

Suffolk Poetry Society



NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 1995

Chairwords

Dear Members

Since the end of August, summer seems to have skidded to a sudden halt catapulting us into autumn. In the Society's calendar, however, it is still 'summer' - until 15 October when the last of our Sunday afternoon gatherings for 1995 takes place.

As always, this final event is the Crabbe Competition Awards meeting which has long been a highlight of the Society's programme. This year, the competition attracted a record 617 entries - which represents an amazing 59 per cent increase on last year's total. Such an encouraging response surely deserves enthusiastic support so do please mark the date in your diaries. And if you are coming to the Awards meeting - which also includes readings by the adjudicators - Jeni Couzyn and Lawrence Sail - why not join the Society for lunch at the Brudenell beforehand. Details of how to book a place appear elsewhere in this newsletter.

After the Crabbe Awards, the Society slips into its winter routine: instead of attending meetings countywide, members gather on a more informal basis in local groups - a tradition which goes back to 1969. Previously, meetings were held throughout the year but in the mid-1960s attendance during the winter months began to dwindle as members became increasingly reluctant to drive across the county in inclement weather and fading light (or even darkness - evening meetings were then quite common). The solution - to meet locally - was so well received that within a couple of years eight groups were flourishing, in locations as far apart as Newmarket, Aldeburgh, Nayland...

Today, there are three groups only - in Hadleigh, Lowestoft and Woodbridge - but these are thriving and popular. Each group arranges its own programme: perhaps members read poems on a theme, or discuss the work of a particular poet, or hold a workshop session, or invite a local poet or critic to talk to them... Apart from encouraging members to develop and share their interest in poetry, the group also enables them to get to know each other - something which can be more difficult in the larger context of a main Sunday meeting.

Do you belong to an SPS group? If not, would you like to? For members living near Hadleigh, Woodbridge and Lowestoft the opportunity is already there. For those living in other parts of the county? Let's meet the challenge and expand the network. If you are interested in joining a group or - better still - setting one up, please let me know.

The fact that the existing groups are so successful is due in part to the commitment of their members and in part to the efforts of their co-ordinators. On your behalf may I thank the group co-ordinators and all others who are involved in running the Society's various activities. Their dedication is crucial to the Society's well-being.

I look forward to seeing many of you at Aldeburgh.

With every good wish

Catherin Dell

THE 1995 CRABBE MEMORIAL POETRY COMPETITION

Joint First Prize

School Walk
Summer Morning

Simon Maier
David Britton

Third Prize

On the Theft of Edvard Munch's 'Shriken'

John Watts

Commended

Dove in a Cloth Cap

Michael McGrath

Dream or Nightmare

Marilyn Chapman

Guided Tour of the Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna

Theresa Turk

'I move in the dark, I plant signs'

John Riddens

The Last Gift

Florence Cox

Topsy Turvy Holiday 1916

Keith Chandler

Prizes will be awarded at an Open Meeting of the Society in Aldeburgh Parish Church at 3pm on Sunday, 15 October, where the adjudicators, Jeni Couzyn and Lawrence Sall, will speak of their findings and read some of their own work.

MAGAZINES

ACUMEN: I have mentioned this before and I urge members to try a copy. The standard of poetry is consistently high and there are stimulating articles, reviews, interviews with poets and a recently added correspondence section. Now published in three issues a year for £10 post free, single copies £3.50 plus 45p postage. Why not, at least, try a back number? Members of SPS can obtain one of these for £1 (early copies), or £1.50 plus 45p p&p.

HONEST ULSTERMAN: now in its 26th year of publication. Professionally printed and well laid out and very reasonably priced for 100+ pages. I used to subscribe to this one in the 1970s when Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley et al were regulars. Must try it again. Tri-annual for £10. Single copy £2. Editor, Tom Clyde, 14 Shaw Street, Belfast BT4 1PT.

MAGMA: well presented and printed; good selection of poetry. Well-reviewed in ORBIS 94. Tri-annual £5, single £1.50 plus 50p p&p. Editor, Laurie Smith, Stukeley Press, The City Lit, Stukeley Street, Drury Lane, London WC2B 5LJ.

LIBRARY

Marguerite reminds us that the SPS Poetry Library is now housed at her home, Sandy Hill, Sandy Lane, Woodbridge IP12 4DL, Tel 01394 382435. Many books have been added recently, and a list is available from Marguerite. Books too valuable to be loaned can be read in the peace and quiet of Sandy Hill. Please write or phone before visiting. Donations of books of or about poetry are always welcome.

This (a passage from In Memoriam) is great poetry, economical of words, a universal emotion related to a particular place; and it gives me the shudder that I fail to get from anything in Maud. - T S ELIOT: Introduction to the poems of Tennyson, 1936

LETTER FROM AUSTRALIA

Flatteringly enough, I have been asked to venture a few remarks about the Australian Poetry Scene for the Suffolk Poetry Society's Newsletter. This, then, is only a personal view, for York, Western Australia, where I live is hardly in the mainstream of poetic happenings. There are of course books of verse reviewed, occasionally, but their reviews do not tempt one to rush out and buy them

Frankly, I suspect that there is not here an authentic, bustling Poetry Scene, not currently, anyway. It may come in time, but not yet. In general, Australia has yet to get SPORT out of its system. This may never happen, Australians are so pleasantly direct, outgoing and immediate. They make wonderful warriors - but words, and what words can do, and where they spring from, the heart, the mind, their depths and linkages and associations, seem to mean so little to them. The universities? - too self-conscious and T S Elliot-ish, I fancy; ghetto-ish, in a strange sense, I sometimes feel: 'We're with it; we know it all, feller!'

What is poetry, anyway? I for one don't know. And I have been learning, tinkering, flirting with it for well over sixty years, and am still only on the lower slopes of the English language and its treasure house of poets and poetry. It used to be Hugh McCrae here that had the reputation. He doesn't seem to get a mention these days. I recently attended a recital of 'Banjo' Paterson's poetry. Now, there was indeed a balladist and versifier, master of his trade, which was to celebrate The Bush, its folk and happenings. But his Australia is no more. He wrote before the cement skyscrapers rose up to dominate our capital cities. The horse has gone, taking largely its romance with it, to be replaced by machinery. The Bush remains, mysterious and eternal; but it has no inspired balladist today, nor have its inhabitants. It's difficult to balladize about machines. 'Banjo' Paterson remains ever popular, but this era has departed, one fears, for good. Henry Kendall, 'Banjo's' rival and antagonist, is in my opinion the better poet, yet somehow flawed. Possibly because he was disappointed in his life, and this gives sombreness to much of his verse, that is not helped by a certain inability to end with the perfect line.

York, W.A., where I have now settled, seems to be a poetic desert. Perhaps I am too elderly to be inspired by it any more, as once I was. And somehow here I don't think there is any sensitivity to the overtones in words that are to me the meat and drink, bone and blood of poetry; nor of irony in the ancient Greek sense of words having inner meanings, unknown to the speaker perhaps, and, certainly, to the persons or readers addressed.

I am still fitting poems to words, and words to poems, but understandably less often than of yore. But when the tension between persons, or of a situation, or a scene hits me, I attempt to dissipate it in a poem, when prose will not do, to 'get the message' out and through. And humdrum, slow-going little York (about the size of Saxmundham) can come up suddenly with its human problems, disappointments and surprises worthy of a Greek Tragedy, and quite as difficult to cope with. Then only poetry will do.

'Nat' Gould 13.7.1995

Nat, who kindly sent the above piece at my request, is still a member of the Society and is remembered by Portfolio subscribers for his frequently cryptic poems and pertinent comments, both of which are much missed. Perhaps, Nat, you could do a Paterson* on York, or a Spoon River Anthology** on its inhabitants - in your own inimitable style, of course.

*William Carlos Williams; **Edgar Lee Masters

THE SUFFOLK POETRY CLUB

From records presented recently to the Society, we find that one of the earliest mentions of the Club in the local press was made in July 1930.

In January 1931 the East Anglian Daily Times published a long - and elaborately flowery - column on poetry in Suffolk and mentioned that the Suffolk Poetry Club consisted of twenty members with Mr Herbert Hudson as Secretary. A typed magazine of members' works was circulated every two months, with criticisms, the first issue being dated February 1930 - the ancestor of our present Portfolio.

The Club used formal, printed invitation cards, with matching envelopes, and meetings were held in members' homes. Mrs E M Pickett of Cauldwell Hall Road was an active member. A poem of hers was printed in the press at the outbreak of the First World War, entitled, 'Justice - Not Hate'. She submitted poems to the magazine and received severe criticisms from Mr Hudson!

By January 1933 the membership had risen to thirty-four. Francis Engleheart's name appears, and also that of Kay Turner, who was a member of the Society until her recent death.

In 1936 the Poetry Club presented a public recital, at the invitation of the Ipswich Library Committee, of Suffolk poetry from mediaeval times to the present; the readers were The Library Players. Mr W M Morfey, Hon Secretary of the Club, gave an introductory paper, and Francis Engleheart concluded the recital with "a clever summary, full of appreciation of FitzGerald and Doughty, the two 'giants' in Suffolk poetry" (EADT March 1936).

Kay Craufurd-Benson

After writing the above piece, Kay received a letter from Jo Westren enclosing a document giving information about a recital by the Suffolk Poetry Club. Of the document, Jo writes, 'if you're surprised to see what it is, so was I when I found it - and in pristine condition, too! It was carefully laid flat in a folder I never go to - but have been tidying up the cupboard today. I'm so pleased to be able to pass it on, because among other things it provides a list of some very good poems, the like of which haven't occurred in our ranks for years and years. This poetry reading was in the evening and took 1½ hours or more, and the Library big room, on the R/H side as you go in, was full of most appreciative people. As I recall, every poem was a poem, and not an attempt at one, and SPC put up a really good show. The poems were chosen by the decision of Francis Engleheart, W M Morfey - English master at Ipswich School, Herbert Hudson (a much published poet), F C Bell (a retired reporter of The Times), and John Youle. My name at that time was Josephine May. I do wonder why Marguerite Wood isn't 'of the company' - perhaps she was still a schoolgirl!

The recital took place on Saturday 11 March 1939 and comprised 72 poems arranged under 14 headings, with two intervals. Poets, readers and audiences were made of sterner stuff in those days. The poets represented were E Broadberry Seaman, Phyllis Noble, Josephine May, Adria Fenn, Muriel D Brooke, Jane Hales, E M Pickett, Sylvia Morgan, Christine North, E L Wise, A M Medd, Rosetta Clover, John Youle, Arthur Moseley, Joan Hudson, Beatrice Ellis, Madge Musgrave, H R Lingwood, Emma A Everett, Dorothy Baker, D Morris, Francis Engleheart, Herbert Hudson, R O H Walpole, E W Edwards, Gweneth Jalouse, Kenneth Marshall, Janet Carley, F C Bell, Freda Noble, Ella Noble, 'Nemo', W M Morfey and A H Streeten. The poems were read by Miss Mary Ashton, Miss Gladys Edwards, Mr R B Stokes and Mr W H Wrigley.

Further information is looked for, especially from Marguerite, and from anyone who can 'flesh-out' the names and clear up the mystery of 'Nemo'.

POEMS WANTED

AGUMEN: Patricia Oxley writes to say she is 'always on the look out for good material, whether it be poetry or articles with a poetic slant. I am always willing to read submissions from anyone, and the work will be returned if it is accompanied by an sae'. She also encloses guidelines for would-be contributors from which I only have room to quote the section dealing with poetry:

'All poetry is read carefully. Any poem that may possibly have a chance of publication is shortlisted, and from this shortlist, the final poems for the magazine are chosen. All other poems are returned within one to six weeks. Any unused shortlist poems are returned as soon as possible. Due to high postage costs, however, poems which are not shortlisted, but which have accompanied a shortlisted poem, will be held along with poem so that the sae can be used for the final decision. I receive around 20,000 - 30,000 poems a year and can only publish a hundred at the most: so the chances of rejection are high. But then this applies to most magazines.

'When reading poetry I look out for a poem that says something which is not trivial, not obvious, doesn't use outworn images or diction, and often works at many levels simultaneously.'

These last observations are worth bearing in mind when considering our own poems. If you want the full guidelines, write to me for a photocopy.

HONEST ULSTERMAN: interested in anything good. The magazine includes prose, drama, reviews, interviews, critical articles, as well as poetry.

MAGMA: all kinds of poetry. Magma 1 appeared in March 1994.

NEWS FROM MEMBERS

Let me first congratulate John Watts and Theresa Turk on their successes in the Crabbe Competition. John took third prize, and Theresa had a poem commended. Barbara Smith has had a poem, Off-Camera, published under the name of Barbara Grace, in the anthology, Poetry Now, East Anglia.

Jo Westren has had two poems included in an anthology, The Voice of War, published by Michael Joseph to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of VE Day. This anthology is a considered selection from past Oasis anthologies, together with poems from Canada, Australia and South Africa, and consists of 160 poems from the 14,000 collected. They were all written while the writers were on active service and so consist of firsthand experience. Jo also has In Summer in Island Moods and Reflections, published by the Poetry Institute of the British Isles, run, I understand, from Canada. The book is made up from poems submitted in an open and free poetry competition, whose contents Jo finds very uneven in standard.. 'It's a huge volume,' she writes, 'with about 6-8 poems on each pair of open pages - such an eyeful that one can hardly take it in! It's the size of the average family bible; of good paper and print with board binding. The best thing about it is the biography section, slickly written by the editor, I guess, and quite interesting - hardly recognized myself! The first winner is a steadily written poem in North Country dialect - not clever or smart, but somehow sound as a good country loaf.' She then goes on to say that dialect poems seem to do well, there being 'several in More poems of the Second World War - totally unintelligible unless you know the dialect, though'.

Marguerite Wood has taken first prize in the Norwich Writers' 1995 Poetry Competition with a poem, Waiting, which is set in Egypt, and has had a poem, The Edge, about the Grand Canyon, included in The Co-op 1995 Caring Poetry Festival Anthology, Our World, which contains 53 poems chosen from 1300. This confirms that travel broadens the mind and increases the acceptance rate. Finally, Frank Wood made his Last Request in The Independent on 22 May 1995.

KEY NOTICE**Lunch Date**

The Society's annual lunch, preceding the Crabbe Awards meeting, is open to members and guests. Details as follows:

time/date: 12.15 for 12.45pm on Sunday 15 October

venue: The Brudenell Hotel, The Parade, Aldeburgh

menu: choice of starter, roast turkey/vegetarian option, choice of dessert, coffee; also included is a glass of wine or soft drink

price: £11.95 per person

To book a place please send a cheque, made out to the Suffolk Poetry Society, to Douglas Wood, Sandy Hill, Sandy Lane, Woodbridge IP12 4DJ. Enclose SAE if you require a receipt. Last date for bookings: 7 October. If you would like the vegetarian dish, please say so when booking.

ALDEBURGH POETRY FESTIVAL: 3-5 November 1995

Theme: risks. Includes Adrian Mitchell, Lauris Edmond, Tom Leonard, Sue Stewart, Gerard Woodward, Nigel Jenkins, John Lyons, Dorothy Nimmo, Norman Silver, Peter Bland, Charles Boyle, Deryn Rees-Jones, Alan Ross, Jill Balcon, Roy Fisher, P J Kavanagh, Grete Tartler, Thomas Lynch, Helen Dunmore on D H Lawrence, Herbert Lomas, Paula Meehan, Eira Stenberg from Finland with her translator, Aldeburgh's own Herbert Lomas, poetry workshops, surgeries for sick verse and BBC Radio Four's Kaleidoscope live. Brochure from Michael Laskey, Goldings, Goldings Lane, Leiston, Suffolk IP16 4EB.

HELP FOR POETS

From Portfolio member Mike Bannister, I have received a copy of the following advice Basil Bunting gave to student poets in Newcastle in the early 1970's:

- 1 Compose aloud; poetry is a sound.
- 2 Vary rhythm enough to stir the emotion you want
but not so as to lose impetus.
- 3 Use spoken words and syntax.
- 4 Fear adjectives: they bleed nouns. Hate the passive.
- 5 Jettison ornament gaily but keep shape.
Put your poem away till you forget it, then:
- 6 Cut out every word you dare.
- 7 Do it again a week later, and again.

Never explain - your reader is as smart as you.

Poetry is like shot-silk with many glancing colours. Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability, and according to his sympathy with the poet. ALFRED TENNYSON - quoted in Hallam Tennyson's Memoirs

EDWORDS

I was just preparing to go foraging for material, when I opened an envelope from Kay Craufurd-Benson and a gallimaufry of interesting material from various readers dropped out. What a pleasant surprise! I'm looking forward to more contributions for the next issue and I hope some of the contents of this one will inspire you all to take the bull by the horns and, out of the milk of human kindness, to think of your editor. Now you can see why I avoid metaphors in my poems. Write to me at 20a Lynwood Avenue, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 9HS.
Frank Wood 11 September 1995