

# The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

## Former Presidents:

Humbert Wolfe (1935-40)  
Lord Vansittart (1940-57)  
Sir George Rostrevor  
Hamilton (1957-67)  
Bernard Newman (1967-68)  
James Laver (1968-75)  
Lord Snow (1975-80)  
Charles Neilson Gattey (1980-2005)

## President:

Alan S Watts

## Vice Presidents:

Richard Adams FRSL  
John le Carré

## Chairman:

Terry Rickson

## Vice Chairman:

Vacant

## Membership Secretary:

Joan M Lewis  
17 The Green  
Corby Glen  
GRANTHAM  
NG33 4NP  
membership@scpsw.co.uk

## Meetings Secretary:

Ethel Corduff  
10 Malcolm Road  
Woodside  
South Norwood  
LONDON  
SE25 5HG  
meetings@scpsw.co.uk

## Treasurer:

Beryl Jones  
37 Lingham Lane  
Moreton  
WIRRAL  
CH46 7SA

## Competition Secretary:

Nina Mattar  
4 Redruth House  
Grange Road  
Sutton  
SM2 6RT

## Publicity Officer:

Jenny Chamier-Grove  
jchamiergrove@hotmail.com

## Diary

Annual Literary Luncheon

Civil Service Club

22 October 2011

## 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.**

## Poetry Editor:

Terry James  
1 Thornleigh Park  
Bangor  
County Down  
BT20 4NN

## Editor:

Paul Williams  
25 castle Road  
Ipswich  
IP1 5DY  
wanstader@ntlworld.com

ISSN 0959-0064

# THE SCPSW AUTHOR

NUMBER 195

AUTUMN 2011

## CONTENTS

- 3 Editorial
- 4 Chairman's Chat
- 4 Minutes of the AGM, Saturday 21st May 2011  
*Ethel Corduff*
- 7 Lewis Wright Short Story Competition 2011 Results
- 10 Competition Winners
- 13 Poetry Workshop *Mike Boland*
- 15 Poetry Pages *Edited by Terry James*
- 21 A Real Artist *Don Nixon*
- 25 The Dream *Philip Barclay*
- 30 Tales *Enid Zaig*
- 35 Hampstead Village – Home of the Rich and Famous  
*Brian Jones*
- 37 Joey's Notebook *Gordon Thynne*

## **Editorial**

Paul Williams

This is a very busy edition of The Author which includes the results of the Lewis Wright Short Story Competition, the Vincent Brennan Travel Article Competition and the Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition, along with the winning entry for each of them. Two other items to which I want to draw particular attention are the Froud Children's short Story Competition 2011, the closing date for which is 31 October, and the Annual Literary Lunch on 22 October. Ethel Corduff does an excellent job organising the lunch and it would be delightful to see some new faces (as well as the old ones, of course!). The problem with a literary society that covers the whole country and beyond is that members do not often have the chance to meet in a purely social way, and the annual lunch is one of those occasions. Ethel chooses the date for the lunch so that it takes place before the clocks go back, allowing all but the most far-flung members to get home before dark. Nowadays it is usually possible to get reasonably priced train tickets if booked well enough in advance, so it pays for those from outside London to start looking as soon as possible.

As will be seen from the minutes of the AGM, membership has fallen this year so as ever it is vital that we all do our best to pass on information about the society. I suspect it's going to be increasingly difficult for societies such as ours in a world where people can have all the literary discussion they want just by going onto the Internet. If we hope to attract younger members we have to offer some things the Internet doesn't, and one of those could be the chance for social interaction.

I am pleased to have received a couple of responses to my request for extracts from novels members may be writing, one of which is to be found in this edition. Unfortunately, when it comes to these and other contributions, space does not permit the inclusion of everything I would like in a particular edition and I can only hope members understand this. The magazine could also do with a few articles about market trends, openings for writers and perhaps people's experiences of getting their work noticed. The late Gordon Gompers used to contribute regularly on these matters but so far no-one has stepped into this particular breach.

## **Chairman's Chat**

Terry Rickson

The literary scene has been in a bit of an uproar recently, I note - when is it not, you may well ask! The two examples I'm thinking of particularly are firstly, the High Court censure of the reviewer Lynn Barber and secondly, the decision by the controller of Radio 4 to cut the number of short stories it broadcasts each week. In the case of Lynn Barber, her review of Dr Sarah Thornton's book, *Seven Days in the Art World*, was judged 'spiteful' and containing errors. *The Daily Telegraph*, which published the review, was ordered to pay the author damages. The reason given for the reduction of in broadcasting short stories is that it will give more airtime to *The World at One*. Forgive me but this seems like feeding news junkies with their immediate fix before the sound of the latest IED to explode has faded away. Some big guns, excuse the pun, such as the Society of Authors, Hilary Mantel and Philip Pullman have weighed in to complain to the BBC. It has to be said, however, that assurances have been given that the short story won't disappear entirely but reduced to one per week.

It is not all doom and gloom, as I've read that several smaller publishing houses have produced books for authors who are competing for this year's Man Booker Prize for Fiction. The authors short-listed will be announced in September and the winner in October.

Amidst all the unspeakable horror of events in Norway, I was touched to hear Michael Morpurgo, the former Children's Laureate, on the Today programme, draw upon the struggle of Beowulf against evil. He made it relevant.

I trust you've all enjoyed a good summer, that you are busy with your pens and, like Tom Daley, going for an inward double-pike somersault and into the deep end!

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Minutes of the AGM, Saturday 21st May 2011**

Ethel Corduff

The AGM was held at the Civil Service Club, Whitehall, and attended by ten members with apologies from five members. Terry Rickson, Chairman, presided.

**Minutes of the last meeting** were read and agreed.

### **Matters arising from the Minutes**

Ethel Corduff said that with respect to competitions, if an SAE is sent with entries it may be possible for judges to send back comments, though not all judges comment on each individual entry. Although she had emailed judge's comments once to a few members who had not been aware comments might be given, it would not be possible to do this again.

### **Membership Secretary's Report**

Joan Lewis said that this year we have 153 members, last year we had 182, so subs down £570 compared to last year. Some people who enter open competitions don't renew membership. Subscriptions have not been put up for a number of years. Most subscribers come via website and through competitions. Brian Scott asked if the membership form asks where new members hear of us. Joan said this is on the form; it is very helpful. Val Tigwell said in the Poetry Library they have leaflets on display. Terry said they also get a copy of The Author. He will ask Mike about their display section for leaflets. Joan Lewis expressed the wish to step down soon as Membership Secretary. Appreciation was expressed for her 25 years' service.

### **Meeting Secretary's Report**

Ethel Corduff is still waiting for somebody to work with her with a view to taking over as Meetings Secretary in due course. The Annual Lunch has been arranged for 22<sup>nd</sup> October and the menu has been agreed. Discussion took place on a possible guest speaker.

### **Treasurer's Report**

We are treading water at the moment. After all is paid out this year we will have £1,400. Money Manager includes Gordon Gompers Legacy, only 8p interest this year! Subs down, donations up, less people entered competitions. We are solvent. Accounts have gone to the auditor who does them free, otherwise we may not be able to afford an auditor. We had to send out 70 renewal reminders this year, which is an awful lot. Several responded. Majority who did not respond did not renew. Val mentioned about having something in the magazine to remind people that subs are due. Paul agreed to this.

Terry said some Poetry Workshop members do not pay the right amount re standing order. Terry had to contact them to increase as it is now £5 (it used to be £3).

### **Publicity Officers Report**

Jenny is in France but continues with on-going publicity for which we are very grateful.

### **Editor's Report**

Paul Williams explained that he does not always know if all the short stories sent to the designer will be included in the magazine. Alan often uses older stories 'on spike' if the ones sent do not easily fit into the magazine's forty pages. Paul explained his idea of asking for a small section of a novel that has not been published yet, with a brief introduction. Val asked if was possible to send in an item that has been published. Paul said we may not mind but the publication where it had been published before might. As the Author is not on sale to the general public it allowed writers to say that their work had not been published before, thus allowing them to submit the stories to other publications and some competitions. Paul said he would like more feedback from members and had not yet received letters or pieces about market trends and other items of interest. Ethel said we are well served with poetry and comps. Need useful information – this and that /funny anecdotes.

### **Poetry Workshop Report**

It was with great regret that members of the PW learned of the death of Joyce Thornton, a member of the Workshop from its earlier days. Joyce contributed fully to the activities of the PW attending, along with her husband Albert the Birmingham weekends as well as promoting music and the arts in and around West Yorkshire as a member of the Pennine Poets. This year's PW weekend was again held at the Hillscourt Conference Centre near Birmingham. A full and interesting programme of activities was enjoyed including a Poetry Slam and the old favourite a quiz run this year by Ethel Corduff. Three talks were given during the weekend, on R.S. Thomas by Barbara Stewart, Elizabeth Barrett Browning by Roger De Boer and 'Zen of a Pretty Woman' by Angus Livingstone, based on the lyrics of Roy Orbison. At the AGM, which took place during the course of the Weekend, Barbara Stewart was re-elected PW Chairman and Terry

Rickson re-elected Treasurer. Steve Pilley signified willingness to act as co-ordinator for 2011 and Angus Livingstone agreed to produce another edition of 'Waves'. The PW membership subscription remains at £5 per annum for the present. The 2011 Weekend will be held at Hillscourt again. The Herbert Spencer competition was judged by Ivy Hudson who commented upon the overall good standard of poems submitted. The winning entry was awarded for 'Envy' by Cynthia Blacker and runner-up to Andrew Millican for his poem 'Clash' the poems, 'Concrete and Cars' 'On the Silk Road', 'The Theatre of Dreams' and 'Wartime Lullaby' by Marcus Turner, Don Nixon and Andrew Millican and D Stevens, respectively, were commended. All of the poems were published in the Summer 2010 edition of the 'Author'. The Bill Barnes competition was judged by Bill Douglas. The first prize was awarded to Alison Mitchell for her poem 'Endgame' Second prize to Norman Bissett for 'Bacchanal' and Third to Andrew Millican for 'Open Every Door'. All the poems will appear in the Spring 2011 edition of 'Wavelengths' together with commended poems of Tony Oswick, Jane Arthur and Barbara Stewart. The new Vee Bradley Humorous Poetry competition, sponsored by her family, was judged by Val Tigwell and won by Tony Oswick with his poem 'Man for all Seasons! Published in the autumn 2010 edition of the 'Author'. The 2010 edition of 'Waves' was given a single new look having a 'spiral spine, making for easier handling; it contained a good selection of members work. The PW remains indebted to Mike Boland for his editorship of 'Wavelengths' thanks should be accorded to Terry James who acts as Poetry Editor to the 'Author. 72 members of the society contributed to the Poetry Workshop.

### **Competition Secretary's Report**

Nina is in Copenhagen. Paul said that competition results had not arrived in time for the summer edition of The Author. Ethel explained that Nina had been waiting for the poetry results to come in so that all the competition results could be sent together. Paul said it would be better to send some competition results to him even if others were awaited. It was preferable not to have all the competition results in one edition as the publication of winning entries left less room for members' contributions.

## **Froud Children's Competition**

Ethel read out Judges Recommendations about age categories for the competition, this was acted on for this year's competition giving 3 age categories. A letter was received from Roy Froud and read out informing us this will be the last year he is sponsoring the competition. The future of the competition will be discussed at a later meeting

## **Writer of the Year**

There are two contenders. Ethel had read one book and Joan is reading it and will pass it to Terry.

## **Elections of President and Vice Presidents**

**President: Alan Watts** Proposed by Terry seconded by Ethel.

**Vice Presidents:** Richard Adams and John Le Carré proposed by Michael Smith and seconded by Val Tigwell.

**Election of Committee** - All elected; proposed by Brian Scott seconded by Shafi Ahmed. We will need someone to take over as Membership Secretary from Joan Lewis so that she can stand down.

Val said thank you to the committee.

**Any Other Business.** Val wondered if people can nominate themselves for Writer of the Year. Discussion took place about prolific writers in the Society who might be contenders, but many have already been Writer of the Year.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Annual Literary Luncheon, Civil Service Club, 22 October 2011**

The annual literary luncheon will take place as usual at the Civil Service Club, Great Scotland Yard, on 22 October at 1pm. Price £26 for three courses and coffee. A flyer is enclosed which those attending should return, with payment, to Ethel Corduff. Please fill in your menu choices (only one choice per course per person!). Many of those attending traditionally meet in the bar for an aperitif, usually around 12.30.



## **Writer of the Year 2011**

The Civil and Public Service Writer of the Year 2011 is Joanna Crawford for her splendid memoir 'A Displaced Person' which was reviewed in the summer edition. Joanna is a longstanding member of the Society and a talented poet and artist. Joanna will receive her award at our Annual Literary lunch on 22 October.

## **Congratulations**

Member Bill Douglas, a well-known poet who has been a leading figure in the Poetry Workshop, recently got married. Best wishes for the future to him and his new wife.

## **Farewell, Kenneth Muncer**

Kenneth Muncer, a member for many years and known to many who attended the annual literary lunch, has sadly passed away. Our deepest sympathy to his family and to his friend, Elvira Bridges.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Lewis Wright Short Story Competition 2011 Results**

The competition was won by Don Nixon with *A Real Artist*. The runner-up was Angus Livingstone with *The Cherry Tree Affair*. Third place went to Susan Row with *Lost and Found*.

The Judge's comments were as follows:

### **A Real Artist**

'Love it. Reader is drawn into the theme, the world of art forgery. No distractions. Frustrations of central character as failed artist in his own right well presented. Sometimes a writer's obvious knowledge about his subject can become overbearing, but not so here for it adds strength to the story and the character's conviction that many art lovers are 'idiots'. Nice twist at the end... and in a funny way the reader is left delighting in the forger's good fortune. I'm reminded a little of Zhang Daqian, the Chinese artist who began life as an outstanding forger then went on to paint in his own style, ending up as one of the greatest artists of the twentieth century.'

### **The Cherry Tree Affair**

'Near perfect balance between humour, never overdone, and something darker... the loneliness of a solitary man desperate for a partner. Letter a good way of setting the scene and I chuckled over Chantelle's terse reply. Nice twist that shows Chantelle and George to be not what they pretend to be.... And a cosy end for poor, unloved Thomas.'

## Lost and Found

‘Very gentle, beautifully written story. Just enough there to tell us what a cad Tom is and why Carol talks to Trixie. This would have been ideal for publication in *The Lady* before their new editor (I’m told she’s the wife of Boris, Lord Mayor of London) got her hands on that mag and stopped publishing those nice warm stories.’

The winning entry, *A Real Artist*, is to be found in this edition of *The Author*.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition 2011 Winner

The competition was won by Pat Little for *Getting Younger*. The Judge made the following comments:

‘I really like this poem. It rattles along and builds pace through the rhyming and scansion. It also makes a serious theme lighthearted but gives the reader pause for thought. There’s plenty here to bring the reader’s imagination into play and I certainly finished the poem with lots of ideas in my head of other ages I could be and fun things I could do.’

### Getting Younger

Does age really matter, when you’re old and grey?  
I find it rather fun to choose the age I’ll be today.  
Yesterday was wet and dull, but I was four again.  
Out I went in rubber boots, walking in the rain.  
I splashed through every puddle, it gave some folks a smile  
I was having so much fun and I was four just for a while.  
Today the sun is shining and I’m going to the shop.  
Today I shall be seven, I might buy a lollipop.  
I see the neighbours looking. ‘Eccentric’ they all say.  
If this is second childhood then look out I’m on the way.  
What use comparing ailments, discussing aching joints.  
I think they’re all like children when I hear them scoring points.  
Tomorrow is my birthday, I think I shall be eight.  
I might get up quite early, or stay in bed quite late.  
I may walk on the common and if the wind is right  
I might just find I’m ten again and try to fly a kite.  
For age is just a number; old age is what we dread  
But the only thing important is the age inside my head.  
So when folks say they’re old, no longer wish to stay alive,  
I smile and say you’re only young – and me? I’m nearly five.

## **Vincent Brennan Travel Article Competition Winner**

The winner this year was Philip Barclay for *The Dream*. It was judged by Allan Watts who writes:

‘I have judged this competition for many years now, but because the standard of entrants has become higher and higher each year, my task of selecting a winner has become extremely difficult.

‘I have often thought that if I could arrange with a clear conscience to have several ‘dud’ contributions slipped in with the others it would greatly facilitate my task. But I have been unable to do anything except what was fair and right. I do wish to say, however, that I am wholly satisfied in my own mind that the article I have nominated is the clear winner.

‘Faced with the difficulty of choosing amongst so many worthy candidates, the final selection has been difficult in the extreme and I ended feeling that whichever candidate I chose to be the winner I was being unjust to those I had passed over. I have chosen the winning entry because the article is topical, well-written and interesting with a professional touch.’

*The Dream* is reproduced in this edition of *The Author*.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Froud Children’s Short Story Competition (Closing Date 31 October 2011)**

The competition is open to all (members and non-members). Entries should be a short story of up to 2,000 words for children, ages 5-8, 9-10 and 11 years upwards. Please state on the front page of the story which age group it is intended for. Prize fund £150 (£100, £30 and £20). Entry fee is £5 for non-members of the SCPSW and £3 for members.

No entry form is required. Enclose SAE for return of entry. One entry per person. Entries should be typed double space on one side of A4 only. Only pen name, word count and page numbers should be written on the manuscript itself. Name, address and pen name should be attached on a separate sheet and be sent to the Competitions Secretary, Nina Mattar, 4 Redruth House, Grange Road, Sutton, SM2 6RT before 31 October 2011. Cheques should be made payable to SCPSW.

*Members are asked to pass this information on to non-members who may also wish to enter the competition. If would-be entrants are also interested in joining the Society, please inform them that there will be a*

***£2 reduction in the competition entry fee for those who join now. Membership of the SCPSW is open to serving or retired members of the Civil Service, Armed Forces, National Health Service, Local Government or any Public Service. Those wishing to join the Society should send an S.A.E. to Joan Lewis, 17 The Green, Corby Glen, Grantham NG33 4NP for details or email joan@lewis5634.fsnet.co.uk***

Results will be posted on the Society's website, [www.scpsw.co.uk](http://www.scpsw.co.uk). Winning entry will be published in *The Author*. (The Judge's report from last year is on the website. It would be useful to read it before entering this year's competition.)

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Book Review. *Behind the Colonnade* by Norman Jacobs**

Reviewed by Tony Oswick.

Norman Jacobs is a prolific writer, having written 25 books on local and family history, football and speedway. Now Norman has turned the spotlight on himself and penned an account of his thirty-seven years as a civil servant working in the British Museum, charting his way from humble stationery clerk to middle-ranking administrator, via his work as an active trade union member.

*Behind the Colonnade* is a personal reminiscence of a great British institution during a period of profound change - but it is much more than this. Norman brings to life, in a very honest and sometimes unflattering way, the people he met and worked with during his time at the British Museum. These human observations - sometimes funny, sometimes sad - are the central feature of the book and those of us who have worked in the Civil Service will recognise many of the characters. There is the clerical officer who loved American comic books and wrote fantasy stories; the garrulous personal secretary who would leap in to finish your sentences; and the museum assistant who wore a yak-skin coat which her colleagues would forever be spraying with deodorant. And, of course, there are familiar stories about stationery requisitions for a single ball-point pen and fraught Whitley Council meetings!

Norman's informal style makes *Behind The Colonnade* an easy-going read and a gold-mine for anyone who enjoys wallowing in Civil Service nostalgia.

*"Behind The Colonnade : Thirty-Seven Years at the British Museum"* by Norman Jacobs is published by The History Press, price £9.99 (paperback)

## **Poetry Workshop**

Mike Boland

### **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”. That and subsequent numbers will include the text of talks given during the course of the Weekend. These were scheduled to be on the poets U.A. Fanthorpe and Norman Nicholson, and the poem by Robert Frost, ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’.

### **Annual General Meeting**

The AGM of the Poetry Workshop was held during the Birmingham Weekend. The Minutes will appear in a future edition of “wavelengths”.

### **Bill Barnes Competition 2011**

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.

### **Waves 2011**

The Poetry Workshop’s annual anthology of members’ work has now been published. Running to 30 pages, it contains 46 poems by 24 poets and is, as usual, of a very high standard. Congratulations to this year’s editor Angus Livingstone. Copies of Waves 2011 are available at a price of £2.50 (inc p&p) from Terry Rickson (address above).

### **Poems**

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 2012 will appear in the winter issue of “wavelengths”.

### **Wavelengths #28**

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; 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 2011	publication of wavelengths # 28
30 September 2011	closing date for entries to the Bill Barnes Competition
1 November 2011	deadline for wavelengths # 29
December 2011	publication of wavelengths # 29
1 January 2012	PW subscriptions due.

## Poetry Pages

Edited by Terry James

### A Growing Passion

Alan C Jones

Two years ago, when Daisy moved into the house next door,  
She seemed to spend much time outside just kneeling on the floor.  
She straightened paths and pulled up weeds and fixed the garden shed  
And mowed the lawns and pruned the trees and sprayed the greenfly dead.  
She trapped the moles and scared the cats and stopped the dogs from  
digging  
And with organic pest controls no slug or snail was living.  
She grew a lot of marigolds I thought seemed rather weird,  
.....And when she asked me what I'd grown, I said I'd grown a beard.

Before too long it all looked smart, with everything in order.  
With irises and scented stocks and tulips in the border.  
It put my scruffy plot to shame, she called my efforts tardy  
And told me I was only good enough to light the barbie!  
She said I was too idle as it wouldn't take me long  
To build a nice pagoda or a rockery or pond.  
I said I had a dodgy back and all my tools had rusted  
..... And when she asked me what I'd grown, I said I'd grown disgusted.

Undeterred she gardened on, with me remaining passive  
And brought some sticks of rhubarb round and marrows that were massive  
Then cauliflowers and cabbages that would have won a prize  
And when she let me see her pears, I had to rub my eyes.  
She gave me ripe tomatoes and fresh cherries from her trees  
And lovely juicy strawberries she made into cream teas.  
All these gifts I gladly ate, I didn't want to fight her.  
.....And when she asked me what I'd grown, I said I'd grown to like her.

Well gradually as time went by, I felt a sense of shame  
And forced myself to go outdoors to look at my terrain  
Compared to her I felt inept, inadequate and humble.  
I made my mind up there and then to tidy up my jungle.  
I scythed the grass and tamed the hedge and bought a rotavator.  
Yes, Daisy caused this change of heart, she was my motivator  
I'd truly got the gardening bug from which I'll not recover  
.....And when she asked me what I'd grown, I said I'd grown to love her.

Now everything is looking great in border, bower and bed.  
We often have a lot of fun in Daisy's potting shed.  
She tempts me with her fruit and veg and often she will say  
That she thinks it so important that I get my "five-a-day".  
I've turned both gardens into one by knocking down the fence.  
We're out there every single day, our pleasure is immense.  
So now we have our perfect plot, our passion's quite demented  
.....And when she asked me what I'd grown, I said I'd grown contented.

### **Lament**

A E Hobbs

I do miss our corner shop,  
It closed a few weeks ago.  
Trade had been dwindling,  
And the takings very low.

Although there is a superstore,  
With a name of high renown,  
But it is situated  
The other side of town.

This entails a journey  
And getting there and back.  
Takes up all the morning  
And good public transport,  
Is something that we lack.

So when out shopping,  
One needs a lengthy list.  
It's then that friendly corner shop  
Is very sadly missed.

### **The Day Dreams On**

Mike Boland

Gothic crumbles slowly;  
pinnacles and buttresses shore up  
hollow shells, peeking and probing  
from a dark caress of thorns.  
Alder carr spreads its moist fecundity  
through Waterloo to Nine Elms,  
and the grate of rooks  
is a heavy weight on the day.



Silt-rich and sullen, Thames flumes  
over Westminster's shattered spans.  
Whitehall's hanging gardens turn,  
rotating to follow the sun,  
and a solitary squirrel stops, en route  
from Penzance to the Norfolk Broads.  
Pausing, he sniffs the air.  
A scent, half-remembered, lingers.  
He feels a thrill of fear,  
scuttles off through oak and ash.

The day dreams on.

### **The Deathsong of Unknown Tiree**

Leaves rustle dryly from under cold trees,  
A waning moon holds back the dark,  
Lighting a woman who sobs at the side  
Of a grave without any mark.

Who is this woman who weeps by the grave,  
And why does it carry no name?  
Whose is the body that's buried so deep,  
And what was the cause of his shame?

The name of the woman is Alice McTell,  
The dead man is Henry Tiree.  
He ventured to quest where no-one should go,  
Saw things that no man should see.

His corpse came home in a cheap cardboard box;  
In moulders in unhallowed ground.  
And Alice will never say where he went,  
What he hunted, nor what he found.

Alice at last turns away from the grave,  
Shuffles home in the moon's stark light.  
But Henry's soul is condemned to the winds  
And howls through eternal night.

**Feet First**  
Anne Grant

Look at them  
padding down the street  
in front of me;  
they surprise me  
every time I watch them  
walking along  
at full tilt.  
How long do they know,  
for instance,  
which lengthy queue  
is the right one  
to stop at.  
How do they know  
to keep moving,  
cross at lights,  
take the first right  
into the supermarket?  
There they go –  
as I'm very attached  
to them,  
I'll follow quickly –  
see where  
they're off to.

**Postdiluvian**  
Norman Bissett

After the rains, luscious and plump as steaks,  
slugs in a flotilla invade the grass.  
They glisten on the lawn and path. One makes  
a trail along the outside of the glass  
of our front door, its leech-like undersides  
clutching like labia. On the garage, spoor.  
They ease along their viscous, liverish hides.  
One's reached a window on the second floor.

A two-foot spider's web, tethered by threads  
of gossamer, shimmers with pearls and water drops.  
A spider with a cross behind its head  
squats in the middle, licking its hungry chops.  
Paralysed, trapped, wrapped in a silk cocoon,  
her mate will be an appetiser soon.

### **Threave**

Norman Bissett

On an island  
in the Dee's  
swirling dark flood,

Archibald the Grim's  
dour castle lours,  
foursquare, satanic, baleful,

lacking soft edges,  
like the heart  
of Black Douglas.

### **The End of the World**

Alan C Jones

'The end of the world is nigh,' some say  
Though it is plain to see  
That no-one's got it right so far  
Through all of history.

The flaw is alphabetical  
If they looked hard they'd see  
That when you s-p-e-l-l the message out  
The end of the world is 'd'!

## **High Born**

A E Hobbs

She was growing into a beauty,  
And had personality as well.  
In slang she was a cutie,  
And her progress you could tell

When out walking,  
She drew many an admiring glance.  
Good breeding and the manner,  
Was reflected in her stance.

There were many advances,  
Met by as many rebuffs.  
So it was then decided,  
To enter her for CRUFTS.

## **Berry Picking**

Anne Grant

Keeping assurance  
made last night  
to bring  
blackberries  
back to you  
I slide from bed  
at five past five  
as an early riser  
would,  
break into entangled  
web of branches  
in near wood;  
all this to bring  
a juicy  
hand-picked breakfast  
back for you.

## **A Real Artist**

Don Nixon

Winner of the 2011 Lewis Wright short story competition

**T**he opening of exhibition of Early Renaissance Art was a success. Everyone who mattered was there - Wall Street movers and shakers, the fashionable Fifth Avenue crowd and the usual clutch of art critics, poseurs and self-appointed arbiters of taste.

I stood sipping my glass of free champagne in front of the little wooden panel of Sandro del Campo's version of the Annunciation. Behind me, two critics from a new Subscription-only Art magazine were airing their knowledge at full voice. I winced as the pitch went higher and higher. I was reminded of Marilyn Home and Joan Sutherland in the old days at the Met vying with each other in a showy Rossini cabaletta.

‘So typical of del Campo, that twist of the curls at the angel’s neck. Quite unmistakable,’ trilled the one in the pink denim jacket. ‘And the hair. Could almost be Durer. See the detail of every hair. Fantastico!’

‘Or even Titian,’ said his companion, not to be outdone as a small group gathered by the picture, eager to be told what to admire. ‘He must have been an influence on Titian. Quite seminal.’

‘And look at the way he’s given texture to that halo. He’s using that Venetian trick of mixing a little powdered Murano glass with the paint. See the shine coming through. He must have spent some time in Venice. Fantastico,’ breathed the pink jacket, determined to have the last word.

I could only agree. They were right. Each feature they had highlighted was typical of del Campo’s mature style and I should know. For over a year I’d done little else but study the style of Sandro del Campo.

I glanced round at the small crowd now gathered by the picture. Already they had picked up the right phrases and I could hear mutterings of ‘hair’, ‘angel’, ‘Durer’, ‘Titian’ and ‘Murano glass’.

‘What's seminal?’ I heard one whisper. I smiled. This was the icing on the cake. Would they be gawping so reverentially if they knew that this ‘Annunciation’ was not the work of Sandro del Campo, born Mantua, Italy 1399, by profession painter and friar, but by me, Alastair Fraser, born Leith, Scotland, 1970, by profession painter and forger?

Even as a small child I could draw. I loved copying the pictures in books at school and I made some pocket money painting pictures of photographs in family albums. Inevitably I ended up in an Art School which was the poor relation in a Polytechnic with aspirations to become a university. We

were the ones who were stuck in the demountable huts while the engineers got the run of new buildings. But I've come a long way since leaving Art School. I'd soon realised that my expertise in precise representational painting was not going to make much money. Then, abstract expressionism, a style I had no feeling for, was pulling in the big bucks and crowding all the gallery space. I didn't want to teach but as I had to eat, I found myself making a modest living doing quick charcoal portrait sketches for tourists outside the National Gallery and selling meticulously crafted copies of some of the old masters for a pittance. These were very popular with Americans.

I'd just sold a good copy of a Tintoretto Madonna to a matron from Illinois when I became aware of a man watching me. This was the man who was to change my life. Count Emilio Barrata. A leading expert on Early Italian Renaissance Art, a highly respected dealer with galleries in Florence, Paris, London and New York and, as I was to discover, a member of one of the top families in the Palermo mafia with a cousin in the Neopolitan Camorra. One of the true aristocrats of international crime. The lineage was ancient and impeccable.

'You have talent young man,' he said in his heavily accented English. 'Almost a genius as a copyist but no originality or creativity I think.'

It was not the first time I'd heard this judgement on my work. At Art School it had been the constant refrain of my tutors. 'A glorified draughtsman' one of them had sneered. I had come to accept it but it still rankled.

'But,' continued the Count, 'let me help you to use your talent.' He waved his hand at my departing American customer. 'Not for the few pounds you get from the likes of her. I can make you a very rich man.'

I listened and that was how I came to join the aristocracy of the criminal classes and become one of the best forgers of my generation.

That was eight years ago. Of course it took time. I had a lot to learn about mixing the paints of the period and working over existing ancient canvases. The Count had access to discarded old canvases and ancient wood panels and a vast knowledge of the kinds of chemicals used in the mixing of Renaissance paints. The main problem was not the technicalities but getting into the mind-set of the painter I was copying. I had to learn to think like him.

For over a year I spent studying the 15th century masters in the galleries and private collections the Count or his contacts arranged for me to visit

privately. Finally I was ready for my first job. Even the capo di capo in Palermo, the Count's nephew, sent me his good wishes.

The working of the scam was simple but it depended on two things. The copy had to be exact and that was my province. Secondly, and this was the key to the success of the whole operation, the forgery had to be authenticated by an international authority and this was where the Count came in. Such was his standing in the Art world, nobody was ever likely to question his judgement. It was an ideal combination.

Finally the Count said I was ready. The capo easily arranged for the painting to be stolen. It was a little Nativity scene by Firanesi in a private collection in Washington. A ransom was demanded and the owner agreed. No police were involved. The owner was warned that if any attempt was made to contact the police then the painting would be destroyed. As the ransom demand was moderate there were no hitches. I then made the copy which was eventually sent to the owner of the original. The owner asked the Count, whom he had met before when buying another painting, to check it. The Count certified it was the original and the forgery was returned to its pride of place in the American oil man's collection, though this time with an increase in the security system.

The real money was made with the selling of the stolen original. The Count has a list of wealthy men who are keen to buy a stolen masterpiece. In mansions all over the world are private rooms containing stolen paintings. Only the new owners will ever see them and that seems to be part of the buzz for them. My friend the capo in Palermo has quite a collection which he once allowed me to view. One of them is a Raphael. The forgery, done in the 19th Century by the great forger Van Helm, who was never caught and never known outside our business, is in the Vatican. The capo has the real Raphael and I was a little disappointed when I first saw it. It is an early work but I think I prefer the Van Helm forgery which seems to have concentrated in it all the elements of the mature Raphael's genius. I think the forgery is the better picture. Was Van Helm then a greater artist than Raphael? At least as good. I think that the Vatican got the better of the transaction and I have certainly improved some of the drearier second rate Madonnas I've copied. In fact from an aesthetic point of view you could argue that I'm doing Art a service. So our business prospered and as the Count had promised I became a very rich man.

But last year I was getting restless. I was becoming bored with just copying. The remark about my lack of creativity still rankled and I decided that, like all the great forgers of the past, I would try to create my own painting in the style of an old master but with my own additions and see if

it could be passed off as a genuine new discovery. It would not be a copy but would be presented as an original work which had been newly found. I was determined to show the Count that I could do more than just copy, that I was a real artist. I suppose I really wanted to show that I was as good as Van Helm. And so I took a year off and studied everything I could find about the little Mantuan friar who had painted so many scenes of the Holy Family. Vasari had written of his painting of an Annunciation but it had disappeared in the French invasions of the 16th Century. I determined that I would create it and the Count would arrange a suitable method for its discovery. In fact it was eventually 'found' during the rebuilding of the capo cousin's villa in Umbria. The scene of the discovery was beautifully staged - a work of performance art in itself. It caused quite a stir in the Art World. The Count was in his element on television. He's a great show off.

And so there I was standing in front of my 'Annunciation' in that New York gallery. The capo had graciously lent it to the exhibition and the Count had written the blurb in the catalogue. But I didn't feel the satisfaction I'd expected. I had an overwhelming urge to shout the truth.

'Listen you idiots,' I wanted to yell, 'I painted this masterpiece. Me! Alastair Fraser. And I'm not just as good as old del Campo. I'm better.'

I didn't though. I remembered my mansion in Tuscany, my Porsche, my yacht and all the beautiful women I could buy. I had made my Mephistophelian compact with the Count too well. There was no going back. Still, I knew the truth. I'd proved to myself that I was a real artist. That would have to be enough. At any rate, my current mistress thinks so.

I looked at the other paintings along the gallery wall. My eye was taken by a study by Mantegna of 'Joseph in the Carpenter's shop'. The perspective was stunning.

What could have been a geometrical study in lesser hands was alive. Yet my perspective was just as good. As I gazed at it, I felt a strange affinity with Mantegna. Van Helm must have felt the same about Raphael, I thought. This was a challenge. I was on the threshold of a new career. I would no longer copy. I would create. I would be a real artist. I would be up there with Van Helm. I took out my cell phone and rang the Count.

'Emilio, dig up everything you can about Mantegna. Did he ever do a 'Flight into Egypt'? I've an idea for the donkey. Warn the capo's cousin to get ready to do some more excavations at his villa. I think the world is ready for another major artistic discovery.'



## **The Dream**

Philip Barclay

Winning entry for the Vincent Brennan Travel Article Competition  
2011

**T**urkish names have meaning, though sometimes it is hidden, almost lost. I live in Raven Street in the Orange Blossom district of Ankara. The ravens still swagger about though the Orange trees that grew here before Ataturk decided to move his capital away from the scented citadels of Istanbul have been chopped down to make way for apartment blocks. My optimistic theory is that all Turkish names capture something about their subject, even if it is hidden below the surface.

But there is no question about my enviable dinner companion, *Rüya*, a clear example of a woman with an utterly suitable name. She is a dream. She is clever, witty and multilingual. She works as a media analyst at one of Ankara's Embassies. She understands far more about Turkey's politics than the diplomats she assists, who arrive, compose their clever-clever reports, packaging up some piece of hearsay as great insight, and leave two short years later. She can make jokes about beer and sausages in four languages. And she is beautiful. Her hair - uncovered, of course and a shade off black - flows in waves to the middle of her back. Her dark eyes and smirking mouth animate her conversation. As we relax into our chairs and drink our wine in a fashionable sushi restaurant on Arjantin Street in Ankara's up market Cankaya district, I feel lucky to have *Rüya* as a friend.

She is a Muslim of course, as are more than 90% of Turkey's people. However stating these facts so baldly does not capture Turkey's wide range of ethnicity, religious practice, language and culture; nor does the standard nationalistic insistence on squashing so much difference into one catch-all, monosyllabic descriptor - 'Turk.' *Rüya* understands this and is on a one woman crusade (or is it a jihad?) to change the way the nation refers to itself. Rather than saying 'I am a Turk', she says 'I am a Turkish person.' This - she hopes - will create room for those unhappy about merging their ethnicity and their nationality; room to say, 'I am a Kurdish (or Jewish or Greek or Armenian) citizen of Turkey.' It may take some time for this initiative to produce results; so far *Rüya* has been unable to persuade even her up-market urban

friends to adopt this linguistic switch, which unfortunately just sounds unnatural to Turkish ears.

It is ironic that I have needed to come to Turkey to befriend a Muslim - not just one, I am delighted now to have dozens of such friends and acquaintances - since doing so when at home in the UK seems strangely complicated. In Stratford, East London, where I live when not abroad, I am not so bigoted that I fail to greet and smile at the headscarf-wearing checkout girls at Poundland. But I cannot imagine asking one of these women to have a cup of coffee with me, let alone a glass of wine and a platter of sushi (not that Stratford has a sushi restaurant). Indeed doing so would feel like an offensive act - surely the headscarf is intended to deter male interest, to show that a woman is absenting herself from casual socialising with non-Muslims? In which case, wouldn't it be rude, even chauvinistic to try to befriend a girl in a headscarf? Maybe I have all that wrong.

It is also ironic that the agreeable society of dozens of Turkish Muslims is steadily curing an Islamophobia within me that first developed twenty years ago during a youthful visit to Turkey. Before coming to live in Ankara I used to find the rising cadence of the call to prayer threatening. When I heard it, I remembered a dark moment in Izmir in 1992. I was making my first adult trip outside of the UK and tentatively discovering the joys of a travelling life. I was standing with my young girlfriend near the bus station. It was late and we were waiting for a dolmuş to take us back to our hotel. We heard the call for prayer rippling out through the smoky evening air from a small mosque a short distance away. At that time we had little experience of travel or multicultural living and were thrilled by a sound so alien and oriental. So we decided to pass the time until our bus came by walking over and watching the worshippers arrive to pray before bedtime.

We stood - so we thought - at a respectful distance as a dozen wiry, tea-stained old men emerged from a smoky *çay odası* and the darkness of the back streets to wash their feet, rinse their sinuses and go in to pray. The situation felt benign enough. But something was wrong either with our behaviour or our situation. A car crept up beside us so stealthily we did not notice it until we heard the driver's voice, 'You should not be here - it is not safe for you.' I glanced at the speaker, but

gained only a shadowy impression of leather and a cigarette. We left quickly - our shiny liberal sensibilities tarnished by this expression of gratuitous malice.

This episode provided a seed of misunderstanding from which I grew a full-blown prejudice that has undermined some of the joys of my subsequent wanderings. In Dar es Salaam or Hat Yai, I heard in the *adhān* a threat to infidels such as me. I felt the loudspeakers haphazardly dangling from their minarets were actually inquisitorial spotlights, illuminating outsiders. When I visited the grand mosques in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, I was welcomed and shown around, but nonetheless felt that I was in a place I should not be and was an object of scrutiny and suspicion. My alienation from Islamic things and people felt complete.

Turkey has cured me. 'God is great,' sings the Imam, 'prayer is better than rest'. Of course I do not understand him, nor do my fellow residents of Ankara, because he is singing in Arabic. But that is the meaning of the cry that rises from a dozen mosques within earshot of my house. Sometimes competing yearning wails begin a few seconds apart and fall into an unintended canon, harmonising mystically; other times they are almost synchronised, as if the cry of one mighty holy man is echoing around Ankara's steep-sided hills. The Imam's urgings - which are studiously ignored by the large majority of Ankarans - focused more on business, politics and pleasure than the eternal - have become a familiar and welcome structure to my days. They seep into my sleep at dawn, but reassuringly, bringing me the soothing knowledge that I have another two hours in bed. At mid-morning and lunchtime, they urge me on in whatever I am doing, gently reminding me that the day is slipping away. The teatime prayers help my transition from the irritations of work to the softness of the evening. Even as I am walking home at night, the sound of the final appeal to the faithful is welcome - is it foolish for an atheist to draw an irrational comfort from knowing that God is watching over the streets? I must be drunk on Kavaklidere wine and Rüya's intoxicating eyes to think such things.

How did this happen? How did my Islamophobia melt away so quickly? Looking across my internal montage of Ankara moments so

far I find them to be warm and pleasing: a sweetheart couple canoodling on a bench - the devout effect of her headscarf offset by the enthusiasm with which she is kissing; my dry cleaner handing me the 250 Lira he found in my jacket pocket; a taxi driver helping me to fix my car and waving away my offer of payment; shopkeepers offering effusive compliments to my feeble Turkish language skills. I am now ashamed that I was at first surprised to find that Turkish people were kind, welcoming and helpful.

And yes - wonder of wonders - I suddenly have Muslim friends, plenty of them and what a bunch: campy students performing show tunes and vigorously inducting me into the Turkish tradition of man-kissing; earnest academics studiously explaining the weaknesses of the Ottoman Empire; nerdy computer garners; racy party girls; English teachers too embarrassed to address me in Turkish, but not really fluent enough in my own language for a decent conversation; dignified journalists keen to discuss the sufferings of Palestine or of Turkey's forgotten domestic violence victims; Ozman - a millionaire director of road projects and connoisseur of Scotch whisky, as well, of course, as my companion, shimmering Rüya of the Black Sea smiles. These characters are dismantling my assumption that all Muslims have the same religious, intolerant character. I begin to see my double standards too - after all I am a Christian, nominally at least, but I hope my new Muslim buddies think I am more similar to them than to Sarah Palin or the Pope.

I am falling in love with Turkey and the warmth of that growing affection is melting my former prejudices away. I find myself even wondering whether I misunderstood that moment in Izmir so long ago. Can I reinterpret? Perhaps the driver was concerned for my welfare, anxious that I not be mugged on a dark street, keen to encourage me to move back to the well-lit security of the bus station. Perhaps his meaning was distorted as he was speaking in English. I try to extract a new verdict from the unsafe evidence of memory. I would like to judge that encounter differently, despite the difficulty of rewriting my personal history - projecting kindly features onto a shadowy face that I could barely make out twenty years ago, but which I have imagined many times since.

Indeed my shift in personal feeling regarding Turkey has been so dramatic that I have found it hard to maintain my objectivity. For while the country is beautiful, self-confident and generous to its guests, it is also scarred by its history. I know there are difficult questions. Where did all those Armenians go? Why are the Kurds and other minority groups pushed to the margins? Is a country where the Government intimidates the media and judiciary so heavily truly a democracy? And what of corruption, or Cyprus, or the imprisonment of children who throw stones and other human rights abuses? My developing understanding of these problems jostles uneasily with my heady affection. I find myself bipolar in my opinions, one moment berating Turkey for harassing journalists who criticise the President, the next forgiving all such sins, as I am charmed by the kindness of a lady on a bus who insists that I help her eat her bagel-like *simit*.

I have been through this before. The shock of arriving in a new country produces a predictable series of feelings and responses: a few days of wild excitement at my new location's most immediate novelties; a few weeks of irritation, which can spill over into surges of disproportionate anger, as I struggle to achieve basic things within an alien bureaucracy and using a strange language; a few years of happiness after I find my feet, achieve a conversational fluency and begin to enjoy what my home and its surroundings have to offer, and finally a weariness at the intolerable blind spots, idiotic habits and moral inconsistencies which all countries unknowingly possess - an ennui I felt at the end of long stays elsewhere and which told me it was time to move on.

But for now I am moving into the third and sweetest phase of this traveller's progression. I am in love with Turkey. Everything she does is adorable and amusing. Even for a casual visitor the country is charming and fun, so imagine the far greater satisfaction of slowly immersing myself into a mature and rich culture that is both European enough to be accessible and Middle Eastern enough to be exotic; the pleasure of slowly exploring amazing places rarely visited, but ancient and marvellous.

## **Tales**

Enid Zaig

*This was submitted in response to the Editor's request for extracts from novels members may be working on, with a brief explanatory introduction*

This is the beginning of one of the tales in a series of twelve plotting the history of the thirty acres of land on the outskirts of Twickenham on which was built an estate of 'affordable housing' in 1934, and where I live now. The tales range from Anglo Saxon times to the 1930's and are 'faction' in the sense that most of the characters are real and have been meticulously researched.

My aim is to relate the history of this piece of land in an accessible and informative way, and to bring out the minutiae of the lives of the people who lived on it against a backdrop of wider historical issues. I am at present writing the penultimate tale.

In the following extract, set in 1749, the land was in use as a man-made rabbit warren. Of the two houses on the land one was derelict and the other barely habitable, but they had had their heyday in previous centuries. Whitton Place was a brand new Georgian villa built by the Duke of Argyll which lay in parkland about half a mile away, the details of which have also been researched. The Duke was well known for his interest in gardening, especially in new plants coming from America at that time.

All the characters except Tom, Matthew and Susan are fact, and William Chunn's post-traumatic stress disorder is due to a well documented event in his past. The two strands of the story in the extract merge later, and both sets of characters become involved together as the plot unravels.

### **FULWELL LODGE IN 1749**

Archibald Campbell, the Third Duke of Argyll, newly arrived from Scotland at his summer residence, Whitton Place, was eager to take a turn round his hothouse this chill March morning. The sharp wind which was blustering about the corners of his villa tore at his great-coat as his feet crunched the stones on the path which led to the long brick-built building. When he opened the door a rush of warm air, and a peaty smell of vegetation, greeted him, and he was glad of the

shelter. He had missed his plants and particularly wanted to know if the rare pineapple top which Collinson gave him in Peckham last autumn had begun to take root in his absence.

All was busy: two gardeners were carefully spreading tanner's bark between leafy stems in a group of large tubs, while another trundled a wheelbarrow stacked with logs for stoking the furnace. Rivulets of condensation streamed down the row of tall windows which in the summer months admitted floods of sunshine, but for now the light was feeble and lacklustre. The men sensed the Duke's presence in the building at once, though they carried on with their work. Only Matthew the head gardener hastened forward with a respectful bow.

“I trust Your Lordship's journey was without incident?” he asked.

“It passed well enough,” the Duke replied impatiently, and he came straight to the point.

“The pineapple plant. Has it taken? Show me it.” Matthew was apprehensive.

“Come this way, My Lord,” and he led the Duke to where it was. “Here, My Lord.” He gestured with a trembling hand. The Duke regarded the blackened, shrivelled plant with dismay and struggled to suppress a tide of disappointment and anger, to retain some composure.

“What went wrong, Matthew?” he managed to say. “You obeyed the instructions given in Miller's *Dictionary* as I told you? Much light, much warmth.”

“It's possible the watering was not correct,” ventured Matthew, “I tried to save it, My

Lord, but it was never very strong.”

“Destroy the thing,” said the Duke, and turned and strode towards the doors, needing to clear his mind in some cooler air. His thoughts went back to last year, sitting with other guests at the dinner table, when a pineapple was passed around and marvelled at, no-one ever having seen one before. He felt bitter. How was it that Lord Petre had been able to grow so many pineapples over at Thorndon? The Duke had envied him his excellent hothouses which he had visited a number of years ago, and the fine collection of American plants he had.

He hunched his shoulders against the elements and turned to take a walk among his beloved grove of tall cedars. He realised he was going to have to admit his failure to Collinson, and would write to him in the afternoon. There was gloom among the massive trunks which ranged around him, and his footsteps were deadened on the spongy ground beneath the trees. The blanketed silence was broken only by the distant hacking sound of someone chopping wood, and the Duke made his way towards it. He found Tom Chunn and an older man splitting logs by the boundary wall.

“Well, young Tom,” he said, “I like to see a busy man!” Tom paused from his work and smiled at the Duke. “And who is your companion? What is he doing here?”

“This is Jack, My Lord,” said Tom, “he is newly employed here. A labourer, My Lord. He has been sent out to work with me.” Jack bowed slightly to the Duke.

“And Jack,” pursued the Duke, “where are you from? What was your former employment? I like to know who I have about my property.”

“My Lord I was employed at Thorndon, but since the untimely death of Lord Petre and the dispersal of his plants, I have been looking for similar work all over. And that is why I am here.”

“And did you tend the plants at Thorndon?” asked the Duke.

“Yes, My Lord.”

“And were you familiar with the American plants?”

“American plants both indoor and outdoor My Lord.”

“And what do you think of my collection here, Jack?”

Jack hesitated.

“It is smaller than at Thorndon, My Lord, and there is not so much variety, but it is in a fine position, and can be added to.”

“I see,” said the Duke, “and what has impressed you from what you have seen so far,

Jack?”



“The trees mainly, My Lord. There are some I have never seen before, and so many different pines. But also I have noted that your swamp bays and Indian bean trees are in bud, and should give a fine show in May if the frosts hold off. I have not been in your hothouse, My Lord, and cannot say about that.”

“Take Jack to see the hothouse, Tom, without delay,” said the Duke sharply, and turned to walk back towards the Villa. He did not want the men to detect the excitement that was coursing through his veins at this moment.

He made his way quickly to where the two swamp bay trees stood, sheltered by the hothouse. He had nurtured three from seed ten years ago, but a stray rabbit, from Chunn's warren no doubt, had eaten one of the struggling saplings. In all these years the remaining ones had never flowered. He stepped close to examine the branches. Jack was right. Here and there tiny furry buds were just emerging on the ends of some of the twigs. He felt jubilant.

Hastening to the Villa, fearing for the buds, and praying fervently that there would be no more frosts this year, the Duke went straight to the library and took out his writing materials. Here was news indeed to impart to Collinson, not only about the failed pineapple and the budding swamp bays, but also about Jack.

\*

William Chunn was clawing his way out of a pit of slime, terrified he would slip back into the snapping jaws below. As he struggled vainly towards the top, the mud kept drawing him down, and down until he knew he would have to make a superhuman effort if he was to save himself. Upwards, ever upwards, aiming for the light. His eyes fluttered open and he looked around him. The small square of his window, dimly letting in the pale pre-dawn air, and the dark shape of the small oak chest of drawers opposite were reassuringly constant. Familiarity impinged on his consciousness as he felt the rough wool of his blanket with his fingers.

“Oh Lord,” the old man breathed as he levered himself into his breeches, “thank the Lord for sparing me for another day!” With difficulty he pulled on his boots and clattered painfully across the sloping floorboards to the door.

Fulwell Lodge was a house full of slants and irregular geometry. None of the walls met at right angles any more, and the doors either would not shut, or stuck so tight that it took all a person's strength to wrench them open. William slowly creaked down the staircase behind the wall and lifted the latch to the door at the bottom which opened straight into the candlelit kitchen. Tom was there, and their maidservant Susan was ladling out some barley broth for him. The dogs lay about on the floor looking exhausted.

“No frost last night, then,” said William. No reply. “Is John out then?” Still no reply.

Tom gulped his bowl of broth hungrily and noisily. At length, his hunger assuaged, he spoke to his grandfather.

“Father was out watching for poachers last night. He had a tip-off. He's still asleep.”

“You should have gone out there with him.”

“I have to be up at Whitton Place by sunrise, Grandfather,” replied Tom with a shrug.

“If your father had not been with me when...when...” William's voice trailed away pathetically. “I don't know what is to become of this warren...” Tom slammed his bowl on to the table.

“Grandfather, don't go over all that *again!*”

“I had that dream again last night, Tom,” said the old man fearfully. But Tom was not listening; he had heard it all before. He picked up his cap.

“I'm away now, Susan,” he said. He dragged the door open and disappeared into the gloom. The ruins of York Farm loomed at him through the early morning mist which was rising from the river. As he walked briskly down the slope across the warren, skirting the heath on his way to the Hospital Bridge, he muttered, “I don't care what becomes of the warren, I don't care.” When he passed the gibbet he shook his fist at the shrivelled corpse hanging there encased in its iron cage. “I don't care!”

## Hampstead Village – Home of the Rich and Famous

Brian Jones

This part of North London, which still retains a village atmosphere, has been the home of the rich and famous for two hundred years. The village of Hampstead is dominated by the ancient Saint John's parish church. It has been suggested that this was the churchyard in which author

Bram Stoker placed the vault that was the prison of vampire Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*. The church and the tomb are creepy enough, and Stoker described the horror vividly:

‘The thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous blood curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut.’

Robert Louis Stevenson, another writer of horror stories such as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll*, lived at Mount Vernon. The churchyard opposite has the tomb of the painter John Constable and those of many famous actors.

It is probably best to start the tour of the village of Hampstead in the busy Finchley Road (on the Jubilee Line if coming by Tube). The traffic never stops in Finchley Road by day or night, but the streets that go uphill to Hampstead are surprisingly quiet and rural. The first road is Frognal, which derives its name from the Anglo-Saxon for ‘place of frogs’. The first place of interest, in 20 Maresfield Gardens, is the poignant Freud Museum. In a perilous last-ditch flight from the Nazis Freud arrived in the large red-brick house which he predicted would be his last address on the planet. The following year he died of cancer of the throat. He arrived in London in 1938 as a semi-invalid. The ground floor study is still the same - a collection of erratic antiques, the famous couch, and Persian carpets. Upstairs are home movies of family life in Vienna. His work was carried on by his daughter, Anna, who died in 1982.

The village of Hampstead is a delightful one, perched on a hill, high above sea level. There has been a settlement here for over a thousand years. From the Middle Ages onwards, Londoners travelled here to escape the plague and other diseases. It was the arrival of poets such as Keats and Shelley, and painters such as Constable and Romney, that

gave the area its Bohemian reputation. A leaflet from the Hampstead Museum, *Where They Lived in Hampstead*, lists about five hundred famous writers, artists, composers, politicians, poets and reformers who lived or lodged in the Hampstead and Highgate area.

At the bottom of the narrow Well Passage is the fountain which gave Well Walk its name. This was an important promenade in the village's heyday, when the sleepy village became a popular spa known as Hampstead Wells. Many flocked here in the 18th century to drink the medicinal waters at 46 and 48. Hampstead Wells declined and ceased to be a fashionable spa because of competition from other spas.

Fenton House, in Hampstead Grove, is a perfect example of a London Queen Anne House. Set behind wrought iron gates, Fenton is decorated in 18th century style and houses a collection of European and Oriental ceramics, as well an assortment of musical instruments from around the world. Fenton has a secret garden and a quiet ancient orchard. Nearby is 2 Willow Road. What you see today is a 1930 building, preserved as it was. The rooms are packed with first editions. It was designed by architect, Erno Goldfinger. Ian Fleming used the name in one of his James Bond books.

Burgh House, which has free admission, was built around 1703. It houses the Hampstead Museum and has a pleasant café.

Keats Grove, off Downshire Hill, is one of the most famous sites in Hampstead. The poet John Keats lived here. He was only twenty-five when he died. Tuberculosis took him before he could marry the girl next door, Fanny Brawne, with whom he had fallen in love. At first he thought she was about fifteen when they met but later he realised that she was eighteen. He described her as 'beautiful and elegant, graceful, silly, fashionable and strange'. In this elegant whitewashed Regency villa he wrote *Ode to a Nightingale*. The interior contains books and letters, Fanny's engagement ring and the four-poster bed where he first coughed blood. Keats was a great fighter against the ruling class and morality, and died in Rome at an early age.

Now we come to Hampstead Tube Station on the Northern Line. It was opened in 1907 and is the deepest in London. Opposite is a building with a clock tower, once a fire station with a horse drawn engine. Nearby is the picturesque village of Highgate and the wild expanse of Hampstead Heath.

## Joey's Notebook

Gordon Thynne

I bought this notebook and a couple of biros at Lorimer's. I'm going to keep a diary. My memory's not what it used to be. Sometimes I'm not sure whether something really happened or whether my mind made it up. If I write the diary every day, I'll be sure to keep track of what's happened. Not that much does happen.

I'm roused by Betty, one of the staff, at about half past eight each morning.

'Come on, Joey, time to get up. Else you'll miss your breakfast'.

I've given up trying to shave. There's too much ridge and furrow in my cheeks. I leave that to the hairdresser who comes once a week. She's not young. But she bends over me with her nice scent. I close my eyes and imagine.

Even without shaving, it takes me half an hour to wash and get my togs on. But I like to go into the dining room after most of the ladies have finished. Most of them wish I wasn't there. I suppose I look too decrepit for their idea of a man. Nancy's the exception. I don't mind her teasing me.

'Here comes the apology for Frankenstein', she'll say. It's true I've got a square jaw and staring eyes.

Or another morning it might be, 'How's Clark Gable this morning?'

Anyway, I see if there's a copy of the Express or the Mail still around, and read it whilst I have my Weetabix and toast.

There's two other men – Bill and Charlie. Bill's all there, but his legs play truant. The furthest he gets is the end of the drive. Charlie's a clever chap, or rather he was till he started imagining that he's somebody else. Yesterday it was the Prime Minister until Matron told him he'd lost his majority and he'd have to resign. She pretended she was the Queen, giving him permission to dissolve Parliament. She's great, is Matron – the way she plays along with us.

She tells me I'm the Ambassador. That's because I'm always off out down to the village, representing us, she says. Truth is, I can't stand all these women, half of them gaga, poor things. It's not just that. I can't stand being shut up. I've always hankered to be out in the country, or even walking the streets. I must have the blood of peasants, or tramps.

Reading's alright for an hour or so, but then I get this feeling of restlessness. There's a world out there, and I have to be part of it.

But now my legs are getting wonky. Time was, though, I thought nothing of a twelve mile hike. Up on to the Down, through the woods and fields to the edge. A view across to the South Downs. Beyond them is the sea. Unless Jesse takes me, I'll not see it again.

So, these days, I just walk down to the village. People look at me, some with a half smile. I wear this red and white woolly hat. My stride is more like a shuffle. They probably think I ought not to be out on my own. Or perhaps that I've escaped. I give other people a half smile myself. I don't want them to think I'm bonkers.

There's a new coffee place opened up, Italian, with gleaming metal furniture, and lots of painted pottery for sale. I'd like to go in, but I'd be out of place. They don't want funny old men in there. So I make do with the Wimpey. There's a smell of chips, and the music's not to my taste. But I put up with it for the sake of a rest. Sometimes the road sweeper comes in for his break. I've tried smiling at him, but he looks away. He's a darkey. I suppose I should say, 'a black'. I'd like to know where he comes from. But I can't see him taking kindly to an approach from me.

Sitting in the Wimpey, sipping my coffee and eating a bun, I try to concentrate on the Gap. That's another reason I'm keeping a diary. If I get some clues, I can jot them down. That way I might build up the big picture. It's a bit like trying to haul back a dream that's escaping. You cling on to an image or a feeling, and try to connect with other things. I've got vivid memories of being a kid, and in the war. But how I came to be in Resthaven, I don't know.

Haven't written in my diary for a week. I couldn't settle down after the turmoil. Poor Charlie! It began with him taking Ida's seat in the lounge. It's been her seat for five years, I'm told. So naturally she was upset. I wasn't there, but Nancy told me about it. Ida asked him to get up. But he just sat there, eyes glued on the Box, as though he hadn't heard her. She asked him again and then gave him a swipe with her handbag. Matron came in to calm things down.

'Now then, Ida, you're not Mrs Thatcher,' she said.

Usually Matron is diplomatic, but that upset Ida even more. She stormed off, if you can call her walk with a frame 'storming'. The

doctor had to be called because of her palpitations. She died during the night.

I was at breakfast the next day when one of the ladies went over to the table where Charlie was and hissed, 'Murderer'. Charlie started crying. It was disturbing to see a grown man weeping. I could see that he felt guilty. Now he doesn't sleep, but walks up and down the corridor at night, disturbing other folk.

Maybe the shock of all this has jogged my memory. I have this page at the end of my notebook headed, 'The Gap'. I've now got three entries under it: a tall building, a blanket and char. I'm looking at this building and feeling afraid. I've got a blanket. Am I trying to find somewhere to sleep? And 'char', that's slang for tea. Strange!

Charlie's now been sent to hospital. That's what Matron calls it. But I reckon it's what we used to call an asylum. They'll give him drugs and keep him quiet. But he won't know where he is, poor chap. I've now got two more entries under 'The Gap': a little girl who's frightened, and a feeling of warmth. I guess that's to do with the blanket.

Jesse came to take me out. We drove down to Brighton and ambled along the front. She's my niece – but she's had to remind me of that. I told her about the Gap and my feeble attempts to fill it.

'You don't want to bother your head about that, Joey,' she said.

I told her where I'd got to. My theory is this. I come home from the war – I can just remember that. I take a job as a hospital porter. There's an accident in one of the wards – perhaps an oxygen cylinder blows up. Part of the roof falls in and people are hurt. One of them's a little girl. I'm one of the first on the scene. I drag her out from under the debris. I wrap her in a blanket and take her to a safe part of the building. Later on I go to see how she is, and give her a cup of tea – char. I tell Jesse I'm worried about that little girl. Did she survive, or was she too badly injured? Jesse told me I'm imagining things.

I've had to write to Jesse. Matron gave me her address. This little girl won't give me any peace. I lie awake at night worrying about her. Then I have terrible dream in which she gets hurt. If only the Gap was filled, with whatever it is, I'd be more at peace. I've asked Jesse to help. She must know things I've forgotten.

Jesse's written to say she's coming on Thursday, and will I tell Matron. She's never asked me to do that before. Makes me feel nervous. Does she think I'm losing my grip? The idea of going the same way as Charlie's horrible.

It's Friday, and I've never felt happier since the news that the war was over arrived on the Italian front. I feel flooded with a peaceful feeling. There are still lots of things I don't remember. But now I understand the reason for the Gap. Jesse made me tell Matron about my clues and my theory about the explosion in the hospital. Then she produced a newspaper cutting. It was dated twenty years ago. It was about a fire in a block of flats. The fire brigade was called. The fire was on the fourth floor. The ladder was put up and the hose directed. Most people had already got out. But there was a girl at one of the windows, calling for help. The firemen couldn't use the ladder to rescue her because flames were licking round the window. They got a blanket from the fire tender. Five of them held it under the window, and called on her to jump. She got out of the window, sat on the edge of the sill and jumped. As she did so, part of the window frame fell. One of the firemen saw this charred piece of wood heading straight for him. But he didn't let go of the blanket. He just bent his head and stayed where he was. The piece of wood struck him on the back of the head. As he fell, he let go. But the girl had been saved. Jesse says that fireman was me. For a time, I was a local hero. I was in hospital for weeks. When I came out, I'd lost much of my memory. Doctors told my wife not to try to remind me of what had happened, in case it was too stressful. Before she died, she passed this warning on to Jesse.

So there's my clues used up: the tall building, the blanket, the char – not tea but the charred wood that fell, the frightened girl, and warmth – that was the fire. Matron commented that I'd been barking up the wrong tree with my idea of an explosion. But Jesse thought I ought to have been a detective. Seems I joined the fire service when I was demobbed, and served fifteen years before being invalided out.

'But what about the girl,' I asked. 'Was she alright?'

'That was me,' said Jesse.

Turns out, she's not really my niece. She's even better.