had departed Grandad opened the till and plucked some coins from it. “Go and have a cuppa, and I’ll shut up shop for a bit. I’d best be off to, err, well to do something,” he said.

I knew he was going to some seedy house to place a bet. He stuck a card on the door: *BACK IN 5 MINS APPROX*

He hurried away, lighting a cigarette as he went down the street.

Half an hour later he returned and it was business as usual (or lack of it.) He put a box of men’s white shirts on display on a table outside the shop.

“I’m selling them at six and nine pence,” he said. But he put the ticket upside down by mistake, and he was puzzled why no one even enquired about them.

“Perhaps I’m selling them too cheap and people think that there’s something wrong with ‘em,” he sighed. “Times are hard.” He shook his head.

I ate my sandwiches for lunch behind the counter. Grandad disappeared in the afternoon, probably to “do something” again.

No further customers entered that day after the morning’s flurry (of four.)

When Grandad retired he spent his days either at the library reading the newspapers or sleeping on his armchair at home. Gran, who liked tending the small garden by herself, became annoyed with him.

“Go and get a job,” she ordered.

So he found a job as a night watchman in a local factory; but after he’d been there for six months it closed down. Then came a job as a gardener at a big house - indeed it was a mansion - in the country; but the owners moved away. After that he took a job as a petrol pump attendant at a garage; but it went into liquidation.

“I dunno what I’ll do with myself,” he said.

There were three cinemas in our town. They were the Odeon, the Regal, and the Star. We children went to the Regal every Saturday morning, and were enthralled by the adventures of Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy and The Lone Ranger. Apaches, Cheyenne and Sioux uttered their war cries, thundering across the screen, before they bit the dust. Horses leapt over burning fences and tom-toms thundered. And there was space fiction that frightened some of the younger children.

The commissioner at the Regal was Mr Jones. He hated children, and spent a lot of time walking up and down the queue of noisy chattering youngsters, shouting at us to be quiet before he opened the doors to allow us in.

On Saturday afternoons we would re-enact the stories we had seen that morning.

The streets were full of noisy children, playing games. Children riding bikes, pushing carts, pushing doll’s prams, playing “tag” in the middle of the street, skipping and playing hop scotch on the pavement.

The recreation ground (the Rec.) was a very important play area for the local children. It was large enough for bat and ball games. There were

several fine horse chestnut trees on one side and on another side grew a straight row of poplar trees. There were also hawthorn trees, and in the spring the girls picked the blossom and wore it in their hair, pretending to be brides.

On Saturday evenings I would return to the Regal with my Mum and Dad, for the grown ups' film. There was the usual group of children, coins clutched in their hands, hovering around the outside, and saying to people: "Can you take us in, please?" because unaccompanied children were not allowed in the cinema in the evenings.

Mr Jones glared at me, recognising me from the morning's viewing. Up the stairs we climbed, I clutching sweets and chocolate, past the black and white photographs of famous film stars that adorned the walls. And at the end of the film we would make a dash for the exit, crushed in the aisles with the majority of the audience, to avoid standing for the National Anthem.

But one day there was news. Young Bert Coggings, whose mum worked as a cleaner at the Regal, came dashing to the Rec. and announced: "Hey you lot, guess what! Old Jones has pegged out!"

A week later, Mum, Dad and I went to the Regal to see *The River of No Return*. As we approached the double doors a new commissioner stepped forward, resplendent in his uniform: maroon coat with gold epaulets and shiny gold buttons, light trousers with a maroon stripe on the side, and maroon cap with gold braid. He opened the door as we approached.

"Good evening Sir, good evening *Ladies*." The last word was followed by a wink in my direction. I gasped. Mum and Dad, after staring in astonishment for a moment, began to laugh.

"You old devil!" exclaimed Mum.

Grandad Payne actually chortled! In fact he looked quite jovial!

"I think I've been lucky finding this job. Can't see any future in watching films on those television set thingamajigs; cinemas will never close down."

He looked at the people behind us and shouted in a stentorian voice: "Form an orderly queue please! Thank you!" He turned to us and said, "You see, I've always wanted to work with the entertainments. Used to go to the music hall and the silent films a lot when I were a youth. Wore meself out sometimes, going there most evenings and weekends. I never really liked all those years in that shop trying to keep t' business going; but I'm going to enjoy working here!"

"Grandad!" A sudden idea entered my head. "Can you get us a free entry here, every time we come?"