



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)