



Upping sticks. Katrina Naomi on her residency at the Brontë Parsonage Museum PAGE 6



Poetry in the 60s: prophecy, protest, rage, rapture PAGE 7



# Poetry News

Summer 2010

The newsletter of the Poetry Society

www.poetrysociety.org.uk

## Martin Figura's the 'Victor' in 2010 Hamish Canham Prize

Martin Figura is the winner of this year's Hamish Canham prize for his poem, 'Victor', judged the best members' poem published in *Poetry News* over the past year. He received a cheque for £350 from Hugh and Sheena Canham, who founded the award in memory of their son Hamish, a psychologist and writer with a passion for poetry. "I'm really delighted to have won," said Figura. "Many thanks to everyone – the money is already spent!"

As an established performer with the touring group, Joy of Six, and Chair of the Café Writers Group (and Stanza), Norwich, Figura is well-known on the poetry circuit. In 1997, after 25 years in



the army, he became a professional photographer; his book, *This Man's Army* was published by Dewi Lewis in 1998. At the same time he had begun writing – "funny stuff, showing-off really" – which he pursued more seriously when he became involved with Joy of Six; "now, it's poetry that's keeping me busy," he says. He has published two collections: *The Little Book of Harm* (Firewater Press, 2000) and *Ahem* (Eggbox, 2005); a pamphlet of new humorous poems is due from Nasty Little Press in November.

In an interview with *Poetry News* Editor Mike Sims, Figura explained how *Whistle*, his collection published by

Arrowhead in March, and in which 'Victor' appears, has marked a major change of direction. In it, Figura deals with the murder in 1966 of his mother, June, by his father Frank when Figura was just nine years old – "the first time I have broached the subject so directly," he said.

In spare, compact poems that pack together anger, grief and bewilderment, *Whistle* runs the "last film / dark and tightly rolled" of Figura's growing-up. Figura also ventures into the mind of his father, a German army soldier and POW, who was to become a patient at Broadmoor Hospital. "I wanted to investigate my ongoing relationship with my father, one in which I held all the cards but which power I didn't always use compassionately," Figura said. In this, he drew on sculptor Ron Mueck's remarks about his piece, 'Dead Dad': "Mueck explained that he hadn't really got on with his dad but, as he made the piece, had found himself thinking about him – and caring."

Figura's MA in Writing the Visual under George Szirtes at Norwich University College of the Arts provided him with both the time and the inspiration to write *Whistle* and Figura pays a warm tribute to Szirtes for his support. "To produce these poems I needed to be a very different writer and George, with his east European background, as someone who has thought deeply about exile, was a huge source of encouragement."

Figura is now working on a spoken word version of *Whistle* with Sarah Ellis of Apples & Snakes, and artists Karen Hall and Andre Barreau. He performs an early version of it at the Ledbury Poetry Festival on 10 July.

• Judges' report by Paul McGrane on page 2. Hear Martin read 'Victor' on the Hamish Canham Prize page of the Poetry Society website. [www.martinfigura.org.uk](http://www.martinfigura.org.uk) [www.arrowheadpress.co.uk](http://www.arrowheadpress.co.uk)

### Bell overheard at Glastonbury

Jo Bell is the Glastonbury Festival's website Poet in Residence for the festival's special 40th anniversary event. Jo will be gathering material in advance through Facebook, and posting poems daily during the festival itself (23-27 June). Jo, who is also National Poetry Day Co-ordinator, will be practising listening-in for her Bugged project, which encourages writers to eavesdrop discreetly on 1 July and to write something based on what they hear by 15 August. More at [www.bugged.org.uk](http://www.bugged.org.uk)

## A shared adventure

Les Murray played to a packed hall at the Poetry Society Annual Lecture 2010



Les Murray: long queues formed at both the bookstall and book-signing table

Over 270 people packed the University of London's Beveridge Hall on 11 May to hear Les Murray's Poetry Society Annual Lecture. Taking as his topic, 'Infinite Anthology: Adventures in Lexiconia', in a talk about words and the poems they inspire, Murray explained how it had once been "touch and go" for him between philology and poetry.

Poetry won because philology offered only the private discovery of what other people already knew; "with poetry I had the chance of discovering, in public, things no one had previously known".

Long queues at the bookstall and signing table, where Murray proved an obliging conversationalist, testified to the warm regard in which he is held. A special letterpress edition of his poem,

'High-speed Bird', from his forthcoming collection *Taller When Prone* (Carcenet), was produced by the Society to commemorate the event. It proved a highly popular souvenir; a few signed copies are still available from the Poetry Society online shop (members' price £6 including postage; RRP £10).

• Look out for Les Murray's lecture in the Autumn issue of *Poetry Review*.

## Education's extra spark

Poetry Society launches new initiatives for schools

The Poetry Society's new Schools Network Education Package will spark big changes in poetry provision in schools, promises Education Manager Bea Colley.

A recent Poetry Society-led study, showed that almost half of primary and secondary school teachers lack confidence in teaching poetry, and would like to link up to share advice, training and resources. As a result, the Society has launched the Schools Network Education Package. This extends the benefits of Poetry Society Solo School Membership across clusters of schools, with tailor-made packages that include in-service training, poet-led workshops and resources.

"The scheme aims to raise the bar for poetry teaching across the UK," said Colley. "Sharing the cost of membership within a cluster saves schools money and enables them to take up opportunities that they might otherwise feel are beyond their means."

Clusters can comprise anything from Neighbourhood Learning Networks,

Specialist Schools, SEN or Gifted and Talented groups, to entire local authorities; the Poetry Society Education team is on hand to help identify and create networks.

Rising young star of British poetry, Ross Sutherland helped launch the scheme with a residency in five Lambeth primary schools, culminating in a showcase event in June. The project extends next to Liverpool, Newcastle, Reading and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

A centrepiece of the package is an eye-catching range of large-format posters, which are free to Schools Members. These combine images by leading illustrators and designers with much-loved poems by John Agard, Sujata Bhatt, Billy Collins, Jackie Kay, Sylvia Plath and Anne Stevenson.

• For the latest on SLAMBassadors 2010, please turn to page 3. Full details can be found on the education pages of [www.poetrysociety.org.uk](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk). To purchase posters, look online or telephone 020 7420 9892



Posters of Sylvia Plath's 'You're...', illustrated by Gemma Correll, and John Agard's 'Boomerang' by Simon Peplow

## In brief

### New on Poetry International Web

Cross-media approaches to poetry are explored in profiles of Paul Farley (radio), Glyn Maxwell (the stage) and Mario Petrucci (film) in the July edition of Poetry International Web. An online forum for poetry worldwide, the site contains poet profiles from Angola to Zimbabwe, as well as poetry news from editors across the globe. The UK edition is run by the Poetry Society in conjunction with Poetry International at their Rotterdam office. [www.poetryinternationalweb.org](http://www.poetryinternationalweb.org)



## A letter from the Director



A big thank you to Les Murray for making the trip over from Australia to give our Annual Lecture in May. When the infamous Icelandic volcano blew her top just as he arrived at check-in, cancelling his flight, and sending him back to Bunyah, it all looked pretty unlikely. After a lucky scramble to secure a new ticket, a bit of teamwork with Chepstow's On the Border and the Writers' Centre Norwich to help share the extra costs, dozens of middle-of-the-night phone-calls and a good dose of patience from Les, we eventually got our break in the ash-cloud.

To celebrate the occasion, we issued a handsome hand-produced letterpress print of a new Les Murray poem. The choice of poem, 'High-speed Bird', about the poet's encounter with a concussed kingfisher, seemed particularly relevant with its theme of disrupted and recovered flight. The generous support of Peter Lehmann wines was a much appreciated addition to the event ([www.peterlehmannwines.com](http://www.peterlehmannwines.com)).

With a surge of new members joining up at the Lecture, I'm delighted to report that Society membership, which has been romping along all year, has just topped the 4,000 mark for the first time. We are always looking for new ways to help you make the most of your membership, so do let us know your suggestions; Membership Manager Paul McGrane would love to hear from you.

As you'll read, we continue to put great energies into developing new education initiatives, and have just launched a new school membership scheme. As part of an ongoing series of experiments we stretched our digital tentacles to Southern Africa last week, running a live poetry workshop in Betterton St via web-cam with teenagers in Lesotho. There'll be more news in the Autumn about a

project we're developing to link up young writers around the UK. There'll be an update too on the poetry modules we're piloting on university teacher training courses, to bring poetry to life for trainee primary school teachers.

The Poetry Society helped out on two new festivals in April. At the Wordsworth Trust's 'Dorothy Wordsworth Festival of Women's Poetry', some interesting questions were raised in debate with Colette Bryce, Paula Meehan and Clare Shaw about what thematic concerns might be revealed in a 'Festival of Men's Poetry'. We should try it and see. (Carol Ann Duffy meanwhile could be glimpsed in a corner, composing her volcano poem: 'Silver Lining'.) At Much Wenlock, Shropshire, the magnificent Anna Dreda (who runs one of poetry's best bookshops: Wenlock Books) had pulled the entire town into a mood of poetic celebration. By day, the PoSoc knitted poem drew crowds by the Priory; by night it was folded up inside a yurt so visitors could kip under it. It was an early start the next morning to get to Keats House in Hampstead where the Poetry Society was helping to make the promotional YouTube video for London 60s Week – joining the teams from Radio Caroline and Carnaby St to dance the Twist while reading Philip Larkin. We'll be staging several impromptu happenings from 16-25 July, so keep checking our website.

As I write, we're still a whisker away from knowing who'll be Oxford Poetry Professor. However, with Honours news coming in just as we go to press – our congratulations to Wendy Cope (OBE), Simon Armitage and Michael Longley (CBEs), and to painter Paula Rego (a long-time collaborator with poets) on her Damehood.

Judith Palmer

## Your personal Odyssey

A free writing workshop at the National Gallery in London on 20 August (6.30pm) has been organised by the Poetry Society as part of the gallery's Friday Lates programme. Tying in with the theme of 'Myths and Legends', the one-hour workshop will take place in front of a painting showing scenes from the *Iliad*. All welcome, no booking required, so come early to Room 29 to guarantee your place.

Greek epics continue to prove rich inspiration for contemporary poets. As Michael Longley has noted, "Poetry is like Homer's octopus / Yanked out of its hidey-hole, suckers / Full of tiny stones". This workshop, led by Martina Evans, encourages students to blend memory and myth to create their own individual response to a painting. Martina Evans's latest collection is *Facing the Public* (Anvil, 2009).

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## HAMISH CANHAM PRIZEWINNER

MARTIN FIGURA  
VICTOR

'True Stories of Men at War'

As fathers stroll home from work  
there is no birdsong and the November light  
is all but gone.

Small boys run amok in avenues,  
take cover behind privet hedges –  
the smell of cordite, heavy in the air.

Over the traffic, the sound of battle:  
grenades whistling overhead, the sporadic  
rattle of toy guns from doorways.

At teatime, those whose turn it is  
break cover, make a zigzagging run for it  
shouting – ACHTUNG ACHTUNG.

They go down in a hail of bullets  
competing for the most dramatic death.  
The pavement is so littered with Germans

the men must pick a way through  
to reach their gates and take their sons  
down paths into quiet houses.

## Judges' choice. "An undercurrent of the real cost of war with a nod to Thomas and Owen" – Paul McGrane on Hamish Canham prizewinner, 'Victor'

Unlike the outcome of a certain other recent popular vote in the UK, this year's Hamish Canham Prize produced a winner with a clear majority – the aptly named 'Victor' by Martin Figura – originally selected by Kathryn Simmonds in autumn 2009, along with other poems on the theme of 'Heroes and Heroines'. The panel agreed that 'Victor' is a beautifully crafted and poignant tale. Boys act out their war games with "dramatic death" on pavements "littered with Germans", against a safe suburban backdrop of "avenues", "teatime", and the fathers who pick them up on their way home from work. There's an undercurrent of the real cost of war in lines with a nod to the WW1 poetry of Edward Thomas and Wilfred Owen: "there is no birdsong and the November light / is all but gone" and (the men who) "reach their gates and take their sons / down paths into quiet houses". The poem is, after all, set in Armistice month.

'Victor' produced an interesting male v. female split during discussions, with one half sensing real violence in the boys' games, and the other fondly

recalling their own experiences of 'playing at war' and reading *Victor* comic's 'True Stories'. The women on the panel picked up on the theme of the relationships between fathers and sons which, by and large, the men had (dis)missed.

Judges Carole Satyamurti, Hugh and Sheena Canham, Judith Palmer, Michael Sims and I were asked to pick our three favourite poems from the crop of 29 selected to appear in *Poetry News* over the last four issues. With three of six judges picking 'Victor' as their top poem, we had a winner from the start. However, we tested this outcome by taking turns to read aloud poems that had received at least a couple of points, a process that always reveals unexpected delights. Special thanks goes to the poets who made the selection process so fascinating: Pat Watson for 'Meeting Moon', Suzanna Fitzpatrick for 'Handwriting', Patricia Hann for 'Exit a Princess', D.A. Prince for 'Heroes of our Islands', Emma Danes for 'A&E' and Kristina Close for 'Ghost-Writing the Climber'.

Paul McGrane is the Poetry Society's Membership Manager

## Peter Porter remembered

Peter Porter, who died on 23 April 2010, aged 81, "was one of the great demotic thinkers of contemporary poetry, the one to, in his own words, 'take up the baton from Auden's 30s generation and bring back intellectualism and populism'," said *Poetry Review* Editor, Fiona Sampson. "The omnivorous quality of his work, which synthesizes cats and Scarlatti, Wittgenstein and iPods, indicates its author's human and intellectual curiosity. Proverbial without being pompous, wearing its learning lightly, Porter's poetry can be wry, questioning – and very moving."

Porter was a highly prominent



member of the Poetry Society for nearly 50 years. His most recent collection, *Better than God* (Picador) was published in 2009. He received his new selected poems, *The Rest on the Flight*, from the printers the day before he died.

## News

### Gregory and Cholmondeley winners

The winners of the 2010 Eric Gregory awards are: Phil Brown, Matthew Gregory, Sarah Howe (a former Foyle Young Poet of the Year), Abigail Parry and Ahren Warner; each receives £4,000. The assessors were Moniza Alvi, Kate Clanchy, Polly Clark, Maura Dooley, John Greening and Carol Rumens. This year's Cholmondeley winners, who each receive £1,500, were: Gillian Allnutt, Colette Bryce, Gwyneth Lewis and Deryn Rees-Jones (a 2010 National Poetry Competition judge); the assessors were Carol Ann Duffy, David Morley, Dennis O'Driscoll and Jo Shapcott. The news was announced at the Author's Awards at the Cavalry & Guards Club, London, on 15 June, introduced by Tom Holland and presented by P.D. James. 2010 is the 50th year of the Gregory awards.

### Campaign call for the Dymock paths

A campaign has been launched to save a new, short walk around Dymock connecting the former homes of Eleanor Farjeon, Edward Thomas and Robert Frost (see 'Sun flecked loitering hours' on page 8). Opposition from local farmers has made the route impossible to follow; similar access problems affected the longer Poets Path II. The new route requires a footbridge and two stiles. To lend your support, please write to: J.A. Williams, Windcross Paths Group, Freshfields, Kempley Green, Glos GL18 2BN.

### Members' latest hits

Youth Member Emily Harrison has won the 10th Christopher Tower Poetry Competition, worth £3,000. Chrissie Gittins's *The Humpback's Wail* and Philip Gross's *Off Road to Everywhere* have been selected by PBS for Children's Bookshelf. Camelford Stanza rep Helen Wood is Pencarrow's first Poet Laureate, and will run poetry sessions at Pencarrow House on 25 July and 26 September. Julian Stannard and Pam Zinnenman-Hope came second and third respectively in the Stokestow International Poetry Prize; Gill McEvoy was third in the English Association Fellows' Poetry Prize; and Martyn Crucefix third in the Iota Poetry Competition.

## In brief

Picador has launched a new poetry prize – details at [www.picador.com](http://www.picador.com)... *Rough Music*, the latest collection by Fiona Sampson, Editor of *Poetry Review*, has just been published by Carcanet... Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's *The Sun-fish* (Gallery Press) has won Canada's Griffin Poetry Prize... Ian McMillan is poet in residence at the English National Opera and Matt Harvey will take up the same post at this year's Wimbledon...

## Alan Sillitoe

Alan Sillitoe, who died on 25 April 2010, was one of the leading novelists of his generation. He was also a fine poet, publishing his first collection, *Without Bread or Beer* (Outposts) in 1957, just before his celebrated debut novel, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. In 1959, he married Ruth Fainlight and went on to publish *Poems* with her and Ted Hughes (Rainbow Press) in 1971. *Barbarians and Other Poems* (Turret Books) followed in 1973; his *Collected Poems* were published by HarperCollins in 1993. His moving meditation on death, the poem 'God's Work', appeared in *Poetry Review* 98:4.

## Teen dreams

The Foyle Young Poets Award reached its teens this year. So how is the world's biggest open poetry competition for young writers faring in adolescence?

This year the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award has reached its teens and it has good reason to party. In 13 years, the competition has received tens of thousands of entries, including a record 14,000 submissions in 2009. Even at this early stage, entries for the 2010 competition are up by 30 per cent. FYP has helped bring many talented young poets to the fore. Caroline Bird, a winner in 1999 and 2000, became the youngest writer shortlisted for the 2008 Dylan Thomas Prize; her latest collection *Watering Can* is published by Carcanet. Helen Mort (a five-times winner between 1997 and 2004), Jay Bernard (2005) and Richard O'Brien (2006, 2007) have all been taken up by tall-lighthouse. Bernard's *Your Sign is Cuckoo, Girl* and Mort's *A Pint For The Ghost* were both PBS Pamphlet Choices; O'Brien has since helped found the poetry e-zine *Pomegranate*, which publishes new work by writers under 30. Annie Katchinska (2006 and 2007) was selected as one of the Faber New Poets and published a pamphlet in May.

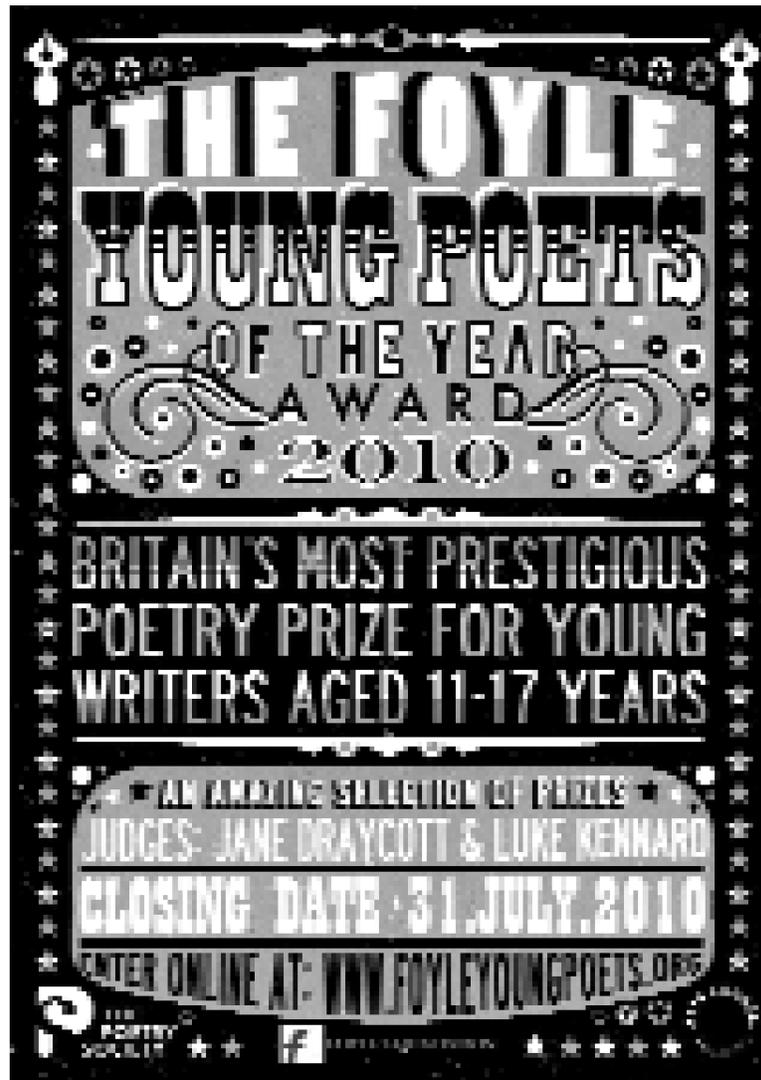
Luke Kennard, who with Jane Draycott will judge this year's Foyle Young Poets Award, recognises how impressive young poets can be.

"I look back over the surviving poems I wrote between the ages of 12 and 17 and they're largely so bad it

makes me want to cry. Whereas every time I've run a poetry workshop in a school I've been struck by how good the students are – how they mostly write with an intuitive straightforwardness that put my efforts, 15 years ago, to shame. I wrote poetry in between 15,000-word science fiction stories as, I guess, a kind of light relief from working out the plot-mechanics of time-travel. Take your most self-indulgent, self-pitying diary entry, double it, add a few overblown metaphors, no less than five clichés and put in some arbitrary line-breaks. At 14: 'the inky black void surrounds me. / "Have you got a light?" you ask. / I have no light' (from 'Your Party').

"Over the next couple of years I can chart my progress from lachrymose junior melancholiac to obscurist renegade poltroon. I was still writing about how I felt a bit unhappy sometimes, but now I was doing it with ridiculously opaque images which didn't mean anything to me, let alone whoever I imagined might read them. I had progressed to the existential bedsit miserablism of: 'The eyes of these four walls bore into me' (from the distressingly long 'These Four Walls'). I did not live in a bedsit.

"My excuse, looking back, is simple: I wasn't reading. I didn't start engaging with contemporary poetry until I was 18 and my favourite English teacher



Poster design by James Brown

"In 13 years, the Foyle Young Poet of the Year Award has received tens of thousands of entries, and has helped bring many talented young poets to the fore"

started lending me stuff. I suppose that's one of the things I'll be looking for as a judge this year, indeed one of the things I always look for, whatever the purpose: evidence of reading and actually liking poetry. I don't mean quoting, paraphrasing or using lengthy epigrams. I'm talking about the confidence and directness that only comes from wide reading and engaging with contemporary writing and thinking, 'That's what it is! I can do that!'"

### Teen horrors

It was Sarah Brown's rediscovery of her old diaries at her parents' house that inspired her to set up the Cringe Reading Nights in Brooklyn in 2005. An opportunity for participants to revisit teen angst stirred up by crushes, fads and gripes, the club became an equally successful monthly event in London after Brown's move to the UK in 2007. As Brown explains on [www.queserasera.org](http://www.queserasera.org): "Anyone can tell a funny story about something that happened when they were 14, but to actually read it how you wrote it when you were 14 is a different level of funny." Brown has since anthologised the best admissions in *Cringe: Toe-Curlingly Embarrassing Teenage Diaries, Letters & Bad Poetry* (Michael O'Mara Books, 2009) – it's a hoot.

### Teen heroes

Underestimate teenage poets at your peril: history is crowded with literary greats who first made their mark as young writers. Alexander Pope was just 12 when he began writing poetry and Rimbaud's major works were produced during adolescence. Sylvia Plath achieved national publication at 18 and Dylan Thomas's 'The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower' was published two days after his 19th birthday. Marina Tsvetaeva's *Evening Album* ("a remarkable collection," says her translator, Elaine Feinstein) was published when she was just 18, the same age as Carol Ann Duffy when she launched her first collection...

### Enter the Foyle Young Poets Award

Visit [www.foyleyoungpoets.org](http://www.foyleyoungpoets.org) for full details about entering this year's competition, with tips and hints from Jane Draycott and Luke Kennard. Enter online or download the Postal Entry Form for individuals or Class Set Entry Form for teachers. Exciting prizes include Arvon residencies for 15-17 year olds and a schools' residency by a leading poet for 11-14 year olds. Deadline: 31 July 2010.

## Better for books

The Poetry Book Society is revamping its online presence. PBS Director **Chris Holifield** explained the changes to Mike Sims

**The new Poetry Book Society website has been a massive project. What will it offer?**

Using generous funding from Arts Council England, we are launching not one but two new state-of-the-art websites that will take us to a much wider audience for poetry. At last we're going to fulfil the wider vision of what the organisation is here to do!

Over the years we have watched bookshops' poetry sections shrink. With a few honourable exceptions, they now contain just a few big names, some modern classics and a few popular anthologies. The focus is on what will sell in quantity, with a poorer range of everything else, including poetry.

We're just launching our new Poetry Bookshop Online, a niche bookshop which, surprisingly, seems to be the only one in the world. We want to provide for younger poetry readers and those who can't find what they want in shops. We think there is an international audience for British and Irish poets and we will be using our



expertise in sourcing poetry to supply 90,000 titles from our site. In addition, we continue to sell the Poetry Archive's wonderful CDs, recordings of the voices of over 130 living poets. We'll also build on our SoundBlast collection of performance poets' CDs.

**But you're offering content too?**

Yes, we'll be delivering a constant flow of content to draw people to the site. Books and CDs will be the focus, but there'll also be a wide range of news, articles, reviews and information about what's going on in poetry, along with an events listing for the UK and Ireland. Please send your news to [editor@poetrybookshoponline.com](mailto:editor@poetrybookshoponline.com)

### What about PBS itself?

The PBS will have a handsome new site where we hope to recruit members online. In the restricted members' area of the site they will be able to order at a discount from an online version of the *Bulletin*.

The T.S. Eliot Prize and its Shadowing Scheme will get greater coverage, and we'll be launching a new T.S. Eliot Prize shortlist reading group scheme this autumn. The Michael Marks Awards for Poetry Pamphlets, run in partnership with the British Library, will have fuller coverage and spearhead our work to bring poetry pamphlets to a wider audience. On the children's side we'll be linking to our Children's Poetry Bookshelf site, offering selections of children's poetry books on the Poetry Bookshop Online and promoting the Old Possum's Children's Poetry Competition on both the PBS and CPB sites.

In short, we plan to be a one-stop shop for poetry, offering everything that poetry audiences are looking for in terms of books, pamphlets, CDs, events, news and information.

● The Poetry Book Society has moved to: Dutch House, 307-8 High Holborn, London WC1V 7LL. Tel: 020 7831 7468

[www.poetrybookshoponline.com](http://www.poetrybookshoponline.com)  
[www.poetrybooks.co.uk](http://www.poetrybooks.co.uk)

## For a Brave New Word

The Poetry Society's SLAMBassadors championship is stepping out at venues across the UK and inviting young performance poets to take up a mic

Calling all 12-18 year olds: 'I Am What I Slam! Brave New Word' SLAMBassadors UK, the Poetry Society's national performance poetry championship, is now open for entries. The competition is asking participants – whether they are individuals, schools or youth groups – to create original, two-minute pieces on the theme of 'Identity' and upload them

to the website. Workshops across several London boroughs, as well as in Buckinghamshire, Much Wenlock and North Somerset, are planned. Mentors Joelle Taylor, Kayo Chingonyi, PACE and Chris Preddie aka Cashman, will provide support and inspiration, and help film entries. For full details on how you can get involved, visit <http://slam.poetrysociety.org.uk/>



SLAMBassadors poster design by Austin Cowdall

A poem can exist both on the printed page and beyond, in music, drama and even – as the Poetry Society proved – in knitted form. The inaugural Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry, founded by Carol Ann Duffy to recognise poetry’s many forms, was won by Alice Oswald for *Weeds and Wild Flowers*, a book of poems and prints. In her acceptance speech Oswald praised Jessica Greenman’s etchings as “more than half the [book’s] making”. Jo Shapcott, one of the judges, added that it was “not a conventional poetry book”. Yet Oswald follows a long line of poets who have woven visual images into their work.

Ted Hughes, whose name graces the award, also produced ‘wildflowers’ – books that were not cultivated in the herbaceous borders of conventional poetry publishing. Hughes collaborated with Fay Godwin, whose sombre photographs inspired *Remains of Elmet*, and illustrated his own writing in *Earth-Moon* (issued under his independent imprint, Rainbow Press). But his apotheosis came when he befriended the American artist Leonard Baskin. Hughes wrote to his editor at Faber: “Baskin is an extraordinary artist [...] I feel something in the inner nature of his work is so kin to the inner nature of my own.”

Hughes and Baskin were creative equals who worked together on several publications, notably *Crow*. Hughes explained that the book’s genesis came from the artist: “*Crow* grew out of an invitation by Leonard Baskin to make a book [...] He wanted an occasion to add more crows to all the crows that flock through his sculpture, drawings, and engravings.” Hughes found Baskin’s work “beautiful and intense and delicate”. Baskin’s drawings, which epitomise the dark ego of the *Crow*, have become a recognisable trademark of Hughes’ poetic imagination.

How can a poet bring about such an inspiring collaboration? Nicolas McDowall and his wife Frances, who run the Old Stile Press in Wales, have been designing and printing books by hand for over 30 years; among them, a



‘The Angels Take Up Archaeology’ from *The Abstract Garden* by Philip Gross and Peter Reddick, from The Old Stile Press. www.oldstilepress.com

## In the space between

As the inaugural winner of the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry, *Weeds and Wild Flowers* proved that collaborative projects between poets and artists become their own source of inspiration, writes Nancy Campbell

fine edition of Hughes’ poems, *Earth Dances*, with linocuts by the artist R.J. Lloyd. More recently, they paired the poems of T.S. Eliot prizewinner Philip Gross with wood engravings by Peter Reddick in *The Abstract Garden* (see above). McDowall says, “The most obvious thing to say about how to illustrate poetry is: don’t – in the sense of don’t be literal.” A poetry book is not an instruction manual, and the reader’s imagination should be stimulated rather than constrained. “It is better to have the artist develop a theme similar to that of the poet but in his or her own way, with the marks the artist makes being as strong as the poet’s words and line-breaks.”

In *The Abstract Garden* Gross

responded intuitively to Reddick’s images. He even composed a villanelle describing how the collaborative process offers writer and artist “a glimpse of depths below / the word, the image, and ... the space between” (“Triologue”). This near-mystical experience harks back to the work of a distinguished poet and early proponent of ‘illuminated books’, William Blake. Blake trained as an artist, but he was not content merely to illustrate works by his poetic heroes, Milton and Dante. In *Jerusalem, Songs of Innocence, Songs of Experience* and other visionary works he engraved his own words and images, creating a passionate reflection of his philosophy.

More recently, experimentation in both poetry and printmaking has led

to exciting combinations of the two forms. In the Victorian period, as mainstream publishing began to adopt industrial processes, there was a nostalgic vogue for hand-printed books. This demand was satisfied by ornate editions printed by William Morris at the Kelmscott Press: Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* illustrated by Edward Burne-Jones, and *Ballads and Narrative Poems* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, along with books of Morris’s own writings. Morris, and the Arts and Crafts movement of which he was a leading exponent, inspired many idealists to set up small private presses in the 1920s. The Golden Cockerel Press, the Eragny Press and others published sumptuous editions of

Shakespeare and Keats alongside work by new writers; some of the artists who illustrated these books (including Eric Gill and Lucien Pissarro, son of Camille) have achieved a more enduring reputation than many of the poets.

Between the wars this trend was embraced by larger publishing houses. Faber began *Ariel Poems*, a series of modest, affordable pamphlets, each pairing a single poem with a specially commissioned image: the first, Thomas Hardy’s ‘Yuletide in a Younger World’ was illustrated by Albert Rutherston; T.S. Eliot’s ‘Marina’, by E. McKnight Kauffer. The series was a long-running success, with pamphlets following by Walter de la Mare and Edith Sitwell; the works are collectors’ items today.

Aside from such commissions, artists have been impulsively drawn to work from poetry just as many poets are inspired by paintings. Coleridge’s ballad ‘The Ancient Mariner’ inspired two twentieth-century artists, David Jones and Mervyn Peake (themselves both writers), to produce illustrated editions. David Hockney was so captivated by Wallace Stevens’s poem ‘The Man With The Blue Guitar’ (itself inspired by a Picasso painting) that he created his own response to the work. In *Blue Guitar: Etchings by David Hockney Who Was Inspired by Wallace Stevens Who Was Inspired by Pablo Picasso*, the long poem gains new life from Hockney’s understanding of “Two things, the two together as one”.

The interplay of visual and verbal communication and standards of book production are aspects highlighted in another new poetry prize, the Michael Marks Award for Poetry Pamphlets. One of the judges, Richard Price, described the shortlisted poets as those who have “risen to the challenge of what a pamphlet can be, fusing both physical and visual form with poetry.” Something entirely new can be generated by poets and artists sharing the same creative space.

Nancy Campbell is collaborating with book artist Sarah Bodman on *Dinner and a Rose, a multimedia response to Patricia Highsmith’s Ripley novels commissioned by Poetry Beyond Text*

## MEMBERS’ POEMS ‘BURIED LANGUAGE’

Selected this issue by David Morley

“In writing poems, we hear, see and feel every word, space and punctuation mark intimately. We might even find our voice in the spaces between words or the open space around a poem (we may veil our voice in such spaces). The ‘buried language’ of a poem is not immediately visible yet words bristle with meanings; they are prickly with histories and usages. It is language within language.

Then there are the buried languages of our own history, in my case the Romany language with which I have tried to spring the sound and speech of poems. The trick is to bring such a buried language to life so that it becomes part of speech. Buried languages such as this are part of the song of language, not some sub-song of

a people that, as Romany has it, are *chindi-chibengoro* – ‘without tongue’.

This theme proved popular. 300 poems were entered and the quality was excellent; I’m grateful for the chance to read your work. I chose this theme to open possibilities and the final six poems have a good deal of breadth in their approach. I found their energy attractive.

The memorable ‘Torfaen’ by Philip Williams offers a beguiling argument on the side of the rain and river, the overheard and underheard voices of the natural world. ‘Gosmari, Albertel and Carvoncello’ by Petra Christian possesses a language so lively it revives the dead. Sally Goldsmith’s ‘Received Pronunciation’ visits the territories of idiom with love, humour and poetic judgement. Josie Turner’s language is impressively sparse. She writes from a dark place in which “I want a new nothing / to hang by my

side” – a remembered phrase that is disturbing and truthful. Frances Green’s ‘Time Capsules’ is telling and deftly measured, while ‘Postcards for Dorothy Pinkney’ by Lois Wilson has a simple but penetrating audacity. Among other entries, I would like to note the poems by Glyn Essex, Amanda Geary, Dominique Gracia, Nigel Hutchinson, Charles G. Lauder, Gill McEvoy, Emma Must, Lesley Saunders and Jacqueline Tobin.

David Morley’s collection *Enchantment, with prize-winning Romany poems that reclaim the magical short story for poetry, is due from Carcanet in November.*

### Next theme: ‘Home’

Our Summer theme will be ‘home’ (to correspond with National Poetry Day, 7 October). The selector is Jane Yeh.

● The deadline is 20 July; entries must be unpublished as of this date.

### LOIS WILSON

#### POSTCARDS FOR DOROTHY PINKNEY

I imagine him to be a veteran,  
An old, surviving man, but in fact  
His words are younger than I’ll ever be again.  
Those thirty-seven postcards carry  
Only thirty-seven times a dozen words.  
And they’re enough to gather up my mother’s  
Mother’s mother’s worth. Her whole collection  
Left to us is just behind that frame, those  
Thirty-seven swirling, fading nicknames.  
*Dearest Pink of Perfection.* Nothing more  
Or less was necessary then. Now,  
Only the pictures are seen. The backs  
Are what we memorised before we hid – protected –  
Every single one of them behind a screen.

● Please send no more than two poems, each max. 40 lines, typed on A4, with your name, address and membership number at the foot of each. Include an SAE if you would like poems returned.  
● Send entries to: *Poetry News*, ‘home’

poems, 22 Betterton Street, London, WC2H 9BX, UK. Poems are also published at [www.poetrysociety.org.uk](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk); winners receive poetry books, entry into the annual Hamish Canham Prize and possible entry in the Forward Prize.



David Morley

## Getting known

How do you get ahead in poetry? **Ian Pindar** and **Neil Rollinson** trade thoughts and **Judith Palmer** solicits other views, ahead of a discussion at Ledbury

In Samuel Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape*, a waning, disappointed writer listens to a recording of his hopeful younger self. The younger Krapp, plumped by pride, was remarking upon the upward trajectory of his career: "Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas. Getting known."

So, how do writers 'get known', and what are the key achievements which can help to cheer a career along?

"I don't think it gets any better than having your first poem in print," says Simon Armitage. "For me, that was a poem in the now defunct Leicester magazine *Other Poetry* – they sent me a cheque for a couple of quid and I've never cashed it. I think that's the most exhilarating moment, because it's going from nothing to something, which is an increase of infinite proportions. Also, I had such low expectations of myself at the time... to make any kind of notch on the post of English Literature, no matter how faint, no matter how low, seemed not just fantastical, but almost criminal."



Simon Armitage



Maura Dooley

"Having encouragement as a young writer is vital," suggests Maura Dooley. "I'm laughing as I say this but I won a competition in the *Bristol Evening Post* when I was 13, and it made me think, 'here's something I love to do and someone else thinks I can do it.'"

Dooley and Armitage have both gone on to be shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize, but both cite winning an Eric Gregory Award in their twenties as the more momentous career moment.

"The amazing thing was that people who knew nothing about you, had read you. There's nothing better than feeling your writing has made a connection with someone," says Dooley. Getting the approval of other writers was the key, says Armitage: "It wasn't about the accolade or the money (though that was handy) – it was about the confidence. The justification to go on writing poetry. I felt as if all those years living in my head had been legitimised."

Dooley reminds poets that they have far more opportunities to take their careers into their own hands than fiction writers. "There are so many outlets where you can get off the ground. You can take your poems onto the internet and, if you keep at it, you will always be taken by some magazine or other, and slowly begin to make your way." Poet and Picador poetry editor Don Paterson has a final word of advice: "Young poets should remember to love the poetry more than they love the idea of being a successful poet; that way they can't lose."

### Ian Pindar



Most poets make efforts to shape their careers. "[Wordsworth's] letters suggest that he was beginning now to conceive of himself more professionally as a poet," writes Stephen Gill in *William Wordsworth: A Life*. "He was thinking about publishing, making money, establishing a reputation [and] marketing." T. S. Eliot was the same, observes Peter Ackroyd in his biography: "Almost from the beginning Eliot had a clear understanding of the mechanics of making a literary reputation; he understood the importance of being mentioned regularly in the newspapers, just as in his own criticism he was always aware of the need to

make the right impression."

So here are ten possible career moves: (1) *Publication in poetry magazines*. Some of the greatest names in poetry first appeared in small magazines, still a crucial means of access to the literary scene. Alternatively, start your own magazine. (2) *Find a champion*. Ezra Pound nagged the editor of *Poetry* to publish Eliot's 'Prufrock', thereby introducing a major new talent. Such champions are rare. (3) *Publish a first collection*. Who decides who's published? In truth, a handful of literary gatekeepers – not fair, but it was ever thus. Alternatively, self-publish. (4) *Become part of a movement*. Poets object to labels, but it can make new work more accessible. (5) *Appear in an anthology*. Think of *Des Imagistes* (1914) or *The New American Poetry* (1960). (6) *The literary establishment* has its own distribution of power and privilege, so get a blurb or a puff from a respected poet. (7) *Correspond with another poet*. Charles Olson and Robert Creeley

bashed out the emerging poetics of a generation in their letters, throwing out statements like "form is never more than an extension of content". (8) *Give a speech or write an essay*. Think of Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' or Olson's 'Projective Verse'. Even a poet as reticent as Paul Celan gave his important Büchner Prize speech, 'The Meridian'. In each case the poet offers us a way into their work, creating the conditions for its reception. (9) *Win a prize*. Generally out of the poet's control, although Rae Armantrout attributed her recent success to her move to a university press better at handling publicity, including award submissions. The result was she won the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. And finally, (10) *leave everything to chance and let the poetry speak for itself*.

*Ian Pindar's first collection Emporium is published by Carcanet in 2011. He was a prize-winner in the 2009 National Poetry Competition.*

### Neil Rollinson



your craft, find your subjects and your voice, and push yourself the whole time. By all means send to magazines and competitions but never waver in your desire to write better poems.

One of the first and most persistent questions you get asked when you teach creative writing is, 'how do I get published?' Whenever I hear it, I think

– oh dear, this one's going to be trouble... These students are rarely the best writers in class. They mistake publishing for excellence and often have an inflated opinion of their work.

So leave it for the moment. Give yourself five years, maybe more, concentrate on the work and eventually, if you're lucky, you might make it.

*Neil Rollinson's latest collection is Demolition (Cape). He was National Poetry Competition winner in 1997.*

'Getting Known', Neil Rollinson and Ian Pindar in discussion with Judith Palmer, is on 4 July, 11am-12pm, at the Ledbury Poetry Festival. [www.poetry-festival.com](http://www.poetry-festival.com)

### MEMBERS' POEMS 'BURIED LANGUAGE'

#### PHILIP WILLIAMS TORFAEN

They told us Torfaen – *Stone Breaker* –  
was the older name and that our river  
only became grey – *Afon Llwyd* –  
when they came to cut the coal.

"You could not see it for foam,"  
my father said. He remembered its speed,  
just as fast as we boys found it,  
taking the feet from beneath you, taking its toll.

They all but emptied our valley of magic  
when they filled in the fields  
between each village to form our town.  
Except here, behind Ty Pwca,

where the worn lane rises in its steep bend  
beyond The Last Bus Stop and The Fairy's House:  
the *Pwca*, our *Bugi-Man*, your Puck.  
And there, where the Candwr Brook –

*The Singing Waters* – still clears her throat  
over smooth, cold stones.  
So why, I wondered, from Saxton,  
an Elizabethan approximation

of the name we had all used all along?  
Had the stream, Torfaen, simply lost her voice  
as she broadened to a river  
somewhere bleaker, blacker, a place

with spittle in its throat, a rattling in its lungs?  
Or did our *Afon Llwyd* only combine  
with Torfaen to form one grey, stone-breaking river  
when they baptised us all into one Borough

and gave us each a name we never knew?

#### FRANCES GREEN TIME CAPSULES

They buried both tins together  
somewhere under the apple trees,  
to be re-discovered in one thousand years

but they weren't sure, since he could not  
converse with them, that he would understand.  
His little sister, bright and brilliant, sucked on a pencil

and decided upon: her last Barbie's best dress;  
her own second favourite hair slide; a photograph  
of her and Father Christmas at Selfridges;

and three old unwanted *Girl Talk* magazines.  
His own tin looked empty in comparison.  
They smiled at him indulgently:

for his twigs; his grass cuttings; his fallen leaf;  
and those two red and yellow sweet wrappers  
he had kept under his pillow for months.

They did not see that in the space around these things  
lay all the fragrances of spring and summer,  
the rich descents of autumn, and the sharp scented crackle

of winter fires. *Don't you want  
to put anything else in here?* they asked him.  
He looked at them, uncomprehending –

because there was nothing else or better to be saved  
but he wasn't sure, since they could not  
converse with him, that they would understand.



Writers' residencies are highly sought after, providing varying periods of stability in a writer's career. The term can, of course, mean many things, from literal residencies that take writers to a particular place with protected time to write, to short-term projects where the writer facilitates writing in the community.

I lived and worked for many years in Scotland, where the Scottish Arts Council has a well-established residency programme. A writer is paid a basic salary for up to three years, half of which is paid by the SAC as a bursary, allowing the writer time for their own work. The other half is paid by the host organisation – a regional library service, an arts organisation or, increasingly, an institution such as a hospital, prison service or museum – which may require the writer to run workshops or run specific projects producing writing on particular themes. Sometimes writers are expected to act as regional literature development officers in the absence of one.

Notable projects I worked on as Literature Development Officer with Dumfries & Galloway were a 'virtual' residency during which Jules Horne worked both face to face and online with fellow writers, exploring the possibilities of the internet. The Burns Fellowship ran a 'mobile' residency during which Rab Wilson gave readings from a mobile library.

For the past couple of years I've managed the Poet's Residency at the Wordsworth Trust. This is a 'literal' residency: the poet lives in a cottage on the Trust site, which includes Dove Cottage, Wordsworth's home during the period he wrote much of what is now regarded as his greatest poetry. The residency is now offered, funding permitting, for a year. Writers are paid a monthly stipend of £1,000, some of which is paid back as subsidised rent (including bills, Council Tax, wireless internet etc). We advertise the post early



Refuge 2008 by Katherine Jones. Etching & sugarlift, 430 x 590 mm. Showing at Jagged Art, London, from 29 Sept. [www.jaggedart.com](http://www.jaggedart.com), [www.katherine-jones.co.uk](http://www.katherine-jones.co.uk)

## Up sticks and write

**WRITERS' RESIDENCIES** Room is made for writers in schools, hospitals, zoos, opera houses and tennis clubs, to run workshops and to hone their craft. Literature Officer **Andrew Forster** outlines the challenges of managing residencies, while **Katrina Naomi** (below) describes her experience as the first writer in residence at the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth

each year on the Arts Council jobs' pages, in literature bulletins, on our website, on Facebook and to our database contacts. I also send details to the publishers we work with regularly.

We generally regard one full-length collection as a minimum requirement, although in exceptional circumstances we will consider a pamphlet and/or a significant award. The selection panel

consists of myself, the Trust Director Michael McGregor, a representative of the Arts Council, and a poet (Jacob Polley, a former Poet in Residence and member of the literature programme advisory group, has acted in this capacity). We look for a fine poet, not necessarily an established name.

The emphasis is primarily on the writer's own work but there is an

expectation that the writer will engage with the work of the Trust and take part in our growing literary programme. This includes running the monthly 'Dove Cottage poets' writing group and joining regular readings, both at the Trust and throughout Cumbria. Our current Poet in Residence, Emma Jones, has run a number of workshops and masterclasses, and has recently

worked on an anthology with sixth formers at a school in Kendal. We are also developing a mentoring scheme, offering one-to-one support to newer writers in Cumbria.

One of the aims of our residency is to offer the opportunity to a poet at a significant stage in his or her career. Adam O'Riordan's first full-length collection, *In the Flesh*, written mainly while in residence with us, is published by Chatto this summer. Emma Jones, winner of the 2009 Forward First Collection prize for *The Striped World* (Faber), used the opportunity to move towards a second collection.

Where appropriate, the Trust has published work written during the residency in limited edition pamphlets. Adam O'Riordan's *Home* sequence was a PBS Pamphlet Choice and we are planning a pamphlet by Emma as a bridge between her first and second collections.

In July we will welcome Helen Mort to Grasmere. Helen has an impressive track record, with two acclaimed pamphlets, an Eric Gregory Award, and the Manchester Young Writers prize. She is developing her first full-length collection and we anticipate her time with us will be a period of huge growth for her as a writer.

It's worth saying that the Poet in Residence does not live in isolation. The Wordsworth Trust has its own community of staff and volunteers, some of whom are accomplished poets in their own right. Although the situation of the poet's accommodation is such that it is very easy to close the door and focus on work when they choose to, poets resident with us comment on the unique benefits of living in a place which has such a rich literary history, and where poetry is still the dominant language.

Visit [www.wordsworth.org.uk](http://www.wordsworth.org.uk) for more information. Andrew Forster's second collection, *Territory*, is published this month by Flambard

## “I wrote far more than I expected and really stretched myself, working up drafts much quicker than usual”

Even if only temporarily, swapping where you live as a poet, getting to write, having the work published *and* being paid for it might sound too good to be true.

I was incredibly lucky. I'd seen the Brontë Parsonage Museum's advert asking for a poet to run a 'non-traditional workshop' for National Poetry Day 2009. I knew little about the Brontës but something told me to give it a whirl. The next thing I knew, Jenna Holmes, the museum's Arts Officer, had asked if I'd also be interested in a residency. Would I like to come to Haworth for an interview?

I spent the next few days reading my first Brontë novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (still my favourite). I had been walking in the area around the museum, but otherwise was nervous about my lack of Brontë knowledge. I was upfront about this in the interview, however – and must have done something right because I was offered the post. Later I found out that the museum wanted a fresh

approach, a poet who wouldn't be cowed by all the mythology.

I was the museum's first writer in residence and my brief was broad: to run a National Poetry Day event for visitors (adults and children) and write a series of poems based on the museum's collections, and to run five creative writing workshops for a local women's group. The residency began in October 2009 and ended March 2010.

I began by reading as much as I could, by getting to know the staff and by writing each day in the museum. I found it very inspiring; I drafted my first poem 'The Extra Brontë' on the day of the interview and wrote 30 poems over the three weeks of paid writing time.

It's important with any residency to be clear about what is expected of you, who is managing you and what the money covers. In addition to my daily fee, I was given a sum for travel and accommodation, which Jenna suggested I use to rent a cottage. As it was winter, I found somewhere

affordable and spacious – much better than balancing my laptop on my knees in a b&b room.

Originally, I'd envisaged working on a portable desk within the museum, but every room is full of Brontë paraphernalia – dresses, jewellery, artwork etc, as well as their manuscripts and first editions. So instead I usually sat cross-legged on the floor, trying not to get in the way of large school parties. I could observe what goes on behind the scenes at the museum, as well as write about the Brontës' lives. In the strong room I saw items too fragile to exhibit and I spent several days with the museum's librarian, Ann Dinsdale, one of the foremost experts on the Brontës. I won't forget handling priceless objects such as Anne's last letter or Charlotte's corset.

As a resident writer, you need to be resilient. You spend a lot of time alone, away from home and familiar things. It's important to forge a good relationship with all the staff, not just those you work with directly. I really



Katrina Naomi outside the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth

enjoyed working with Jenna. She also helped with back-up for a series of creative writing workshops that I ran for Together Women in nearby Bradford. Without her help, I don't think that I could have achieved all that I did, or that the residency would have run so smoothly.

If you are offered a residency, make sure that you receive a letter or a contract setting out what is involved

and what you will be paid. You'll almost certainly find yourself putting in extra hours, but then you're being paid to write and isn't that what most of us aspire to? In addition, I walked on the moors most days and enjoyed a pint with several of the staff – no mean storytellers themselves!

My experience as the first writer in residence at the Brontë Parsonage Museum was entirely positive. I wrote far more than I expected and really stretched myself, having to work up drafts much quicker than usual. I really enjoyed the workshops and the Together Women project. But it hasn't stopped there. The museum organised an exhibition of my Brontë poetry, and the Brontë Society published a pamphlet, *Charlotte Brontë's Corset*, to accompany the show. From 17-19 September, the museum will be holding the first Brontë Festival of Women's Writing ([www.bronte.info](http://www.bronte.info)), with Carol Ann Duffy. I'm proud to say that I'll also be reading.

The *Girl with the Cactus Handshake* by Katrina Naomi is published by Templar Poetry. [www.katrinanaomi.co.uk](http://www.katrinanaomi.co.uk) For more on poets' residencies, visit [www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/archives](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/archives)

As London 60s Week prepares to remind us of the prophecy, protest, rage, rapture and revolution of the 1960s, **Hylde Sims** looks back on an era that was to change poetry for good

## Woke up this morning...

“Woke up this morning...” – thinking about the Sixties. Like many a famous decade it was a late starter. It didn’t really get going till halfway through and was to tail off early with the political failures and compromises of ‘68.

I was a student at Hull University at the time, where we were well supplied with poets. Our librarian was Philip Larkin but he avoided students. Though I spent much time in his fiefdom I never saw or spoke to him. Cecil Day Lewis was our visiting poet. I attended his lecture on Thomas Hardy and a friend of mine took his poems to CDL’s poetry surgery and received polite advice. Douglas Dunn lived down the road in Terry Street. When we students occupied the admin block at the end of that summer term, none of these was in evidence, though Larkin (somewhat panicked I’m told) wrote a poem about the likelihood of Soviet tanks invading the campus – not one of his masterpieces...

The city of poetic innovation, equally northern, industrial and deprived, was further west, and very much sexier. We’re talking Liverpool – home of the Beatles, Merseybeat, the Mersey Sound and its close cousin, Scaffold, comprising John Gorman, Roger McGough, Michael McCartney, Paul’s brother, and Adrian Henri early on, plus various musical accomplices. They didn’t oblige us to read, re-read and digest, but made poetry funny, political, pertinent and popular. The term ‘performance poet’ had not been invented then, but they were nevertheless reviving and revitalising a tradition of, and a need for, the performed spoken word – a tradition as old as civilisation. Scaffold even made the top ten – remember ‘Lily the Pink’?

We read them too, lots of us. *The Mersey Sound: Penguin Modern Poets 10*, featuring Henri, McGough and Brian Patten, sold 500,000 copies, unique in poetry publishing. This series, begun in the 60s, helped define the decade, giving poetry a new audience, relevance and focus.

Then there was Al Alvarez’s anthology, *The New Poetry* (1962), calling for the death of the English disease of ‘gentility’. It included poets of the younger generation and, in a later edition, Americans Berryman, Lowell, Sexton and Plath. These poets were, on the whole, not ‘genteel’ but neither did they have the entrée to popular culture that the zeitgeist of the time required. As R.S. Thomas, a contributor, plaintively put it, “For myself, I cannot even boast a guitar...”. In an era when Bob Dylan and the Beatles showed that a song lyric could be as complex and compelling as any poem, a guitar was a significant asset.

The real poetry revolution began in

the USA, giving voice to a generation traumatised and politicised by the Vietnam war and the violence meted out to those who opposed it. Voices came. In June 1965 the American ‘Beats’ were invited to perform at the International Poetry Incarnation at the Albert Hall, London, of which Michael Horowitz, founder of the pioneering magazine, *New Departures*, was a lead organiser. In excess of 7,000 people turned up to listen and Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Christopher Logue and Horowitz himself performed. Adrian Mitchell did his anti-Vietnam War poem ‘To Whom it May Concern (Tell me lies about Vietnam)’ to wild applause; marijuana fumes wafted round the hallowed sphere; LSD and Mescaline-induced performances occurred; there was accompanying jazz and dancing in the aisles. Peter Whitehead made the award-winning film ‘Wholly Communion of the creatively chaotic occasion (included on the DVD *Peter Whitehead And the Sixties*, £19.99). Poetry should never have been quite the same again – and maybe it isn’t...

*Hylde Sims’s collections Sayling the Babel and Reaching Peckham are published by Hearing Eye Books.*

*Michael Horowitz offers his own provocative look at the legacy of the 1960s on the Poetry Society website. Readers’ experiences and views welcome.*

### Coming up...

*Fourth Friday – poetry & acoustic music (of which Hylde Sims is a co-organiser) is at the Poetry Cafe, 22 Betterton St, London. The Fourth Friday annual party, at 8pm on 23 July, will feature sounds from the Sixties. Flares optional...*

*Look out for other poetry events during London 60s Week, 16-25 July, at [www.london60sweek.co.uk](http://www.london60sweek.co.uk) and on the Poetry Society website*

### “One beautiful body of voices and echoes”

“The whole underground reading movement surfaced, for one night, with the Albert Hall reading of June 1965 at which the Americans Ginsberg, Corso and Ferlinghetti were joined by many British and European poets. It was organised in about ten days, but 7,500 people came. It wasn’t the beginning of anything, it was public proof of what had been accelerating for years.”

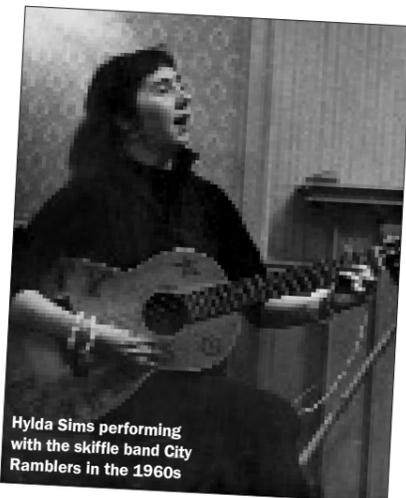
**From Adrian Mitchell’s BBC radio broadcast Poetry Explodes, also published in The Listener, 1970**

“No one was one, but we each were the thousands, reshaped in one beautiful body of voices and echoes, with Allen Ginsberg our soul.”

**Austrian poet Ernst Jandl on the First International Poetry Incarnation, Albert Hall, London, June 1965**

“British poetry needs its own stropmy militiamen... to reassert the primacy of bold, non-aligned utterance that fired us in the Sixties, that unsettled governments – and inspired schoolkids to write, however stumbingly at first, about stuff that really mattered.”

**John Walsh, from ‘Poetry and Political Culture’, Poetry Review, 98:3, Autumn 2008**



Hylde Sims performing with the skiffle band City Ramblers in the 1960s



Michael Horowitz and Allen Ginsberg  
Photo courtesy of Peter Whitehead

## MEMBERS’ POEMS ‘BURIED LANGUAGE’

PETRA CHRISTIAN  
GOSMARI, ALBERTEL AND CARVONCELLO

I’m thinking of a church in Rome that sits upon a clutch of secrets, speckled, rare. Some sixty foot below, there is a house filled-in and lost, burned down in Nero’s fire; on this, the people made another house, next-door a temple; and these are but roots

for what’s above, four hundred years thence: a basilica which, in turn, gives rise to our present, built on its very bones. Bricolage of ages, stones and frescoes, St Clement’s thousand years of orisons hushed up a thousand more of unsung chants,

until men broke daylight back in. And I fell through the clotted seam of now and here, descended down these vertiginous pasts, Time more coldly coating me in each layer. Dropping through a quadruple tier of ghosts, – oh, but they were *such* dead, unshy, lively –

I saw what I had come for: the witness, earliest, extant, to Italian.

Found in a fresco, flaking on the wall, half-grown away from its crib of Latin, the writing goes with a quaint miracle: St Clement, as saints will, has caused a fuss,

and his arrest is ordered by a lord. But when the heavies come to take him in they find him heavier than sin, for they mistake a fallen column for the man, arrest, and try to heave, the masonry, while St Clement steals home, unseen unheard,

muttering (in Latin). What are the words so precious, with which we glimpse the tilting of tongues? A prayer to accompany this comic affair? A bible verse? A song? It is the nobleman’s demented hiss, his profane raging at the three blackguards:

– *Fili dele pute, traite!*

– Go on, you sons of bitches, pull!

SALLY GOLDSMITH  
RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION

As a boy, my Sussex granddad could spot the runty dillin in a pig’s litter, play the fool down the pleached twittern, cry faints when he wanted out of the game, make jokes about the daglets on a sheep’s bum comparing them to his own number two’s.

From the Warwickshire lot I got the blart of waltzers at Stratford Mop, learned to swill the sink after washing up, to call down the jutty at the side of the ‘us – loud enough to wake the diddikais about whom my mother said I never should.

In rural Oxfordshire, I wuz *moi duck* to aunts who let me tiffle biddy hens off their eggs, bring in pecked bottles of *miwk* off of the step, nudged me out of looking a sawney, warned me to avoid the bunt of boys or even a cow.

In Sheffield now with you, flower, I look after us tranklements, crozzle my bacon and modge my pudding, put the door on t’ sneck, go to t’ foot of our stairs, let da into t’ entry, talk clarty at neet, lake and love da till ah dee.

“I have lived in a cottage in daffodil country... and I have known what it is to have Wilfrid Gibson and Robert Frost for my neighbours; and John Drinkwater, Rupert Brooke, Edward Thomas... have drunk my cider and talkt in my garden. I make no cider now, and I have no garden. But once I lived in Gloucestershire.”

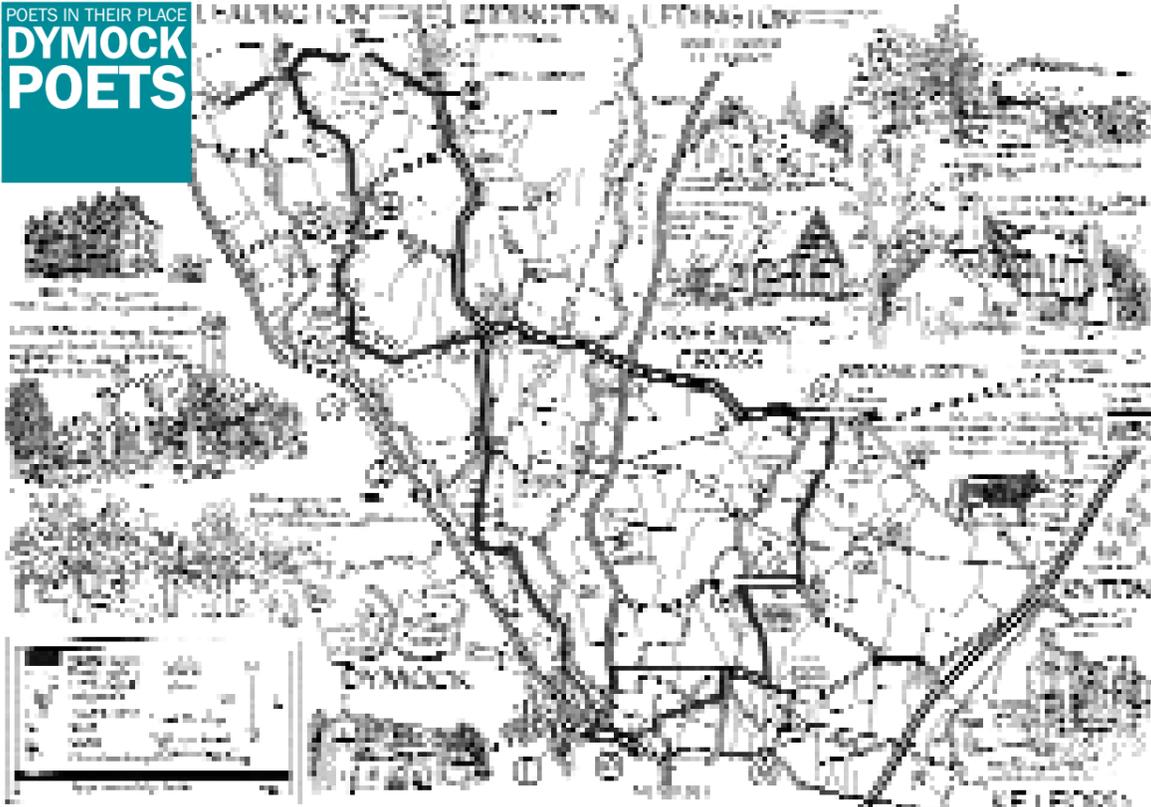
These are the words of Lascelles Abercrombie recalling his time spent living at Ryton, near Dymock, between 1911 and 1914. A recognised poet in his own right, he was the central figure of the poet-colony that briefly established itself on the north-western borders of Gloucestershire shortly before the First World War, a group now known as the ‘Dymock Poets’. Abercrombie’s litany of names reads like a who’s who of Georgian poetry but why did an obscure little village near the Forest of Dean become the meeting place for some of the early twentieth century’s greatest literary minds?

As Abercrombie himself states, Dymock was, and still is, the land of the daffodil: the home of the *narcissus pseudonarcissus*. Its abundance of wild flowers drew so many tourists from towns such as Ledbury, Worcester and Gloucester, that special public conveniences had to be built. But despite the appeal of “dancing daffodils”, as John Masefield put it, of the dense woodland, and dramatic Malvern Hills, the association came about largely by chance.

Sean Street, author of *The Dymock Poets*, explains: “Abercrombie was living at Much Marcle, a couple of miles from Dymock, and suggested Gibson came out. Gibson and Brooke were friends and Drinkwater was up the road, working at the new Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Gibson met Frost at the Poetry Bookshop (in London) and suggested he come up. Edward Thomas interviewed Frost and they became friends and so on. It could have been anywhere, but then you have to ask yourself would the great poems have happened? ‘The Sun Used to Shine’ is out of that landscape as is, of course, Frost’s ‘Iris By Night’. Had Thomas not made a certain train journey, we’d never have had ‘Adlestrop’!”

The poets drew inspiration from the natural beauty that surrounded them and attempted to mirror this by creating a poetic diction modelled on everyday speech; the resemblance to Wordsworth’s romancing of the Lake District is clear. They were constructing their own pastoral idyll or ‘English

## POETS IN THEIR PLACE DYMOCK POETS



Hand-drawn map by Barbara Davis, available from the Friends of the Dymock Poets, <http://www.dymock.org.uk/history/poets.asp> Image © the artist

## Loitering hours

Benjamin Miller explores the Arcadia founded by the **Dymock Poets** in Gloucestershire, a refuge from the political tensions of early 20th century Europe

Eden’ to which they could escape from the political tensions in Europe. Years later, after her husband was killed at the Battle of Arras in 1917, Helen Thomas said: “We spent those happy weeks in the open air, in the evenings sitting with our friends and talking – talking of people and life and poetry... We did not then realise all that brooded over our lives.”

The Great War not only shattered the Romantic haven they had built, it also profoundly altered the course of the poets’ lives. Frost returned to America. Brooke died aboard a troopship bound for the Dardanelles. Abercrombie and Gibson both tried to enlist but were turned down as medically unfit, later trading literary glory for distinguished academic careers. Drinkwater would forsake poetry for the theatre.

Abercrombie later returned to Dymock in 1919 to find that a small wood near his old home had been felled. In ‘Ryton Firs’ he laments the loss of their Arcadia:

But where is our cool pine-fragrance fled?  
Where now our sun fleckt loitering hours,  
Wading in yellow or azure or red,  
Daffodil, bluebell, foxglove flowers?

Similarly, Edward Thomas would leave a lasting reminder of his summer with Frost in ‘The Sun used to Shine’:

[...] We never disagreed  
Which gate to rest on. The to be  
And the late past we gave small heed.  
We turned from men or poetry

To rumours of the war remote  
Only till both stood disinclined  
For aught but the yellow flavoured coat  
Of an apple wasps had undermined [...]

Today, their legacy survives not only in their words, but in the village of Dymock and the countryside which surrounds it – a living monument to their work. It is possible to re-tread the

dirt which these poets trod, with several Poets’ Paths, circular walks around the Dymock area, having been set up since 1988.

Any visit to Dymock, however, must begin inside the picturesque reddish-brown and grey stone walls of St-Mary’s Church in the centre of the village, where an extensive permanent exhibition on the Dymock Poets can be found. It offers information on the poets’ lives, wives, friends and work, and also includes detailed maps of the area, first editions of the poets’ books, a children’s section and audio visual presentations. A range of lovingly produced maps, books, postcards and posters is available for purchase.

The three Poets’ Paths all start and end near the church. The main walk is rather romantically called the ‘Daffodil Way’ and, although best undertaken in the spring, the route has plenty to offer whatever time of year you should choose to visit. As the £1 paper map from the church explains: ‘The Way’ is a ten-mile circular path offering “a

wealth of woods and orchards, ponds and streams, meadows and fields”. There are “vistas of distant hills and glimpses of historic houses like the partly Elizabethan Allums Farm” and the now derelict Boyce Court, the grounds of which form the latter stages of the walk. What strikes you most is the sheer variety of countryside it encompasses – this is a slice of the finest that Gloucestershire has to offer.

On top of stunning scenery, the Daffodil Way has two other major highlights to recommend it. About three miles in, and enough to justify a visit on its own, is another St Mary’s Church (or Kempley Old Church). Its diminutive nave and chancel contain several sublime frescoes dating back to the 1120s. It is the perfect spot to stop and catch your breath, before continuing on into Kempley itself.

Beyond Kempley, the path leads through Dymock Wood, which has its own considerable literary heritage. It was Edward Thomas’s uncertainty over which path in the “yellow wood” to follow, when out walking with Robert Frost, that prompted his American friend to immortalise the occasion in ‘The Road Not Taken’. Although the daffodils are only present for a short time, the numerous dirt tracks and dense undergrowth make it easy to imagine the dilemma Thomas must have faced.

The walk can be hard going in places and refreshment at the Beauchamp Arms is ten miles back in Dymock. Sitting outside the pub after a three-hour hike, you feel your drink has been duly earned; it offers the opportunity to ponder the sights that have passed before you. It’s the diversity of Dymock’s countryside, added to its poetic posterity, which makes it such a treat to visit. As U.A. Fanthorpe asserted in her lecture *Dymock: The Time and the Place*, published by The Cyder Press: “It was – it is – a small, obscure place. But it matters.”

*Benjamin Miller is a writer and teacher in Berkshire. He thanks Sean Street, Cate Luck and Paula Iley for their help with this article.*

**The Friends of the Dymock Poets**, founded in 1993 to “foster an interest in the work of the Dymock Poets”, offers lectures, readings, walks and an annual journal to members. [www.dymockpoets.co.uk](http://www.dymockpoets.co.uk)

**The Dymock Poets Archive and Study Centre**, run by the University of

Gloucestershire, has a wide collection of manuscripts, biographical material, and multimedia resources on the Dymock Poets. Visit [www.glos.ac.uk/archives](http://www.glos.ac.uk/archives)

**The Cyder Press**, run in association with the University of Gloucestershire, “prints long out-of-print or little-known works by the Dymock Poets”. [www.cyderpress.co.uk](http://www.cyderpress.co.uk)

### JOSIE TURNER IN

*I’m tough*, you said, towards the end, knowing it is hard to stop. The shuttle wants to weave new cloth – we find words; we slot the tongue of the buckle into a makeshift notch.

Your old saying – *I want a new nothing to bang by my side* – resounds. Its after-shocks of silence taste bitter in my mouth. I lick the iron bridle, then spit it out.

We are swayed to be makers. Taken with the class on a lashing afternoon to a still-raw dual carriageway that mocked up the land, with plastic earth on our hard hands we twisted bulbs into an embankment, so they might bloom one day in the distance.

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