



Having Ideas

by Linda Lewis

People are always asking how I keep coming up with unusual ideas. This is a complicated question as I use all kinds of techniques but I'd like to pass on a couple of quick tips.

Often I start with an unusual setting. Over the years, I've made notes of places that might be suitable so that when I want to generate an idea, I simply have to pick one. If you want to make a list of places in a hurry, a quick scan through the TV listings pages will produce a huge range of settings.

Places don't need to be exotic, they simply need to be different. For example, I've used everything from a bus, a book shop, to Bournemouth. Many new

writers set their stories in the home. This can work against them because if an editor has just read a whole batch of stories with a similar setting, theirs may not stand out, but if you set the story in a laundry, that might be all you need to get noticed.

The next time you go out, note down a few details about the various places you visit so that you can visualise them when you want to write a story.

The same idea works with characters. Once you give a character an unusual job or an interesting hobby, all you need to do is ask yourself a few questions about what they might be doing and why, and

you may find that the story starts to write itself.

WEBSITE:

www.akacatherinehoward.weebly.com

NEW! Follow me on TWITTER; just search for Linda Lewis or 55linda55

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FROM THE EDITOR

By the time you read this, the NAWG Festival 2011 will be less than three months away. All of us on the Committee are very grateful to those of you who have already booked up. It would be great if we could fill all of the available places.

Once again the Writers' Bureau has generously offered a course (worth several hundred pounds) as a prize in association with the Festival. This time, and with WB's permission, we are inviting sealed bids with a minimum bid set at £50. More details of this will be posted up on the NAWG website, or please contact nawg@live.co.uk or write (with SAE please) to our PO Box.

One of the attendees at the last Festival suggested a competition category of *Rewriting Fairy Tales*. We think this is an excellent idea, so as well as considering it for next year's competition, we'd like to try it out now. No more than 1,000 words please. Send to our PO Box and we'll print a selection of our favourites over the next few issues.

We would like to welcome the following new groups and associate members:

Grainger Women Writers; Verulam Writers' Circle; Sneinton Writers; Alton U3A Creative Writing Group; U3A Creative Writing Group - Weymouth & Portland; Balsall Writers; West Park Writers; Happing Writers; First Line Writers; Monday Writers; Willpower Writers; Wire Writers; Maryfield Writers.

New Associates:

Peter Andrew, Teresa Moody, Craig Pay, Jaqueline Gayle.

New LINK subscriber:

Kate Wood.

Total Membership:

Groups - 137
Associates - 75
LINK only subscribers - 30

Incidentally, would your writers' group like the option of receiving more copies of LINK? We are researching what the current additional print/postage costs would be for one or more extra copies, but, if this would interest you, please send in your views via the PO Box or the nawgeditor email address.

Another idea that we thought we'd mention is the *Author Showcase*. This would take the form of a short account of your working methods and publishing trials, tribulations and successes. And if you've had a book published (including self-published), remember that you can advertise it free in LINK and on our website.

Finally, we wonder if any of you have been the creator or victim of *unfortunate typos*? If so please send them in as fillers. Coincidentally, and with no word of a lie, when I made a note of this to include in the editorial I wrote *unfortunate types*. Not that I was thinking of anyone in particular!

August LINK copy deadline - 10th July.

Happy reading.

Steve Bowkett

LINK LETTERS

Yarm Writers' Group is 30 Years Old

I have only been a member for 25 years. We have no annual subscription or joining fee. For 50 pence you can have a cup of tea or coffee, read your story or poem and sit and listen to the rest of us reading our

stories, poems, local history or pieces of imagination. Some of the stories from the past include a frozen chicken escaping from a supermarket trolley; a fairy shivering and shaking when she is unwrapped because she is not sure where the top of the Christmas tree will finish up; ghosts escaping from their ancient house because they fear it will be demolished, stealing the workmen's mopeds in search of a new abode ...

Still new topics flow from our members' pens. In the past, *experts* have told us we are not the best in the country, but we might be the happiest!

Doris Perley
Yarm Writers' Group

* * * * *

We at Friday Writers in Ashton under Lyne enjoy reading the LINK Magazine. The article about haikus by Verica Peacock was particularly fascinating. Not only did she explain the differences between haiku, tanka, haiga, haibun and renshi, but how she has been in touch with like-minded people in Croatia and Romania. What a world of adventure and new friendships sprung from Verica's haiku writings.

To those of us who lack patience for short story writing, novels or stage plays, the haiku is the quickest way of getting our thoughts down on paper! In addition we had Lynne Hackles (well tried and tested) with the answer for names for our

writings according to the period in which they are set. Thank you Lynne.

Well done!

Mrs T Beddard
Friday Writers



What a Wonderful Weekend

Writing can be a lonely occupation so it's great when you get the chance to get out and meet other writers. I went to the NAWG Festival at Durham in September and I'm kicking myself for not having been before. I have rarely met such a warm, friendly bunch of people. The accommodation was comfortable, the food good, the company great, and the tuition excellent. There were so many interesting workshops, it was hard to decide which to go to. I came home buzzing with ideas, and full of enthusiasm.

I'd just like to thank everyone involved in making the weekend the success that it was. I can't wait for 2011.

Editor's Note:

Somehow I've lost the name of the sender of this last letter. Many apologies, and thanks for your enthusiastic support of NAWG!

* * * * *

Dear Link Letters,

Stress! Stress! I kid myself I don't get stressed out. I just love sitting back to watch others climb the walls. Well, that was until I read your April 2011 front cover article, *Dealing with Stress and Anxiety as a Writer*, by Stanley Popovich. It interested me to know how mere mortals have to deal with stress, so was very interested, until I got to the last word of the last line. After a full stop came the word *In*. This indicated it had been badly edited to finish the article on this page, or did it continue on the next page? No such luck. I have seen this sort of thing in so many magazines (other than the word *In*) where there is no indication as to where it continued, or even if it did. A little note – to page

number would be helpful. Oh! I forgot, you don't put page numbers do you? After getting more frustrated and now badly stressed after scrutinising every page, the continuation of the article was eventually found on the inside of the back page. Please consider your readers and do justice to the article and author. I now need you to do a follow-up article as I am now suffering with stress and hypertension, all because of a little lack of forethought on the editor's part.

Yours,

**Stressed Out,
Malcolm B Goodwin**

Editor's Response:

We can all improve of course, and I was glad of the opportunity to sharpen my editing skills on your letter, which by my judgement required eleven grammatical and presentational corrections, including the misspelling of Stan's surname, which I felt did not do justice to the article or the author. This, by the way, is not counting the double spacing after sentences (and I left your use of commas alone, although our proofreader might not!).

Another point I want to make is that often, despite people's best intentions, errors do slip through. In at least half of my published books, as I proudly held that first mint copy in my hands, I noticed several mistakes – sometimes more – and this after the text had been read umpteen times by myself, the commissioning editor, the manuscript editor, the proofreader and others. This had nothing to do with any lack of forethought, and to the best of my knowledge none of the team got stressed out because of it.

This box could contain one of your unfortunate typos – please send them in.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

Please take the time to check if this notice applies to your group, and if it does your £40 Annual Membership Subscription is due by the end of June 2011.

As I have mentioned many times on receipts and renewal notices, there would be a general notice in LINK to remind members that all group fees will be due at the beginning of July, and this is it!

For those groups who have already started on this scheme, and have an end of June 2011 renewal date, please send a cheque for £40 made payable to NAWG to:

Pam Fish
Membership Secretary
65 Riverside Mead
Peterborough
PE2 8JN

If you require further details, telephone: 01733 311680 or email pamfish@ntlworld.com

I am hoping that, over time, there will be no further need for individual letters. This will help considerably to reduce the time taken in administration plus the cost of postage. Those Associate Members or Writing Groups who have not yet been given a June renewal date will still be reminded in the usual way.

Thank you.

Pam Fish



Autumn
by
Tendair Mwanaka

Forward to a reddish autumn
Multi-layered, multi-coloured paths
Emblems of our archetypes
And metaphors of our times
Unthinkable parameters
If colours could swap?



MY FIRST BOOK SIGNING

by Isabella Rose

Tips for Book Talks:

- Don't try to talk to an entire audience in one go. Pick out one person in the room and chat to them as you would to a genuine friend.
- Your listeners expect you to be truthful, so don't exaggerate.
- Some people will agree with your ideas, others might disagree. But if you know your subject and believe in what you're saying, you'll be able to reason with anyone who disagrees.
- Do avoid upsetting people. For example, I can't tell stories about witchcraft or child abuse; if it makes people feel uncomfortable, that doesn't sell books.
- What does sell is giving an entertaining talk which makes people laugh. Be your normal cheerful self – don't try to complicate things.
- You don't need to affect a *professional* delivery.
- Remember to always talk – and write – how you would in a normal situation. (When writing, for instance, "May I be so bold as to declare my affections for you?" might be suitable in a Regency romance, but not in everyday speech; a simple declaration – "I love you" – sounds natural.)



Tips for Signings:

- It's a good idea to hand out free bookmarks – this enables you to chat to customers and find out what type of books they enjoy.
- Occasionally, I put one of my books into someone's hands and leave them to read the blurb in peace. They can then bring it back to you if not interested, or hopefully decide to buy it and bring it over to be signed as proof that they have met a genuine author.
- Don't just stay for one hour – bookshops prefer you to stay for several hours – I lasted four hours. Sometimes a manager will request you to stay all day. If they have given your visit a boost by advertising that you will be in their shop, then you owe them some time. One chain store was so disappointed that one writer disappeared after an hour that they discontinued all visits from other authors. That didn't help any of us.
- Enjoy your day in the limelight. You've dedicated years of hard work to write an exciting book.

Giving talks and doing book signings is your reward. This is the time to meet your readers and have FUN.

Hi. As LINK's proofreader, I might sometimes have queries on submissions that I'd like to check with their authors. With other commitments and deadlines to meet, Steve doesn't always have the time to do this and I wondered if authors would mind me approaching them direct if I have any questions. If you submit a piece to LINK and are happy for me to do this, please indicate this at the bottom of the document itself and include a contact phone number or email address. Thanks.
Wendy.

FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

by Barbara Cooper

Pre-Publication Press Release:

Have the Parishioners of South Lincolnshire Been Forgotten?

FORGOTTEN PEOPLE: The story of Careby, Holywell and Aunby, three Lincolnshire villages bound together in history, is a docu-dramatisation of one thousand years of history.

Researched and written by local author Barbara Cooper, the lavishly illustrated 300pp book is a dramatic re-telling of actual events and real people who once lived in these villages.

Surprising documentary evidence has been uncovered. The influence of the Normans, clergy, vengeful medieval kings, along with politicians, soldiers and the gentlemen landowners who helped shape the landscape have brought this book to life in evocative style.

Forgotten People is an absorbing glimpse into the past, revealing how foreign invasions and the early role of the Church affected medieval peasants. The lives of Careby's Hatcher dynasty dramatically unfold. The Reynardsons of Holywell who transformed the countryside, the arrival of the railways and the inception of the village school are explored through revealing anecdotes and excerpts of vivid nineteenth-century writing.

Forgotten People will be launched at Holywell Hall on Sunday, 3rd July.

www.barbaracoopercareby.co.uk

The book can be pre-ordered from carebyparish@yahoo.com.

Barbara is a member of Peterborough Writers' Group.

CO-OPERATION LEADS TO SUCCESS

by Mike Wilson

For many years, I have known that my grandfather's name appears on the town's Cenotaph and on the Menin Gate in Ypres. There he's one of thousands named as having died in The Great War who have no known grave.

Late in 2009 I decided to research his war. To my astonishment he lasted merely a week. 2370 Private John William (Jack) Wilson, of the 5th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment, landed in Boulogne on 18th April 1915. He was killed on the 25th.

It then occurred to me that it might be interesting to research the other 330-plus men named on the local memorial. By the end of that year I had amassed a fair amount of material and started laying out the book. This book would be my ninth publication about Bridlington, but, as I wanted to allow one page per man, it would also be my biggest.

During my work in the library, I discovered someone else was researching the same material. Fortunately, in October 2010, this man wrote to the local paper asking if anyone had information about the men who were named on the Cenotaph. I sent him my material, and mentioned that I had intended doing the same work, eventually publishing the result.

We met and found that our ideas coincided, with the result that his work is now in our book *Great War Heroes of Bridlington*.

However, some of the pages were short. There was insufficient material to fill each page, and I don't like open spaces on pages. I offered to fill those pages with some of my

battlefield and cemetery photographs, along with other First World War information from various archives.

That task is now complete, and the book is full. But have I been writing? I've compiled three indexes, compiled 24 pages for the preliminaries, written captions for the photographs and been allowed to fill the open spaces with what interests me.

I've written captions and material that are – I hope – explanatory. I've written words that try to capture the life and times of the men who were there, and added a bit of myself to the end product. The response of my co-collaborator Chris was very satisfying. He admits he has little writing skill and welcomes my contribution. For my part, I thank him for doing the hard work in his six years of researching. For his part, he thanks me for creating the book.

Co-operation has worked very well in this case. Our book will be launched on 1st July this year, the 95th anniversary of one of the worst days in The Great War: the day some 40,000 men were killed at the Battle of the Somme. Four of these men were from Bridlington, two of whom appear on the Cenotaph.

Chris and I will offer the book to local schools to be part of the increase in interest in that conflict once the centenaries come round.

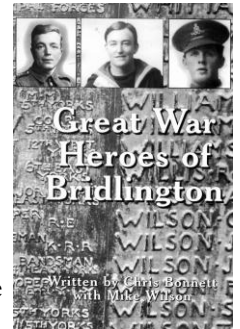
The work has given me a great deal of satisfaction, knowing that the lives – and deaths – of my grandfather, and Chris's two great-uncles, are now recorded for others to understand. When Chris was handed his proof copy, he could hardly speak.

The culmination of his work was now a physical item.

The book costs £11.99 (please add £3.00 for post and packing – it's a very heavy book!). Send payment to:

Free Spirit Writers
40 Burstall Hill
Bridlington
East Yorkshire
YO16 7GA

Make cheques payable to Free Spirit Writers.



The Traffic Warden

by

Joe Thomas, Sandgate Writers

I'm a Traffic Warden;
dedicated and mean,
everything per book - nothing in
between.

This particular day seemed untoward
until an elderly lady appeared in a
Ford.

An erratic driver she parked out of line
automatically incurring a £30 fine

plus the old girl has forgotten to pay
which really complements my day.

I print two tickets from my machine
and stick them gleefully
onto her screen

then wait patiently in my hiding place
to see her reaction,
the look on her face.

I'm pleased to see she's really upset
the tears of frustration I'll never forget

and I marvel at how hard I've become
because after all she is my mum.



NAWG SURVEY

by Chris Huck

First I want to apologise for the typos on the survey form – there were gremlins running wild in NAWG's typesetting last winter ... I'll blame them anyway.

This analysis is from the results I've received up to the June LINK's deadline, 22 May 2011, which consist of 21 from group members and 12 from individual members.

- **Individual**

All but two visited the NAWG website and the average length of membership was 5½ years.

- **Group**

All but one visited the website and the average length of membership was 9 years. Average yearly subscription was £22.81 and varied from £15.00 to £40.00. 8 groups meet weekly, 8 bi-weekly and 5 monthly. Average membership was 14 and most were around that figure. The average age of members was 62 years and, from one under 20 to two over 90, they totalled approximately 16,235 years between them.

That is as much as I could extract from the returns, but some people used the comment box and I followed up all the comments. Two of these will be the subject of articles in a future LINK. I ask all of our members to tell me what they think NAWG, the literary world or anything else that bears on what we are about as writers in our association, should be doing differently and I will look into it and see that it is properly discussed.

I am to be found at chris.huck@ymail.com or The Old Vicarage, Scammonden, Huddersfield. HD3 3FT. Tell us what you think that we ought to know or ought to be doing.

NAWG FESTIVAL OF WRITING – UPDATE

Bookings are now coming in steadily and we urge you to book your place soon to avoid disappointment. Advertisements are coming out in the July issue of two writing magazines, but we want to make sure that the needs of you, our members, are satisfied first.

One-to-Ones

We have organised with the tutors this year a series of One-to-Ones giving delegates the chance of detailed feedback of work in progress. All the four tutors are happy to do this for £30 a session (open to delegates only). They will take place during the 11.30 – 12.30 talk by Linda Lewis on Saturday morning (sorry that you might miss a little of this), and in the afternoon during the hour timetabled as *Writing Time*.

Book your spot with Anne Steward, either directly or with your booking.

For more details, contact casualwriter@hotmail.com or telephone 01484 769930.

Once you have booked your slot you will need to send, directly to the tutor, a sample of your work. You will then be given a 20-minute slot during one of the times given above for a One-to-One session with the tutor.

Requests for sending your manuscripts, asked for by the tutors:

James Nash: Work to him by last Monday in August before the Festival. 5 x 40 line poems / one story / other prose up to 2,000 words.

Tim Wilson: Maximum 5,000 words, and submission 4 weeks before the Festival.

Julie Bokowiec: Play samples should be around ten pages, preferably opening scenes of a large play or complete ten-page short scripts. One month before the Festival please.

Steve Bowkett: Maximum, a 2,000 word piece. Send scripts at least two weeks before the Festival. He is happy to look at children's fiction, including poetry for children, children's/adult SF, fantasy, horror, educational ideas/proposals/series concepts, general fiction.

Remember – these sessions can only be booked by delegates attending the Festival of Writing in Nottingham. If you haven't booked yet, see advert within these pages.

Also, may I remind those who paid a £100 deposit that the final £120 is now due? Many thanks.

Another request to those who are going to the Festival.

On Saturday evening, after all the excitement of the Gala Dinner, you can let your hair down and take part in our *After Dinner Sparkles* – your four minutes of fame! If you are coming to the Festival with other members of your writing group – why not prepare a short sketch for our entertainment? Or, if you are a solo artiste, get yourself prepared beforehand. Names will be collected over the course of the Festival for the event at approximately 9.30pm on the Saturday, after the Gala Dinner.

Many apologies to those who sent contributions for this issue of LINK which have not been printed. There were so many that, even with 12 pages, there wasn't enough room for them all. No reason other than available space was used to choose which ones to include. Any not used this time will get priority in the next issue. Please continue to send your submissions.

NAWG Accounts
1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010

Income

Membership subscriptions	5,035.00	
Reduction in bank interest over-estimated in prior years	- 412.06	
Advertising	220.00	
Book sales	216.44	
Festival income	<u>5,727.96</u>	
		10,787.34

Expenses

Trustees' costs	2,133.68	
LINK printing	1,597.05	
Judging fees	550.00	
Book stock written off	356.00	
Over-accruals in prior years written back	- 2,657.00	
Sundries	2,002.11	
Festival costs	5,445.95	
Depreciation	1.00	
Advertising	562.00	
Postage	<u>558.86</u>	
		<u>10,549.65</u>

Surplus generated 2009/10 £ 237.69

Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2010

Cash at bank	<u>£ 8,257.69</u>
Reserves brought forward	8,020.00
Surplus in year	<u>237.69</u>
	<u>£ 8,257.69</u>

WORKSHOP TIPS

by Daisy Watkin

When you have spent hours planning, writing, making props and setting up your workshop, your preparation hasn't finished. People sitting around the table may not know each other, or only be on familiar terms with one or two other members of the group. Those who leave your workshop as a happy and friendly bunch will go home contented.

When actors meet they bond. You should bond with your workshop.

If you can make them laugh, you will break down many barriers. When I have given talks to crusty old groups, I have tried to make them laugh in the first few minutes. It works wonders, and puts you at ease with yourself and with the group.

One of the ways to do this is with the *Big Lie*. Tell the group that you will introduce the person sitting on your right and that you will tell a big lie about them. The person will then say something about it and the group will ask questions.

"This is Joanne and she can drink a cup of tea while standing on her head. Joanne could you tell us something about that please?"

Joanne will rise to the occasion. I have not known it to fail, although you may feel happier if you pick the first person carefully. You might start the questions by saying, "Don't you find that gravity is a problem in that the tea has to travel uphill instead of down?" When the questions are over, Joanne introduces the person on her right as the Conker Champion of the West Midlands or something sillier, and so it goes on round the table.

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WHY NOT BE A WRITER?

As a freelance writer, you can earn very good money in your spare time, writing the stories, articles, books, scripts etc that editors and publishers want. Millions of pounds are paid annually in fees and royalties. Earning your share can be fun, profitable and creatively most fulfilling.

To help you become a successful writer we offer you a first-class, home-study course from professional writers – with individual guidance from expert tutors and flexible tuition tailored to your own requirements. You are shown how to make the most of your abilities, where to find ideas, how to turn them into publishable writing and how to sell them. In short, we show you exactly how to become a published writer. **If you want writing success – this is the way to start!**

Whatever your writing ambitions, we can help you to achieve them. For we give you an effective, stimulating and most enjoyable creative writing course... appreciated by students and acclaimed by experts.

It's ideal for beginners. No previous experience or special background is required. You write and study at your own pace – you do not have to rush – as you have four years to complete your course. **Many others have been successful this way.** If they can do it – why can't you?

We are so confident that we can help you become a published writer that we give you a **full refund guarantee**. If you have not earned your course fees from published writing by the time you finish the course, we will refund them in full.

If you want to be a writer start by requesting a free copy of our prospectus 'Write and be Published'. Please call our freephone number or visit our website NOW.

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TUTORIAL SUPPORT
FLEXIBLE STUDY PROGRAMME
STUDENT COMMUNITY AREA
HOW TO PRESENT YOUR WORK
HOW TO SELL YOUR WRITING
15 DAY TRIAL PERIOD
FULL REFUND GUARANTEE

www.writersbureau.com

FREEPHONE 24 HOURS
0800 856 2008

PLEASE QUOTE REF. NAWG10
email: 10W1@writersbureau.com
Please include your name and address



AWARD WINNING WRITER
Christina Jones, Oxfordshire
"So far, I have had eighteen novels published. The Writers Bureau helped make this possible for me. Within six months of enrolling on my course I was having work commissioned by editors and I still work regularly for magazines."



Michael Foley, Essex
"Completing The Writers Bureau course has made it possible for me to attain my life-long ambition of becoming a published writer. The level of success I have achieved has far outweighed what I was hoping for when beginning the course. By the end of this year I should have eight books already published and hopefully two more finished."



Cindy-Lou Dale, Kent
"I thought you'd like to know that seven years since doing my course at WB I've been published in more than 150 magazines around the world. I've now got to the stage where I'm turning down all-inclusive exotic press trips!"

Please send me free details on how to become a successful freelance writer:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

POST CODE _____

The Writers Bureau

Freepost NAWG10,
Manchester, M1 9HZ

Writers Bureau 21 Years of Success

NEWS FROM THE FRONT, BACK & MIDDLE – PART 2

by Jennifer Margrave, Guildford Writers

The publishing side of my character has been hard at it this spring with a throwaway line from a contact, “You publish books, don’t you? Can I pick your brains, because I have a book I want to get into print?”

The book in question was *A Brief History of the Whole World*, written over four hundred years ago by one George Abbot. So why was I excited about it, and offered to publish it under our Goldenford Publishers imprint? For several reasons, the first being that this year is the four hundredth anniversary of the translation of the King James’ Bible – one of the best sources of wonderful quotes ever. And our man, George Abbot, was one of the translators, being responsible for some of the Gospels, The Acts and Revelations.

Secondly, he was a poor boy made good, from Guildford. The picture of his place of birth shows a narrow small building, but from these small beginnings he rose to become Archbishop of Canterbury, the highest religious post in the land, and along the way held the posts of Bishop of London and Dean of Winchester, among other appointments. *Brief History* was first published in 1599 and became a best-seller.

The new edition has been adapted by Anthony Richmond, Master of Abbot’s Hospital – an almshouse set up by the *boy made good* in his home town, and Anthony is donating any profits to the hospital where he works. So there is a wonderful circularity about the story of the book now under publication, which I loved. And it is quaint and charming, describing not

only the known countries but its people and their characters; some are described as *runagates* – just one of the sixteenth-century words that gives the book its attraction.

So, having discussed the possible publication with my co-directors, who all agreed it was a great book to take on, we started a round of approving contracts, instructing our book designer and editing the book.

And here, I and my co-directors had to disagree: the book has many references to infidels and is not favourably inclined to Islam; there are adverse comments about other races too. Anthony had already edited out some of the more extreme descriptions, but it was felt that others might involve us all in a Salman Rushdie situation. In fact, I was happy to leave some of the descriptions in – after all this was a four hundred-year-old book and how could anyone take exception to this and declare a fatwa against us? However, after being told I would have to go into hiding – writers are so extreme sometimes – I backed down, so our edition is *adapted* a little for modern tastes. The thought of living in a safe house with two burly coppers did not appeal – on the other hand, it might give me the time and discipline to get more writing done!

We sent the book to the publishers just before Easter and received the proof copy within a week – and it looks great, with a parchment-like background to the cover, the front of which is dominated with an old map of the known world in the era in which the book was first published.

I think the book will prove invaluable for historical novelists who want to gain an insight into what people believed in 1599 about the world and its peoples.

And finally, I’ve booked for Nottingham – the NAWG Festival of Writing and hope to see you there – and, with the permission of the Committee, I hope to have a stall selling not only the *Brief History* but other Goldenford books. See you there.

A Brief History of the Whole World is available from Goldenford Publishers at £6.99, plus post and packing.

WORKSHOP TIPS (continued)

After these few minutes well spent you will find you have a group that feels it knows each other, is at ease, is mildly excited and is raring to go.

If you have any good ideas to improve workshops then Daisy would like to hear from you and the best will be printed in the column. Email Daisy care of chris.huck@ymail.com.

A LITTLE DIFFERENT by Dick Sawdon Smith

Members of Thames Valley Writers’ Circle compete each year for the Arthur Redway Trophy, which differs in two ways from other competitions during the year. It is the only one that carries cash prizes, thanks to a legacy from much-loved former member Arthur Redway. It is also not read as usual at a weekly meeting and voted on by members present.

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POET'S SOAPBOX: Poetry readings – taking the *Po* out of *Po-etry*

by Andy Humphrey

My first experience of poetry readings took place in a dimly-lit Georgian building in Edinburgh, when I could still get away with calling myself a student. A crowd of us would pile into the chaplain's rooms, armed with stacks of poetry books. We would get plied with cheap red wine and spend the evening reading from the works of our favourite poets – even, for a few brave souls, reading from our *own* poetic scribblings for the entertainment of others. Those evenings wove a kind of spell about me.

My first attempts at poetry were rough and ready, naïve and would have benefited from some serious editing (some might say that my current output is not much different!). But the experience of sharing them with a crowd of other poets, hanging on each other's every word, stirred something within me that has never been able to rest easy since.

My first encounter with a performance poet took place about the same time, at an Edinburgh Fringe performance by Attila the Stockbroker. In the early 1990s, stand-up comedy was huge (*the new rock 'n' roll* was a phrase prevalent at the time), and many poets were choosing the comedy circuit, rather than the literary one, to get their material to new audiences. John Hegley led the way with his unique brand of stand-up poetry, but his tactics were hardly revolutionary. Attila, John Cooper Clarke and others had been ploughing the same furrow since the days of punk. Before them, Adrian Henri and Roger McGough led a wave of *pop*



poetry, which is now rightly admired for its literary depth as well as its mass appeal.

The deeper I go into poetry, the more I am convinced that what really makes poetry powerful is not the appearance of words on a page, but the effect of those words being transmitted from poet to audience. The democratic principle appears to be behind me on this. Open-mic nights, poetry slams, and *poems and pints* sessions in local pubs are springing up all over the place. The poets who appear at these gigs rub shoulders with musicians, singers and stand-up comics. They range in age from students to retired people, and in style from shaven-headed rappers to foppish Victorian throwbacks.

Not everybody in the poetic world agrees that this is a good thing. There is a distinct snobbishness from certain quarters – a suggestion that some would prefer poetry to be elitist rather than democratic, intellectual rather than accessible.

This is a dangerous mindset for poets to possess. In my opinion, it's a wilful disregard of where poets came from. Before printing and mass-market communication, the poet was a storyteller and social commentator – an entertainer, but an educator and activist as well. The people relied on poets. The political movements which were the forerunners of modern democracy relied on them. The movement for universal education owes poets an enormous debt. I hate to think of today's poets as being instrumental in turning back the clock.

These days I make a distinction between poetry and *po-etry*, with an intentional hyphen. The *po*, you will not be surprised to learn, refers to the faces of those who indulge in the latter.

My first poetry readings were tippy, hedonistic, romantic affairs. These days, *poetry readings* usually seem to involve a darkened room (or at festivals, a marquee), where the guest poet sits behind a desk with a stack of books from which they read. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this format. But it's more like a sort of highbrow *Jackanory* than the poetry readings that were so formative for me.

I'm starting to lose count of the poetry readings I have attended where the poets don't seem to understand how to connect with an audience. They have sat miles back from the front row, often without a microphone; they've hunched away from the audience, buried their noses in their books, and *mumbled* their poems. It's almost as if they are embarrassed by the whole affair.

The result is, quite simply, dull. It does the poems themselves no justice. And it's hardly a good advertisement for the groups who host these readings.

What makes it worse is that I'm not talking about amateur poets. I have seen some of the most respected names in British poetry give readings like this.

I find myself amazed that the expectations of the audience at these events are so low. The capacity of poetry to entertain, stimulate and challenge often seems to be of no concern.

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POET'S SOAPBOX (continued)

Instead, the whole affair becomes little more than an excuse for people of a certain caste (usually white, patrician and elderly) to show their faces in the right company. I've walked into events like these and left with a definite impression that my face doesn't fit. I've been cold-shouldered, talked across, even on one occasion verbally abused, all of which only reinforced the notion that I'm not part of the poetry set and have no place there.

Is this really the way for the poetry world to win new audiences? Is it heck. I don't want to tar all poetry readings (or the groups that organise them) with the same brush. I've been present at readings with some truly gifted poetic communicators. The mischievous charm of Roger McGough, the gentle dignity of Pete Morgan, the *gravitas* of David Harsent, and the warmth and wit of Carol Ann Duffy – four very different poets in style and substance – all serve to convey their message brilliantly. But these seem to be the exception, rather than the rule. There are still too many poets – often with prizes and critically acclaimed collections to their name – who are somehow unable to make a direct connection with an audience, or have never thought it important to do so.

Those who are snooty about poetry as a performance art need a serious reality check. Poetry exists to stir a response in others, and there is no better way to stimulate that response than by performing your poems in front of an audience. Not all poets have a natural aptitude for this, I agree. But all poets who have ambitions to *succeed*

as poets need to learn how to do it. It is no longer good enough to keep poetry shut away and shared only in whispers, the preserve of the po-faced. It needs to live, to breathe. To be heard.

Its audience deserves nothing less.

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A LITTLE DIFFERENT (continued)

All the stories are posted anonymously on the Circle's members-only website so they can be read and judged by all members, including those who can't get to the presentation evening, such as overseas members.

Voted into first place was *The Runes of Rohenna*, revealed to be by Christine Mundy. It was the tale of how the Uffington White Horse came to be carved on the hillside and how it got its name.

The runner-up was *Shhh*, a story about a mind-magician, a talented artist and a magic nut. The question was asked, "Could it work for you?"

In third place was Sally Johnson with *The Touch*, a story of a friendly ghost who brings some relief to a woman grieving her departed daughter.

The Circle's next short story competition will be judged by leading competition judge Iain Pattison.

The photograph shows the Arthur Redway Trophy being presented to Chris Mundy by Circle President Barbara O Smith.



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POOETRY? PO-ETRY? POYTRY? OR POETRY?

A little rant from Chris Huck

In the April LINK Mike Wilson tells us to “Do it now”, so I’m doing it.

He mentions his word *pooetry* which came to mean verse that is too difficult to be understood by the average reader. Andy Humphrey rails against *po-etry* which he sees as snobbish verse. I can’t remember any words coming from the opposite direction except that I sometimes use the words *poytry* and *poymys* to describe pretentious light verse of the Wendy Cope variety. I enjoy funny verse but I have an enduring quest to find a funny poem.

Andy says that poetry exists to “stir a response in others”. Don’t football, newspapers, theme parks, horror films and *cheap music* exist for the same reason?

There is nothing wrong with light verse other than its being called poetry.

I think that it is time once again to realign the boundaries and slow down this bickering. It happened with Imagism, with Wordsworth and Coleridge, with Shakespeare and the *rude mechanicals*, with Chaucer favouring English, with Norman rhyming verse and with Caedmon the first recorded English poet who wrote with Christian themes in heroic Early English. Occasionally we have to start all over again. Art becomes bogged down and sterile; it needs a rebirth and it has rarely needed a rebirth more than it does now. With Tracey Emin being made a member of the Royal Academy and some of the rubbish published by Carol Ann Duffy, art is at an all time low. (OK, Carol has also published some fine stuff as well.)

In the 1960s – yes, I’m old enough to have been thrown out of a Moss Side variety club for not wearing a suit and tie – people like Roger McGough began to call light verse *poetry*. As the sixties progressed it became acceptable for everyone to overtly enjoy pop music and to call the lyrics *poetry*. Roger McGough was a pop singer.

In the 70s, Pam Ayres became popular with “me poymys”, a phrase she used with tongue in cheek. Does she do that now I wonder? Today we have Benjamin Zephaniah as a respected poet, Tony Harrison writing doggerel as poetry and Wendy Cope selling her papers to the British Library, her “life’s work”. Why is this?

The 1960s were in some way a product of the 1946 Education Act. The artistic revolutions of a hundred years ago owed something to the introduction of universal education in the 1870s. Wordsworth and Coleridge came out of the Age of Revolution. Shakespeare is the product of Royal grammar schools of the Tudor period. Chaucer created himself out of a visit to Early Renaissance Italy. Medieval rhyming lyric poetry was a product of the Norman Romanesque and good old Caedmon from being an uneducated dreamer with Celtic connections, because Caedmon is a Celtic name.

Let us once again look deeply into poetry because, if it is nothing else, it is a deep subject. It is our first literary art, our first written art and Ovid says that it is our first art of any nature – don’t let it die in the quagmire of twenty first century McGonagalism.

Thank you Mike and thank you Andy, because I really enjoyed that.

(From July, Holmfirth Writers’ Group will be running an Open Poetry Day at Huddersfield University. For details, email chris.huck@ymail.com.)

THE TORTURED MIND OF A WOULD-BE WRITER

By Sylvia Smith

It will soon be time for the Writers’ Group meeting. Now what was the topic for June? It seems a long time since May ... what was it now? *Chekhov and Ibsen: compare intrinsic spiritual values and relative nuances?* Doesn’t ring a bell. *Examine the psychological influences of Shakespeare on political and social structures of modern civilisation?* No, maybe not. *Perhaps Plato’s discourses on the inner recesses of the human mind?* Or *What I like about summer?* Something like that.

It’s no good. I shall have to consult my notes. I always make concise and informative notes. Ah, here we are: *28 Jun, First sentence, 500.*

Well, the date is pretty concise, but I already knew that. 500 is obviously the guide for the number of words, but what on earth does *First sentence* mean? 500 words would be an impossible number for a first sentence. It’s in my handwriting, so it really ought to mean something to me. Perhaps *First sentence* was meant to be the inspiration for a story about a criminal’s first conviction, but I don’t remember that being mentioned. Or maybe I’m supposed to write an article about the importance of the opening sentence in a story. No, I’m pretty sure it was meant to be a piece of fiction.

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THE TORTURED MIND OF A WOULD-BE WRITER (continued)

I know – I'll telephone someone sensible. Somewhere I've got Cathy's number. Now I do have a carefully compiled and up-to-date directory of family and friends with whom I'm in regular contact; I also have assorted scraps of paper containing numbers I have taken down and subsequently forgotten why, but which I am loathe to throw away in case I eventually remember. Here's one with a C next to it. This looks promising.

"Charade Fancy Dress Hire. I'm sorry, all our operators are busy at the moment. Please try later." Hmm. Aha – here's another one: CJ. I can't remember what Cathy's surname is, but it's worth a try.

"C&J Removals. Please hold the line. Your call is important to us and will be answered shortly." Oh dear.

Here's a scrap of paper with just numbers on – could be anybody. Better not. I think I'll email the Chairman. No response – must be away. OK, so I'm on my own.

I expect everyone else has finished theirs. I've almost exceeded my word target and I haven't started yet! Never mind. All these bits of paper with numbers on have given me an idea. No time to write it now, but how about this as the first sentence for my next story:

The numbers on the scrap of paper were in her own hand but meant nothing to her, and as she picked up the telephone she felt no presentiment of the tragic chain of events she was about to set in motion.

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This competition has only been made possible by a generous donation by Daisy Watkins thank you, Daisy.



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