

# The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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## Vice Chairman:

Vacant

## Membership Secretary:

Michael Smith  
22 Western Drive  
Shepperton  
TW17 8HL  
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  
publicity@scpsw.co.uk

## Diary

**25 January 2014**

**New Year Party, Civil Service Club**

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**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  
editor@scpsw.co.uk

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# THE SCPSW AUTHOR

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## **Editorial**

Paul Williams

While well-written contributions on all subjects are welcome, I was particularly pleased to receive Martin Jones's *Cutting the Odds*, which gives us useful information about e-publishing and in particular about the steps involved in publishing a book on Kindle. Coincidentally, I have also received notification of a couple of online books published by members (these are mentioned in more detail below) and during the summer I read John C Bird's novel, *Alby and Me*, recently released on Kindle.

I must say, I have been impressed by the new novels I have seen on Kindle, having originally assumed that in general they would not be quite up to the standard of those published in the conventional way. But then, all budding writers know perfectly well that talent is not confined to those with the right connections, even though until recently the right connections seem to have been almost essential for a place among the elect. All that could be changing, though something inside me warns against holding my breath just yet. Still, I can now fully believe reports that publishers and agents are increasingly looking for talent on Kindle and other online publishers and sites rather than in their slush piles, though I hope they will continue to look there too as I have a couple of things near the bottom awaiting consideration!

I have been flicking through past editions of *The Author* going back fifteen years and there seem to be scarcely any reviews of contemporary novels. Chastened by this, I have written a review of *Alby and Me* in this edition and I hope this will set the ball rolling for other budding reviewers. Although any review will be gratefully received, it would give an added frisson if the reviewed work was by a member, and that will become increasingly possible now that members have greater opportunities to put their work in the public domain. Whether of works by members or other writers that have taken your fancy, finding books to review won't cost the earth. Apart from public libraries, books published on Kindle cost from as little as 77p.

Finally, just a reminder that we have a Facebook page, which can be used both as a notice board and a discussion arena. Anyone who wants to comment or ask a question about anything, large or small, connected with the society or literature in general is welcome to contribute. Dialogue is difficult in a quarterly magazine like ours with limited space,

and I hope that the Facebook page will help fill that gap for those who want to use it.

Have a wonderful Christmas and a productive New Year.

### **Chairman's Chat**

Terry Rickson

The first few days of October and what days they have been! The modest Professor Peter Higgs, the Edinburgh physicist, awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics and the Canadian author, Alice Munro, winning the Nobel Prize for Literature. The latter has been described as 'the master of the contemporary short story', sometimes described as the 'Canadian Chekhov'. It may surprise some but Chekhov was master of the short story. Boyd Tonkin, *The Independent's* literary editor, said of Munro, 'She can encapsulate life within a dozen pages.' This modest, unassuming author has, I understand, a world-wide readership.

The short story has received a well-earned boost from the success of Alice Munro, who is an inspiration to those of us who endeavour to write short stories. We may never imagine for one moment reaching the dizzy heights of prestigious awards but it is satisfying should one's efforts meet modest success; our magazine is one good showcase, as are others.

I picked up an interesting piece on Radio 4 recently, about young authors and their wide-ranging writing subjects, especially fearless adventures into politics. I read a comment by Marcus Sedgwick, an award-winning writer of books for young adults: '... every week I am delighted, though not surprised, to meet hundreds of engaging young people reading all sorts of things...' It is good to know that both writing and reading are in good heart.

A thought has popped into my head, do any of our members try their hand at writing crime stories or thrillers? I'm sure there are and it is quite a skill to get this into short story form an exercise for *The Author* perhaps?

I wish all members a Happy Christmas and New Year, including those ladies still in shock from Helen Fielding killing off Mark Darcy, although I gather the irrepressible Bridget has found new interests in *Mad About the Boy*.

*Ad aperturam libri* (wherever the book opens).

Enjoy your writing!

## **Subscriptions – Please read carefully, important change.**

Subscriptions are due at the beginning of January. They remain at £15 for standard membership of SCPSW or £22 if you wish to include membership of the Poetry Workshop. A renewal form is enclosed with this edition of *The Author* for those who are not paying by standing order.

Please note that for **this year only**, subscriptions are to be sent to the Chairman, Terry Rickson, 48 Marlborough Road, Ashford, Middlesex, TW15 3QA. This is because Beryl Jones, the Treasurer, is taking a well-earned break in the Antipodes. If for any reason the renewal form should go astray, subscriptions may be sent with a short covering note giving your name and address. Late subscriptions could result in failure to receive the spring edition, especially as by then we are likely to have a new printer and distributor who will need a definitive list of members in good time.

## **New Year Party, Civil Service Club, 25 January 2014**

The New Year Party will take place at the Civil Service Club, Great Scotland Yard, Whitehall, on Saturday, 25 January 2014. The event starts with a buffet at 1pm, after which the first prize winner of the Children's Short Story Competition, if present, will be asked to read out the winning story. All members attending are also invited to bring along a short story or poem to read out, theme: 'Flight'. Short stories should be a maximum of 1,000 words and poems a maximum of 40 lines. Prizes will be awarded to the winners.

Tickets are £16, which includes the buffet and wine. The form, which should be returned to Ethel Corduff, is enclosed.

## **SCPSW ANNUAL COMPETITIONS 2014**

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

Maximum length 3,000 words, clearly typed on A4 paper. Entries will be returned if accompanied by S.A.E. Entry Fee £4.00 per story. Prizes as follows: 1<sup>st</sup> prize £75, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize £25. Closing date 28 February 2014.

## **Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition**

No restriction on theme or form, but maximum forty lines and one poem per sheet of paper. (Writers of humorous verse should consider the Vee Bradley Prize.) Entries will be returned if accompanied by s.a.e. Entry fee £2 per entry. 1<sup>st</sup> prize £50, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize £25. Closing date 28 February 2014.

**Several further competitions** will be held during the course of the year and details will be published in future editions of *The Author*. Just a reminder that, although the Vincent Brennan Travel Article Competition has been discontinued, travel articles can be entered into the Gordon Gompers Non-Fiction Competition later in the year.

### **Notes for Entrants to All Competitions:**

Unless entrants state from the outset that they do not wish their entry to be published, all first prize winners will appear in *The Author*. If space permits some second and third placed entries may also be published in later editions. The entrants' real names will be used when announcing winners, unless they have advised at the time of submission that they would prefer to be known by their pen name. Entries must be the original work of the entrant and must not have been published at the time of the submission. Entries exceeding the specified length will be disqualified.

**All entries should bear only a pen name** (which should be varied to avoid recognition) and a separate sheet quoting the pen name used, title of entry, real name and address. All entries should be sent to the Competition Secretary, Nina Mattar, 4 Redruth House, Grange Road, Sutton, SM2 6RT.

## **Gordon Gompers Competition Results**

The winner of the Gordon Gompers prize for a non-fiction article is Trish Rissen for *Those Were the Days*. Alan Watts, who judged the competition, commented as follows:

'I felt that this entry was a simple straightforward tale, reminiscences of happy bygone times in which we could all share. It was nostalgic and charming, and it was a well-rounded, well written little article.

'The standard of the entries was extremely high, and it was delightful to read so many interesting pieces which made judging both a joy and

a difficulty. There were two entries which deserve special mention: *Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Adult Schools* by Beryl Jones and *The Black Box* by Leslie Wilkie, but unfortunately there can be only one winner, so congratulations to Trish Rissen.’

The winning entry can be found in this edition of *The Author*.

### **Vee Bradley Humorous Verse Competition Result**

The winner of the Vee Bradley Humorous Verse Competition is Una McMorran for *The Tennis Club Car Park*. The judge, Steve Glason, commented:

‘I was very impressed with the high standard of entries for the Vee Bradley Humorous Poetry Competition. It was difficult to make up my mind, such was the diversity of the poems, ranging from limericks to *The Ballad of the Boilerman* and *A Close Shave With Sweeney Todd*. However, there was one which immediately appealed to my sense of humour and that poem has won the competition. The winning poem was deliciously wicked, very amusing and very, very funny.’

Here is the winning entry, **The Tennis Club Car Park** by Una McMorran.

Miss J Hunter Dunn, Miss J Hunter Dunn  
Regrets her engagement by twenty-past-one.  
Wants shot of Aldershot to stretch her wings,  
Sow wild oats, burn her boats, do exciting things,  
Perhaps join the WRENS or maybe the ATS –  
Depends on which has the prettier hats.

Miss Joan Hunter Dunn, Miss Joan Hunter Dunn,  
Wants all the pleasure the leisure of fun,  
This varnished, untarnished Aldershot Miss  
Quite likes her subaltern and likes his kiss,  
It might be ‘chic’ to be married, thought she,  
So reconsiders by twenty-to-three.

## **Annual Literary Luncheon**

Ethel Corduff

Our Annual Literary Lunch was held on 19th October at the Civil Service Club, attended by members and guests from Belgium, France, Wirral, Norfolk, Suffolk, Middlesex, Kent, Surrey, Bournemouth and London. Several members from Croydon Writers joined us also. Our President Alan Watts's daughter, Fleur Hogarth, represented her father. Sadly Val Tigwell was not well enough to attend.

Chairman Terry Rickson introduced our speaker, author Adrienne Dines, who kept us all amused at Irish nuns' antics from her schooldays as she spoke on 'When the Writing Begins'.

Adrienne is assisting Barbara Large in the running of a very useful writer's workshop. The email address of the workshop is <http://creativewordsmatter.co.uk/>

**The Writer of the Year, Mike Boland**, was announced. The award is for Mike's new poetry book *Trout Rising* and for his huge commitment in editing and publishing *Wavelengths*, also for his years on the committee of the Poetry Workshop, where he ran the Poetry weekend for many years. Mike's work has appeared in many small poetry magazines and anthologies here and in America and has been broadcast on local radio. A founder member of the Trout Poets, he contributed to the group's two collections *The Trout....Minus One* and *Rainbow Trout*. Unfortunately Mike was unable to be present due to a family celebration on that day, but we wish him hearty congratulations here.

Mikes website: [www.mikeboland.moonfruit.com](http://www.mikeboland.moonfruit.com)

### **Martin C Jones, *130 Shady Acres: A Soho Novella***

*130 Shady Acres* is available on Kindle, price 77 pence. One reviewer describes it as 'a cracking read with well-drawn characters and a page-turning plot bringing the seedy world of post-war Soho to life.'

Martin has written a useful article, reproduced in this edition of *The Author*, about how to publish a book on Kindle.



## **Graham Andrews, *A Gentle Flow of Ink***

*A Gentle Flow of Ink*, a collection of science fiction and fantasy short stories by SCPSW member Graham Andrews, was published by Random House on 20 August. It's part of their on-line Feed A Read programme. You can find it on [feedaread.com](http://feedaread.com) along with an extract from the book.

## **Stephen Bibby, *Collingwood's Club***

Stephen Bibby's *Collingwood's Club*, published last year as an e-book, is now in paperback and available from Olympia Publishers or it can be ordered via Amazon or Waterstones.

## **Review - *An introduction to the Novels of Charles Dickens* by Alan Watts**

Ethel Corduff

I did not realise how much of Dickens's work I had not read until I had the pleasure of reading *An Introduction to the Novels of Charles Dickens* by the SCPSW President, Alan Watts, with secretarial assistance from his daughter, Fleur Hoghart. This splendid little book could fit in your handbag or large pocket. It is beautifully illustrated and is an absolute pleasure to read.

It really is Dickens in a nutshell. All his books are here and summarised in an inviting way, where each cameo whets the appetite for more. As a result I want to read *The Pickwick Papers* and, as a crime reader, to explore *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

This is a book that could be read by adult or child. In fact it a perfect introduction for anyone to Dickens great works. It would make a lovely Christmas gift and would be easy to post. Several schools have expressed an interest. Copies can be ordered from Alan Watts, Glebe Court Nursing Home, Glebe Way, West Wickham, Kent. Price £8.00 including postage.

## **Review – *Alby and Me* by John C Bird**

Paul Williams

The Kindle I received as a present two years ago had not been getting much use, so for my holiday in Crete this year I decided to download SCPSW member John C Bird's novel, *Alby and Me*.

At just over £1 nobody could complain about the value, but if I had known what was in store I would have been prepared to pay much more, and that's not something I say often! It's a moving, humorous story of the friendship between two working class grammar school boys in their mid-teens. Intelligent and witty, Alby is friend, mentor and sometimes protector of the narrator. Although set in the late 1940s, I was relieved that the author did not make the mistake of giving us a History lesson about rationing, austerity and mid twentieth century grammar schools, but pays his readers the compliment of assuming they already have a basic general knowledge about the period. Instead we are treated to what counts, to a story and an anguish that could apply in any decade. The emotions are understated (these are boys, after all, and so not supposed to have emotions), but ultimately they are all the more powerful for that.

## **Market Profile**

Ethel Corduff

*This England* welcomes articles about England's traditions customs, places of interest, notable people and reader's recollections 250-2000 words Payment £25per 1,000 words and poems £10(12-24lines). Editor Stephen Garnett, This England, The Lypiatts, Lansdown Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 2JA. [editor@thisengland.co.uk](mailto:editor@thisengland.co.uk) Please include your name and address. Articles and photographs submitted for publication must be accompanied by a stamped, addressed envelope for return if unsuitable.

**Vanity Publishing.** Member Douglas Fulthorpe wrote to me about his negative experience with a vanity publisher, *The Amalgamated Press*, who praised his poem and offered to publish it in a book for (wait for it) £19.99 plus £9.99 for a dedication, £16.99 for a profile,

£9.99 for a pen name and, to include his details on their website, £42. He says they are included in the *Winning Writer* list of bad sites and have no sales outlets

When I Googled their name, numerous companies called 'Amalgamated Press' sprang up but they seemed on a brief search to be bona fide and none mentioned vanity. But when I Googled 'vanity publishing' I was surprised to find a website, [www.vanitypublishers.co.uk](http://www.vanitypublishers.co.uk) that seemed only to feature one author with details of his book and family photos, nothing else. Be aware!

The Society of Authors gives information about Vanity Publishers. It can be confusing: vanity publishers do not call themselves that, but often talk about subsidy-, self- or cooperative-publishing. As a general rule, if a publisher is advertising for authors, it is probable that it will be seeking a large subvention from the writer. Be clear about what your money is buying, and what your chances are of earning any of it back.

If you pay a printer to produce copies of the book (self-publishing) you will end up owning those copies. When you pay a vanity publisher, you are not acquiring the books; they remain the property of the publisher. You will be asked to grant the publishers an exclusive licence to exploit the work. Your fee is for the costs of publication. The contract will probably entitle you to say ten free copies of your work and the chance to buy more in return for (further) payment. Increasingly, vanity publishers print copies to order, so treat with scepticism arguments about the cost of warehousing and storage. In any case, their production costs - unlike those of a conventional publisher - have already been met (by you). There is inevitably less of an incentive for the publisher to sell the work.

Check on the quality of production (often distinctly poor), and the financial credentials of the vanity publisher. You might want to see examples of other books produced by the firm, and a copy of their latest catalogue. And check the fine-print; for example, an undertaking to print 'up to' 1,000 copies actually guarantees nothing.

If conventional publishers have turned the work down, it is most probably on economic grounds and, although there are well-recorded stories of bestsellers collecting rejection slips, one has to accept that an experienced editor may have a better idea of what will sell than you do. Be realistic about who will read your work, as reviewers and

booksellers know the names of vanity firms. They also know that (even if this does not apply to your book) many works that were not good enough to find a conventional publisher end up on vanity lists. Occasionally a book produced by one of the better-respected vanity firms might be reviewed, but it is extremely rare.

Many people enter into vanity arrangements because they cannot find a conventional publisher and feel that what they have to say would be of real value to other people. If you cannot find a conventional publisher, and you have the money to spend, then consider self-publishing before vanity publishing.

**Online/Electronic Publishing.** If your work is unpublished be very cautious about agreeing to have it published first, or only, online or as an eBook or print-on demand. This is an easy market for vanity publishers. (*The article below shows that it is fairly easy to publish online yourself. Ed*)

Jonathan Clifford is an expert on vanity publishing and he says many vanity publishers pretend to be self-publishers. He gives this important information, which you can check out in advance with the company: a genuine self-publisher will have a name designated by the Author on the copyright page of the book as publisher, and the book's ISBN number must be registered by the ISBN agency to the Author as published. Any company which publishes books under its own name/imprint cannot help authors to self-publish. Look at Jonathon's marvellous website [www.vanitypublishing.info](http://www.vanitypublishing.info) where you can download a free advice pack. For a paper copy send an A4 stamped addressed envelope with a £1.20 stamp to Jonathon Clifford, 27 Mile Road, Farnham Hampshire PO16 0TH.

### **Cutting the Odds (E-publishing)**

Martin Jones

It's time to face some harsh facts. You've taken your masterpiece and polished it until the prose positively glitters. It's time to send it out into the world. What do you do? You send it to a publisher, right? Wrong. Apart from a few tiny Independents, publishers won't accept unsolicited submissions. They rely on literary agents to unearth new talent. So, send it to an agent. As I used to, perhaps in your mind's eye you see your envelope gently drifting onto their doormat, from whence

they pluck it up, tear it open with eager, trembling fingers and, instantly recognising your genius, shower you with contracts and riches. Well, it didn't happen like that to me and it's a fair bet it won't happen to you either. The first thing to realise is that agents receive hundreds, even thousands, of submissions every year. Some even claim to read each one. Perhaps. But even if they do, the chances of your diamond being discovered amidst all the dross are tiny, probably less than 1%. The second thing is that, despite rumours to the contrary, agents are human too. They need to eat and their existing clients are their bread and butter. Publishing is an uncertain business and they won't spend much time chasing that elusive best-seller. The reality is that you have a better chance of success of winning the lottery. So if I said there is a way to 100% guarantee getting your work published you'd bite my hand off. Well there is, and it's e-publishing.

I would hazard a guess that you've already considered it and dismissed the idea. It's not a proper book, it's all seems too technical, no-one will read it.

Let's first deal with the difficulties. A cursory scan of the Internet will reveal that there are numerous companies that promise to take the pain out of the process. They will take care of everything for you for, usually for between about £50 and £150, although many won't give you a price up front until you've sent them your work. But they all contain glowing testimonials from satisfied clients and I expect many of them are true. Unfortunately there's no real way of finding out. If you do want to go down this route it will be worth checking out websites like *Absolutewrite.com* or the *Writer's Workshop Word Cloud*. On these sites you'll find nascent authors like you sharing tips, gossips, gripes and information about the murky world of publishing.

Of course, you could try and save yourself money by doing it yourself. You don't need to be a computer expert. I did it and I'm not. In fact my children regard me with pitying smiles every time I approach a computer. I've been known to break into a cold sweat accessing messages on a mobile phone. There are a number of platforms available but Amazon are the market leader by some distance, with at least 80% of the UK market. Its Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) system makes it possible to publish novels, poetry, short stories, even graphic novels and within 24 hours have your work available worldwide. So, how do you go about it?

The Internet contains possibly hundreds of articles on e-publishing. Unfortunately they are not quality controlled for veracity or clarity, and unless you know what you're doing you risk being reduced to a shivering bundle of confusion. There are plenty of books available telling you how to do it. The problem is that books are book size. They contain an awful lot of information, of which probably only a fraction will be relevant to your needs. You really don't need to read an entire book to publish successfully. It's not rocket science. So, are you ready to take the first steps to fame and fortune?

If you decide Amazon is for you, go to the KDP website and create an account. A page will come up, and in the left-hand margin are instructions for converting your file into a publishable format. As you begin reading it might all seem a little daunting, but don't despair. Also on the left-hand side you will see a heading 'Building Your Book for Kindle'. Follow this link and you will be able to download a free booklet. This contains all the information you need to know in a more comprehensible and accessible fashion. Read it through so you grasp the entire process and if you take it stage by stage, it's really not at all scary.

Here you will be given instructions on creating the front matter (including a copyright page so that when Steven Spielberg takes up the option on your novel for his next blockbuster you get your cut). It will show you how to format your book. This is the worst part of the process, not because it's difficult but because it is time-consuming. Then you need to copyedit the book for formatting errors and spelling. It's a good idea to get a friend or loved one to go through it too. A fresh pair of eyes always helps. Then the fun bit; designing a cover. You can have this done professionally but with a bit of imagination you don't need to. You can use Amazon's online Cover Creator. It's easy to use but a bit formulaic. I used Adobe Photoshop to create mine. There are plenty of royalty free images which you can crop to suit and then create a new file of between 2500 x 1563 pixels and 1000 x 625 pixels. If this is all starting to sound a bit technical you can do what I did and find a child and promise them a tenner to help. I leave the fulfilment of that promise to your conscience. One tip: like most first-time writers, don't make your name too small. You don't have to apologise for anything.

You're almost there. Click the Upload button and when it's finished uploading click the Preview Book button. It's in the nature of e-books that there might be some small problems like the occasional wrong paragraph indentation, but that goes with the territory. If there's nothing too bad, press Save and Continue. The final step is set your price and royalty scheme. Bear in mind if you go for the higher royalty figure there is a minimum price at which your book may be sold, which might affect sales. Click Save and Publish and congratulations, you're a published author! Ready yourself to thumb your nose at all those people who thought you couldn't do it.

Perhaps you're still not convinced. You write because you love books, the feel and smell of them. Your ambition was to hold your book in your hand, see it on the shelves of your local bookshop, sign copies for adoring fans. This is the easy way out. It's not a proper book. If that's what you think, let me provide you with a final argument.

We've all heard the adage that everyone has a book in them. Well, if you have a book in you, forget it. Publishers and agents aren't interested in people who have a book in them, they want people with five, six, seven books in them. It's a business and only exceptionally do debut novels make a profit. They will need to invest money and time in you and they won't do it if you can't demonstrate that you are in it for the long haul. Look at the blurb on any book by a new writer and more likely than not, you'll discover they've worked in journalism or produced poetry or been in another occupation that gives them a track record in writing. Publishers are professional and naturally enough they prefer to deal with other professionals, people who understand what it takes. So you're faced with an impossible situation: most agents won't consider your work if you're not published but you can't get published if no-one looks at your stuff. If you want to pique an agent's interest then you need to show them that you have the tenacity and discipline they want, and if your work is well-received, all the better. Putting something on Kindle is no guarantee of success but it will narrow the odds in your favour.

## Review of Waves 2013

Pru Phillipson

*Waves 2013* is a striking production. The dramatic cover heralds the dramatic contents inside. There are over fifty poems by eighteen different poets and the range of subjects is exciting.

As in any anthology there are many poems inspired by actual locations, natural phenomena and animal life, but here the reader is confronted with a wonderful variety of topics and treatment from the dense packed images of Bill Torrie Douglas's *Bass Rock* 'pulsing in the sun' with 'its skull-cap of stained guano' to the lyrical evocation of a flight of starlings 'rotating, gyrating, three storeys high' in Joanna Crawford's *At dusk*.

All the poets who chose these themes showed close observation of their subjects as well as the ability to convey their delight and enthusiasm to the reader. I have watched salmon struggling up a highland torrent and Norman Bissett delightfully recalled the sight in *Brig o' Feugh*, grabbing my attention with the brilliant opening lines 'Engorged by days of rain/ the falls spew splintered amber.'

Several poets enriched their descriptions with personal musings, like Donald M Abbot in *Jubilee Beacons at Hadrian's Wall*, Dorothy Pope in her two poems on *September*, Terry Rickson in *The Whale's Road* and Val Tigwell in the charming vignette *Lap Cat*.

Many of the poets chose to write about a character who had impressed them and I found some of these very moving. I can mention only a few for they all reflected their author's insightful visions and memories. There was *The Pilgrimage* by Elsie Russell, *Mother Sewing* by Sylvia Neumann, *Twelve Years Old* by Sheila Nichols and the thought-provoking *Papplewick Pumping Station* by Ivy Hudson, all very different in style and treatment.

What struck me about this collection was its ability to create different moods. There were ominous poems like *London 5000 AD* by Brian Jones and *Darkness* by Mike Boland but there was some delightful humour as well. I enjoyed a laugh when I read *Breakfast at Stornaway* by Tom Riley and *Mount Edna* by Tony Oswick to name but two.



As the subjects differed so did the forms. There were some successful traditional rhyming verses with true rhymes and scansion and much free verse that was truly poetic through the use of images, figures of speech, echoes and repetitions that enhanced their impact when read aloud – as all poems should be. But in one or two, though they were well written, the division into lines of varied length seemed quite arbitrary and in fact they were really pieces of prose. I remember when I was teaching being asked by pupils ‘What *is* the difference between prose and poetry?’ Perhaps that’s a topic for you to discuss in your magazine ‘Wavelengths’.

Reading *Waves 2013* was for me a truly rewarding experience and I am grateful for being asked to write about it. I shall go back and reread it with deepening appreciation. I am only sorry there isn’t space to comment on the many poems that I haven’t singled out. I congratulate all involved in this excellent production.

### **Kent and Sussex Poetry Society – Open Poetry Competition**

Terry James has informed *The Author* of an open poetry competition organised by the Kent and Sussex Poetry Society. Prizes £1,000, £300 and £100. Entry fee £5, three or more poems £4 each. Closing date 31 January 2014. The Competitions Organiser, 26 Courtlands, Teston, Maidstone, Kent, ME18 5AS. Poems can be submitted by post or email (email payment by Paypal).

Further details can be found on the site, [www.kentandsussexpoetry.com](http://www.kentandsussexpoetry.com)

### **Poetry Workshop Pages**

#### **Mike Boland**

#### **Review of the Year**

I’m pleased to be able to report that the Poetry Workshop continues in a healthy and vibrant condition. A report on the PW’s main activities follows:

#### **PW Weekend**

The 2013 Poetry Workshop Weekend took place in July at Launde Abbey in Leicestershire. PW members attending enjoyed a varied programme of poetry-based activities.

Next year's PW Weekend will also be held at Launde Abbey on **4-6 July 2014**. Full details and a Booking Form will be included in the winter issue of **wavelengths**.

### **Bill Barnes Competition 2013**

I'm writing these Poetry Workshop Pages shortly after the closing date of this year's competition, and therefore judging has yet to take place. Hopefully the results will be available in time for inclusion in the winter issue of **wavelengths**. The winning entries and the Judge's Report will be published in the spring issue of **wavelengths**.

### **Waves 2013**

The 43rd issue of the Poetry Workshop's annual anthology of members' work was published this summer. '**Waves 2013**' is 34 pages long, containing 55 poems by 18 poets. It was edited jointly this year by Val Tigwell and Ivy Hudson, has a stunning cover and, as usual, the contents are of a very high standard. Copies of Waves 2013 are available at a price of £3 (inc p&p) from **Ivy Hudson** at **7 Whitwell Acres, High Shincliffe, DURHAM DH1 2PX**.

The winter issue of **wavelengths** will hopefully contain details of how to submit work for consideration for the 2013 anthology, but PW members should note that the closing date for submissions is 31 March 2013.

As announced in the autumn issue of **wavelengths**, the PW committee is looking for a new editor for **Waves 2014**. If any PW member is interested in this role, please contact Jane Arthur on **[jane.l.Arthur@btinternet.com](mailto:jane.l.Arthur@btinternet.com)** or by telephoning her on **0121 233 0906**.

### **Postal Folio**

There are four circulating postal folios in which participating members can exchange critiques of each other's poetry, encouragement and news. There is room for any member of the Poetry Workshop who would like to take part. If you are interested, contact me, Mike Boland, at the address above or by e-mail to **[gothic.garden1@btinternet.com](mailto:gothic.garden1@btinternet.com)**

## **e-folio**

The PW also runs an e-folio for members who have access to the internet. Anyone interested in joining the e-folio should contact Sylvia Neumann. Her email address is: [sylvia.neumann@btinternet.com](mailto:sylvia.neumann@btinternet.com)

## **wavelengths**

This is the Poetry Workshop's quarterly magazine, issued free to all its members and averaging twenty pages in length. The winter issue will contain the text of two of the talks given at this year's Weekend, the Minutes of the PW's AGM, poems by members, plus the regular Newsletter section providing news of the Poetry Workshop's upcoming activities.

## **Subscriptions**

Subscriptions to the Poetry Workshop will fall due on 1 January. A renewal form will be enclosed with **wavelengths**. Membership remains unchanged for 2014 at £7 for Society members.

## **The Poetry Workshop**

If you are a member of the Society, have an interest in poetry but have not yet joined the Poetry Workshop - what are you waiting for!

The cost of membership is £7, and for this small sum 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 scheme
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition (open exclusively to PW members)
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend.

If you are interested in joining us, contact our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Terry Rickson, at the address above. Cheques should be made out to: SCPSW Poetry Workshop Account.

## Dates to Remember

<b>1 January 2014</b>	<b>PW subscriptions due</b>
<b>1 February 2014</b>	<b>Deadline for wavelengths number 38</b>
<b>1 March 2014</b>	<b>wavelengths number 38 published</b>
<b>31 March 2014</b>	<b>Closing date for Waves 2014</b>
<b>4 -6 July 2014</b>	<b>PW Weekend</b>

I'd like to wish all members of the Society a very Happy Christmas and a successful New Year.

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## **Poetry Pages**

### **Akenfield Revisited**

Steve Glason

Beyond the town of Framlingham  
(Station closed – oh long ago)  
Cottages – all pastel pink  
Low ceilings and a wealth of beams.

Down peaceful lanes – what will we find?  
An ancient church for Evensong  
That hint of cobwebs – slow decay  
Fresh flowers fading by the Font.

Around the corner – sleepy pub  
Once skittles on a sawdust floor  
Where local dialect could be heard  
Such good humoured repartee.

Redundant – maybe – both forlorn  
The very heart has withered –died  
Nowhere to meet – desertion now  
For a vibrant Ipswich scene.

With Wickham Market left behind  
We think of Suffolk's Ronald Blyth  
Portraying then a different world  
In a book so evergreen.

## **Why Are We Here?**

Norman Bissett

What are we doing here? And why? Nobody knows

Neither the politicians nor the high command,  
the press corps, commentators, military strategists,  
local population, Taleban Jihadists,  
suicide bombers, planters of IED's,  
womenfolk bivouacked in burqas,  
or schoolgirls clutching their exercise books.

Nobody knows why we are here. It is not our business.

There have been some gains, but too few to justify  
the loss of lives, of young life.  
There have been even more reverses,  
green on blue.

Who is friend and who is foe? Nobody knows.  
Democracy is an alien concept  
if you cannot read or think straight.  
Tribal loyalties prevail. Treachery is the norm.  
Assassinating a translator costs under ten dollars.

Nobody knows why we are here.  
They claim it is to make our streets safer.  
Nobody knows what is going on.  
Withdrawal does not mean conclusion  
for nothing will be concluded.

The best that can be hoped for?

No repetition of the fracasso that was Iraq.  
No repetition of the ill-advised, calamitous  
First Afghan War and its aftermath.  
No repetition of the disastrous  
retreat from Kabul,  
and the slaughter, in January 1842,

of sixteen and a half thousand  
British troops and camp followers,  
with only one survivor, Dr Brydon,  
a Scot from Edinburgh, left alive.  
No repetition of the Second Afghan War.

The best that can be hoped for?  
Timely withdrawal.  
An end of hostilities.  
The safe return of our boys.  
And no repetition.

**The Welcome**  
Helen Fletcher

The children of the mansions are at the garden parties,  
Eating nectarines and sticky buns,  
Everybody has sun-cream on.

Come down whenever you're ready  
Or not at all today.

You've come a long way.  
You have done well.  
It is so hard to leave,  
I know.

This is your room.  
Vespers is quarter to six,  
Dinner at six thirty.  
Tomorrow there's tea with your angels at three.

**Long Meg**  
Helen Fletcher

She remembers, with some embarrassment,  
lying in a stone circle,  
in the jagged edged sunken bowl.  
Her mind stopped when she curled up  
in the egg shell filled with sand.

It makes her sad to think she thought it held her  
like some embedded hand,  
the miniature of the mountains that stood round her,  
incapable of protecting her from anything but rain;

Or that another half would come,  
arrive from somewhere, gently surround her,  
and click into place.

## **Progress**

Norman Bissett

Twenty-eight thousand Chinese  
rivers have disappeared  
off the map.

Those that remain  
bob with carcasses  
of exploding pigs.

The iconic Yangtse  
turns dragon red  
the Yellow green.

Toxic pollution creates  
bitter, inedible fish,  
dead Peking ducks.

Rivers silt up  
and become sandbanks.  
Cormorants fester, unemployed.

Blame climate change  
and the mistakes  
of earlier cartographers.

## **Coronation June**

Steve Glason

Those images on the flickering screen  
Were new beginnings to be seen  
Devon – Brentor – far away  
This important regal day.

18 months – mere babe-in-arms  
(People came from Dartmoor farms)  
'It is our Queen' – so I was told  
In her Coach of yellow gold.

'The House of Windsor' – now went live  
Miles of grainy film survive  
Ancient Rites – all monochrome  
Beamed to every hearth and home.

As loyal subjects of the Crown  
We felt at one with London Town  
An audience round centre stage  
Part of a modern Fifties Age.

## **Ode to a Factory Toilet Monopoliser**

Douglas Fulthorpe

'Lone ponderth he in sunless clime,  
Full heedless of the flight of time.  
No ken of clash of steel on steel,  
Nor threshing cog, nor whirring wheel.  
None save him there in dark retreat,  
Where poiseth he as glued to seat.  
Yet without, in choleric hue  
Await his peers in restive queue.



## **The Thames**

Brian Jones

I think that in a previous life I was a sailor  
How else could I explain my fascination with the sea?  
I do feel the darkness at midnight  
I do feel the looming power of the waves  
I do feel the wind marks on the water  
Yet I only know the Thames.  
I saw in a dream a London inhabited by sailors  
I saw a forest of masts rising above the turgid waters  
Now all one sees is trivial pleasure boats  
I know a London that is haunted by ghosts of sailors past.

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## **Those Were the Days**

Trish Rissen

*(This was the winner of the Gordon Gompers non-fiction article competition)*

**I**t was 1959 when my father decided to diversify. We had moved into our house in Coronation week, 1953. It had been my father's dream when he was on active service during the war to have his own house built. He also wanted to be a business man. He and his business partner, Sam, owned two lorries and called themselves, somewhat grandly, haulage contractors. True, they transported everything from furniture to sugar beet but that was on the days when the lorries were running well. Some days they billowed black smoke from the exhaust and refused to move.

The lorries at been bought from the proceeds of Dad's pig farming venture. He had kept pigs on a piece of land that he bought cheaply. Unfortunately the pigs had a tendency to escape. They would somehow manage to get out of the sty and amble across a neighbouring field, ending up in the Vicarage garden. The long suffering Vicar would then bring them home. My father was always very apologetic and eventually turned them loose and installed an electric fence around the land to keep them in. The fence was turned off when my father went to feed and water the animals. Before

climbing over the fence he would ask my little sister to check that the electric was turned off by holding the electric wire because he didn't want to get an electric shock. My sister would grab hold of the wire and assure him that all was well. Unfortunately my sister had a tendency not to notice the electric current in the wire. This might have been due to her numerous allergies or her little rubber boots. But whenever Dad grabbed the wire it was live and he would jump in the air and swear. Of course it might just have been that my sister enjoyed watching his antics. Eventually he decided that he had had enough of pig farming determined to make his money elsewhere.

My father worked hard and in 1959 he decided that it was time that the rest of us joined in. He had noticed that although there were several shops in the village, there were none at our end, so he thought perhaps he should open one. Planning permission was sought and given and the builders came along to carry out the work. Truth to tell they weren't the fastest builders in the world but the shop built on to the side of our house gradually began to take shape. Once the shell was completed and plastered the counter and shelves were fitted. Two sets of scales were installed one for weighing vegetables and one for weighing sweets etc.

My sister and I became interested when the shop began to be stocked. Behind the counter on the tallest of shelves were the jars of sweets. Heavy glass jars full of such goodies as pear drops and pineapple chunks that gleamed through the glass. My father's favorites were the menthol eucalyptus sweets. He would grab a handful of those on a Sunday evening to get us through the Vicar's sermon at the Church. He would unwrap them silently in his overcoat pocket and pass them down the line to my sister and I. An extra long sermon warranted two sweets each. Mum didn't get any because she was always sitting behind us seated at the organ.

Most shops in the village opened from nine o'clock in the morning until five or six in the evening. So it was decided that we would open from seven forty-five in the morning until seven in the evening to pick up extra trade, five days a week. And as most of the other shops closed on Wednesday afternoons, our shop didn't. We closed on Saturday afternoons so that my mother could go to town on the bus to have her hair done. We were also open from ten o'clock Sunday morning until

four o'clock in the afternoon. They were long days and my sister and I were called in to serve in the shop when needed.

The shop was basically a general store selling everything from soap powder to hair nets, fruit, vegetables, all kinds of tinned food for humans, cats and dogs. There was also cut meat and cheese and later, when we had been open a year or two, frozen foods and ice creams were added to the stock of Coleman's General Stores. However, my sister and I were mainly interested in the crisps, sweets and seasonal novelties for Christmas and Easter.

The cigarettes were kept on a shelf out of sight along with tobacco, matches and lighter fluid. We had a lot of passing trade. They were the ladies who left the village daily to go to work. Some cycled to the 'camp' as they called it, although it was in reality an RAF base. While other ladies left the village in the opposite direction to work on the land. It was the 'land ladies', as my sister and I called them, who terrified us most. These hard-working ladies called in every morning for cigarettes, crisps, and chocolate bars to make their working day more bearable, and while my sister and I worked out how much to charge with our pencils and paper, no automatic tills back then, they knew exactly how much they should pay. If we got our sums right they would smile sweetly and hand over their money, but if we were wrong they would bang their grimy hands on the counter and demand that we try again until we got it right. It was very daunting for girls of ten and twelve and we used to argue over whose turn it was to go in and serve them.

To tell the truth I wasn't very keen on the shop, and as I grew older I had my mind set on an office career. To help me towards this end my parents enrolled me with a private shorthand teacher who lived in our road. This elderly lady was slightly eccentric. For ten shillings a week her pupils were given a two hour lesson in shorthand and typing. The shorthand lessons were fairly straightforward. She taught us the strokes and as we gradually learned them she read passages of varying speed which over time led towards examinations. The typing lessons were a different matter. She had an old Remington typewriter on which we learned the basics of typewriting. When we were familiar with the keys she would cover them with little caps so that we couldn't see them and set us a passage of typing to do. This was always accompanied by a piece of music, usually *The William Tell Overture*,

and we had great fun trying to fit the ping of the carriage return to the music. We would set off at a rip-roaring pace, our fingers flying over the keys. Unfortunately, despite this being the beginning of the nineteen sixties, our teacher still used a wind up gramophone. Gradually the music would wind down and the teacher would come hurrying in from the other room, where she was teaching a shorthand pupil, to wind it back up again. Looking back it is hard to believe that any of her pupils managed to gain any qualification, but it gave me a start in office work which led ultimately to a career in the Civil Service. In between school and shorthand lessons I was still expected to serve the customers in my free time.

My sister, on the other hand, eventually grew to like working in the shop and worked there permanently for some time after leaving school.

My parents sold the shop shortly after I got married in 1966. Of course I got married on a Saturday, because after all it was our half-day closing. We closed the shop at one o'clock and the wedding was at half-past two, and as I walked down the garden path several of our customers waited outside to see me off. Looking back I believe that was the nicest memory of the shop I have.

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## **The Unknown Du Maurier**

Terry James

**E**veryone has heard of Daphne Du Maurier - novelist, but who can say they know of the existence of Angela Du Maurier - novelist?

Angela was Daphne's elder sister by three years and published some fourteen books. Her last book seems to have been a volume of memoirs entitled *Old Maids Remember*, which was published in 1965; but since the late seventies not one of Angela Du Maurier's books has been in print.

Yet she was arguably as talented as sister Daphne, but perhaps a little less ambitious. One of her novels, *Treveryen*, written in the 'forties, rivals even *Rebecca* in terms of mystery and suspense, and is just as compelling as the Daphne Du Maurier masterpiece. Indeed, *Treveryen* was Angela's own favourite book and, as she reveals in *Old*

*Maids Remember*, was at one time to be made into a film. Alas, the project fell through, and this magnificent novel is all but forgotten.

Interestingly, one of Angela's best friends and supporters was the late Naomi Jacob, a very popular post-war novelist in the Catherine Cookson tradition. Today, however, Naomi Jacob is out of favour with modern readers, although the seven volumes of her brilliant *Gollancz Saga* are still in print. .

It is surely tragic that, whilst most if not all of Daphne Du Maurier's books are currently in print, and her 1940's play *September Tide* enjoyed a recent West End revival, not one word of her talented sister's literary output is in print. Indeed, not only the books, but also the name of Angela Du Maurier has gradually faded into obscurity.

Perhaps the only glimmer of hope on the horizon is that some enterprising television producer will come across *Treveryen* and realise its potential for TV adaptation. If so, then this unknown Du Maurier may gain the recognition she so richly deserves.

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## **Let Them Eat Cake**

Maureen Mills

**T**he News on television is often sad, depressing and shocking and the same can be said for most of the programmes. Our Lotto numbers never turn up and it always rains at week-ends, so what is there to cheer us up?

The answer has to be Afternoon Tea. After all, we're told in times of recession it's good to revert to traditional values.

Years ago Tea wasn't a special treat, just routine of consuming bread and jam washed down with cups of tea but at least the family sat together and there was a tablecloth. Sunday Tea was different, a milk jug appeared on the table and sometimes other family members were present.

Sandwiches were prepared. On special occasions these contained tinned salmon but generally the filling consisted of a strange smelling fish or meat paste. Aptly named homemade rock cakes were often provided.

Nowadays there is no time for a proper Tea. People arrive home at different times eager to dive into a hastily prepared meal followed by a mug of liquid with a tea-bag floating to the top waiting to be discarded. In the background the television plays an important role disrupting any attempt at conversation. Sadly even Sunday Tea has become a thing of the past.

Afternoon Tea is provided at posh establishments at high prices, often vouchers are given as presents for special occasions. Yet Afternoon Tea doesn't have to be for events and it needn't be expensive if we do it ourselves. Now is the time for the great revival.

Why not invite someone, or more than one person, to Afternoon Tea? Not too many though, it will feel like a kiddies' party. Definitely not a good idea to invite small children, too many moving objects to throw about and break. Men too might not be interested. So let them stay at home watching sport but once they hear what they've missed, they might be sorry. It doesn't have to be for a birthday, or special event, it should be just a treat and it can be fun. More importantly, hopefully the favour will be returned.

This is an occasion when it isn't the food and drink that matter that much but the all-important presentation. For most of us inviting guests for a meal can be fraught with problems. After much racking of brains, usually the safest option is settled upon, a chicken dish and there is a limit to what can be done to disguise chicken breasts. Jamie Oliver might be able to work wonders in thirty minutes but he has an army of helpers. Lots of preparation is needed and timing is essential, which means the host spends most of the time in the kitchen missing out on the company, only catching snippets of the conversation.

Getting the wine right is no easy task and there is sure to be one guest who doesn't drink alcohol which means a choice of soft drinks must also be available. Once the wine is consumed some guests forget to go home, leaving the host totally exhausted even before coping with clearing up.

Afternoon Tea is more straightforward and prepared in advance. No alcohol, so guests know what they will get - tea! Making conversation isn't hard work as controversial subjects are not likely

to be raised. However, we have to remember the rules. A dainty tablecloth is a must as this will be the canvas to show your creativity. Either embroidered or lacy look suitable. Cups, saucers and plates must be china, certainly no mugs. This may mean searching the back of the cupboard for great aunty's tea service but it will be worth it, appearances are important.

Charity shops have plenty if this is a problem. Certainly a recent search for a tea service as a golden wedding present proved an impossible task from the big shops. Plenty of mugs of all shapes and sizes and a huge array of teapots, but no cups and saucers.

A tiered cake stand helps to display your goodies at their best. Pastry forks, doyleys and serviettes are necessities to set the scene but these can be disposable.

When it comes to the food, this can be economical as long as there is choice. Size certainly matters, the smaller the better. Thinly sliced bread cut into small triangles with crusts removed, and/or plain scones with a choice of two jams. The scones must be made on the day to ensure they are absolutely fresh and light. Small dainty cakes for the cake stand and pieces of shortbread make a useful addition.

The cake should be the centrepiece. It doesn't have to be homemade. Delia cheats, so why not us? Either a simple fruitcake or a Victoria Sandwich with a decorative ribbon around looks attractive. Cup cakes are popular and colourful as long as they are not too sickly.

The tea itself should preferably be leaf tea which requires a strainer and, of course, made in a teapot. If a choice of tea can be supplied that would be an added luxury. If anyone wants coffee, make a mental note not to ask them again.

What is provided can be very basic but it is how it is presented which makes it special. This means taking trouble but those invited will also feel special and will enjoy an experience not to be missed. Afternoon Tea shouldn't be something only experienced by our parents and grandparents. Let's all carry on the tradition, spoil ourselves and those we love, or want to impress!

## Luke's Evening

Chav Lad

Luke was startled when he discovered the party was being held in a flat on what they now called the Waterfront. Returning to this town was one thing, returning to this particular location quite another, even if it had been known simply as the docks in its previous life. In those days it had been a place of industry, now it was a clearly place of leisure, of expensive boats, of renovated warehouses that had been turned into flats, of bars, cafes and restaurants.

For Luke it was a place of catastrophic loss.

Despite himself, Luke was intrigued by the changes that had taken place, and the flat in which Nigel and Angela were having their party certainly commanded spectacular views. Much of the conversation with their guests was about the amazing price of such apartments in Suffolk, a fraction of what you'd have to pay in London. This momentarily revived in Luke a vague ambition to move back, not after he had retired but sooner perhaps. He could buy a place here and have change from his London house, the mortgage of which was all but paid off. His tastes were simple and he did not need to cling on to a well-paid job. But it seemed like a bold step, too bold for him.

Julia had once laughed at his timidity; indeed that was probably why she had left him. They remained good friends ('I'll always love you as a friend,' she had assured him with perfect sincerity) but it was easy for them to hold no grudges as they had never loved each other much in the first place. Julia seemed to assume that, like her, Luke did not do intense love and she was so obviously comforted by the thought that he did not disabuse her.

It was one of those Sunday afternoon parties that showed every sign of lingering into the night, though Luke left around six, citing a fictional relative he had to visit while in the area. 'Oh yes, you were originally from here, weren't you?' Nigel said. Luke, assuming he was more or less invisible to his colleagues, was impressed that Nigel had remembered this cursory snippet of information. Luke had only been with the company for three months and was fearful the others might find him rather boring with his interest in History and Literature, and he was older than most of them. 'You can always come back later,' Angela said. 'I understand you're booked into a hotel tonight.'



Luke doubted that he would return to the party. For one thing his hotel was a mile away and for another he wanted to explore the town once more. He suspected he would be in no mood to socialise by the end of his little pilgrimage.

He walked towards his old street off Woodbridge Road to give his former home a nod, though it gave him no great stirring of emotion. His parents were both dead but his mourning for them was over. At least he had been able to say goodbye to them. The adjacent street was the real object of the visit, the one in which Norman Clayton had lived. For ten years they had been friends. Only Norman's death, aged sixteen, had ended the friendship.

It did not occur to anyone that Luke might grieve for long. Nobody knew that Norman had not only been his friend, he had been his saviour. With an older brother and sister, both of whom knew how to impose their will, Luke had started school timid, withdrawn and dyspraxic. 'I can't understand it,' his mother had told people, her disappointed making it clear to Luke that he was deficient, 'Matthew and Marcia have always been bold as brass.'

Parents always set the agenda for their children. Youngest children have the double burden of an agenda set both by parents and older siblings. If the agenda did not suit there was no escape, for the arbiters of right and wrong had created it for their own benefit and would be the judges of those who deviated. That was why Luke's somewhat rigid parents had not liked Norman much. They must have sensed that he offered the glimpse of an alternative.

Even at six, or at least by seven, Norman seemed to have observed all this. He had certainly observed Marcia kicking Luke all the way to school. In fairness to Marcia, Matthew had also bullied her when she had been Luke's age, and Luke could at least be grateful that his brother had moved up to secondary school just as he was starting primary.

'You have to stand up for yourself,' Norman had told him. He did not teach him how to do this so much as show him, his mere presence giving Luke a confidence he had hitherto not possessed. At last Luke was the equal of somebody, and that knowledge was to help him grow both academically and in character. 'You're cleverer than me,' Norman had once told him when they were about nine. From then on

Luke's schoolwork progressed by leaps and bounds and they were both in the top stream when they went to secondary school.

Like all close friends they developed a kind of language of their own, a shared sense of humour. Between fifth and sixth form they got a holiday job in Burtons by the docks, packing marzipan. Luke could only work the first three weeks because he had to go on a fortnight's holiday to Cornwall with his family. It was while he was away that Norman went for a lunchtime stroll along the quay and was hit by a heavy swinging chest being unloaded from a ship from Gdynia. That was one of the few details Luke was to hear on his return, by which time the funeral had taken place.

Luke never returned to the docks, avoiding them like the plague. This was made easier by his father's decision to return to his firm's London HQ a few months later. Luke never stopped yearning for his old friend, for he had left too soon. They were just coming up to the age when they could really enjoy life. They were going to go to sixth form together, to pubs, perhaps to university. They had already (illicitly) done the pubs a few times. They had intended to do so again before the end of that summer.

Yet those anticipated years of joyful discovery were to become years of mourning for Luke. His academic prowess did not wane after Norman's death but his confidence was another matter. He had been right in his supposition that he would never have another friend quite like Norman.

But why don't we pop into a pub now? Luke asked as he made his way back to the Waterfront.

'Sounds good to me,' a voice seemed to say. Luke knew it was all in his imagination but what the hell. Perhaps it was time to wallow.

'Let me get you a drink,' Luke now said, half aloud, as he entered the bar on the Waterfront which must have been pretty near the spot where Norman was killed.

'I'm dead,' Norman, ever the realist, would have pointed out.

'But I want to drink your health,' Luke explained.

'Are you trying to be funny?' said Norman. Luke laughed.

Luke bought himself a pint. If he really had gone potty he would have bought another for Norman, but he contented himself with an

imaginary conversation, making sure that his lips weren't moving. He told Norman what he had been doing all these years, rightly anticipating that Norman would be a little contemptuous of his lack of ambition.

'You're still shy, aren't you?' Norman admonished. 'You're over fifty for God's sake. Your weird family can't tell you what to do now. You'll soon be entering the evening of your life and you never let yourself enjoy the lunchtime and afternoon.'

'I was on my own again when you left. Anyway, you were the one who got yourself killed.'

'So you blame me?'

'I'll never blame you, Norman.' Luke felt his eyes moistening.

'You should have stayed at the party.'

'I was boring people.'

'No you weren't. There were at least two people who were really interested in what you were saying and a couple more who were interested in you.'

'It's too late.'

'No it's not. Go back. They want you there.'

'If I go there I'll have to leave you.'

'You should have left me forty years ago,' said Norman, then he softened. 'But thanks for always thinking of me and making me live on.'

Luke walked in the direction of Angela and Nigel's flat. Some of their guests were on the balcony, talking volubly over the music. A couple of them waved to him. The party seemed to have revived.

'Go on in,' said Norman.

'Ah, Norman, but...'

'Goodbye for now, Luke,' said Norman firmly.

'Goodbye Norman,' said Luke reluctantly. Yet as he pressed the buzzer he knew that a cheerful evening awaited should he wish to grasp it.

## By Arrangement

Margaret Hothi

**N**irmila was bored. She fanned herself listlessly with the fan of deep green peacocks' feathers which she had bought in Delhi. It did little to dispel the intense heat, but at least it kept the flies away. She wished she had something to read. There were no books in the house, and no shops anywhere near. They had only stopped one night in Delhi, otherwise she might have found a shop selling English books.

When her parents first suggested a visit to India to see her grandparents, she had been excited at the prospect. The last time she had been there, she was only 5 years old. She couldn't remember much about that visit, except that everyone had made a fuss of her, bringing her toys to play with and sweets to eat. She remembered also the fields of tall green sugar cane outside the village. It must have been cooler then, because she could recall running around happily. But now the courtyard where she was sitting was dusty and depressing, and swarming with flies.

Her parents had been talking to some visitors, who were just leaving. They came back to where Nirmila was sitting.

'When are we going home?' she asked.

They looked at one another.

'We thought you would enjoy being here,' said her mother.

'But it's so boring. There's no-one I can talk to.'

'Well, there will be tonight,' said her father. 'Those people we were talking to are coming for a meal, and they have a son about your age who speaks good English.'

She looked at them suspiciously as realisation dawned. They were trying to arrange her marriage!

'You could wear that new blue sari your grandmother gave you,' suggested her mother.

'You know I never wear saris, except for special occasions like weddings,' grumbled Nirmila.

'Well, in a way this is a special occasion. We want to make a good impression.'

‘I can’t see why,’ said Nirmila. ‘I hope you’re not trying to to arrange a marriage for me. You know I don’t want to get married for years.’

Her mother sighed. ‘You know we would never try to force you to get married. But your grandparents think this is a very eligible boy, so at least be civil to him.’

That evening, wearing her new sari, Nirmila found herself seated opposite the boy, whose name was Ranjit. Her grandmother waved aside her offers to help with the meal, simply saying, ‘Just talk to our visitors.’

Ranjit was quite good-looking, but seemed very quiet. Their elders did most of the talking.

‘Your father tells me you are still at school,’ said Ranjit’s father to Nirmila.

‘Sixth form college actually. I’m taking A-levels, then I have to decide about university. I’d like to go, but it’s very expensive nowadays.’

‘Ranjit would like to go to university in England,’ said his mother. ‘We would like him to go to Oxford or Cambridge, and perhaps be a doctor or lawyer.’

‘It’s very hard to get into Oxford or Cambridge,” commented Nirmila.

‘Ranjit is very clever,” said his mother.

‘Mother, please....’ protested Ranjit.

‘What subjects do you enjoy most?’ asked Nirmila.

‘I am very interested in Drama. I have been learning about Shakespeare, as well as modern drama.’

Nirmila was thinking that Drama wouldn’t help him to become a doctor or a lawyer, but at least it gave them something to talk about.

‘Which Shakespeare plays have you read?’ she asked.

His face fell. ‘I have not actually read any of the plays.’

Before Nirmila could comment on this startling admission, her father intervened. ‘Why don’t you come and stay with us while you

make enquiries about universities?’ He turned to Nirmila. ‘That would be a good idea, wouldn’t it?’

Nirmila was too appalled to do more than give a slight nod. Why on earth did her father have to make such a suggestion?

Her mother managed to change the subject and somehow the rest of the evening passed without incident. Ranjit’s parents invited them all to dine at their house the following day. Nirmila was too tired and dispirited to say anything to her parents that night. She was wondering how on earth she could put a stop to their plans without causing offence.

Next morning her grandmother asked Nirmila to get some milk from a neighbour who kept goats. She had been there before, so she cheerfully took a jug and opened the door. But in the lane outside she came face to face with Ranjit, who was also out on some errand. Seeing her, he stopped.

‘I wanted to speak to you,’ he said. ‘I could see by your face last night, when your father invited me to England, that you didn’t like the idea.’

‘I’m sorry...’ began Nirmila.

‘Don’t worry, I don’t want that either. I know I would never be clever enough to go to Oxford or Cambridge, or be a doctor or a lawyer. That’s just my parents’ wishful thinking. I want to go to Mumbai and get into films. Maybe I’ll go to a drama school.’

‘But what will your parents say?’

‘Oh, I’ll have to persuade them gradually. After all, it will cost them less in the long run. But you and I should keep in touch, just to keep them happy!’

‘I think I can manage that,’ laughed Nirmila.

By the time Nirmila’s family had returned to England, both sets of parents had accepted that there wasn’t likely to be any engagement at present. Just before Christmas, Nirmila and her parents received letter from Ranjit, saying he was now at drama school, and enclosing a photo of himself on Marine Drive, Mumbai. He was looking very happy.

‘My parents have agreed to let me follow my dreams,’ he wrote. ‘It helped that my sister, who got married last year, has just had a son.’

‘We should send him a Christmas present,’ said her mother.

‘I know just what to send,’ said Nirmila. ‘The complete works of Shakespeare!’

## Uncle Fred

AE Hobbs (*With acknowledgements to P Wilkes, Bedford*)

**F**red was known as ‘Uncle Fred’ to most of the kids in the town, and a fair number of their mums as well, or so we are told. Uncle Fred was a man of habit. He would leave work at the local factory as soon as the bell sounded (shows you how long ago it was). Factories! Bells! Anyway, he left work and was soon in the Red Lion with his first pint.

He became aware of something different as he noticed two heads and only one body at the bar - perhaps a second pint was called for. “Do you know?” he said to Doris, a barmaid of buxom proportions, “I could have sworn that the tall chap at the bar had two heads.”

“He has, or they have”, said Doris, “they or he has been making short work of our best bitter all evening. They landed up in the hills in a spaceship apparently last night. Trouble with the electrics. George from the garage has sent young Sid up there with a new battery to see if he can fix it.”

Uncle Fred took a closer look at the stranger. “Can I talk to him?” he queried.

“Of course you can,” said a voice, “what is it you wish to know.”

For once in his life Uncle Fred could not think of what to say. The voice continued as to how they got stranded in the hills with electrical trouble and someone was now trying to fix it.

“How is it,” asked Uncle Fred, having got his voice back, “you speak with no mouth but I can understand you?”

“Funny you should say that,” said the voice, “a long time ago, before your tiny planet was formed, we were like you — one of each sex. Then it was decided that it was inefficient, so we combined together as you see us now. It doesn’t always work though.”

“You can say that again,” said a quite different voice, “he makes me drink this bitter instead of a gin and tonic.”

“That’s his trouble”, said head number one.

Uncle Fred by now had worked out which voice belonged to which head.

“Keep this to yourself,” said head number one, “but I have great doubts as to his gender, male or female.”

Head number two burst into tears and head number one said, “Now the crying has started it might go on for ages.”

Sure enough, the bar area was soon ankle deep in water, but stopped as Uncle Fred questioned again, “How do you know what I am thinking?”

“We do not need your old fashioned means of communication by mouth anymore. We communicate by thought, so we pick up language very quickly.” Uncle Fred was aware that he was being answered in perfect English.

Head number two, having wiped his eyes, sighed and said, “You see, we are not a backward lot like you.”

Uncle Fred started to get angry. “I’ll have you know we are very aware of events and have opinions that are listened to.” Fred’s anger subsided as a further pint slid across the bar.

“We didn’t mean to be rude but, we have also been talking, as you call it, to our friends on Venus. One nation of your race, Americans, I think, sent a DIY gadget to us, very crude but probably the best they could do. We have installed it in our museum.”

At this point, it was announced over the hubbub of the bar that the spacecraft was fixed, and everyone went to the hillside to see the take-off. Goodbyes were said and the machine burst into life and took off with a roar.

The crowd on the ground were silent until someone said, “Where’s Sid? I did not see him get off the spacecraft.”

Again a silence and then a voice enquired, “Who’s going to tell his Mum?”