

**Newsletter**  
**December 2009**

Welcome to another edition of the Newsletter which will be the last in this temporary format. This one has been put together by Fred Ellis with the help of SPS Admin due to the illness and now convalescence of our editor Gerard Melia. We apologise both to him and to our readers for our tardiness and whatever mistakes we are about to make!

Remember that news items, letters, reviews or reports from your local group are welcome so please continue to send them in but now to our new editor for 2010:-

Mr Ian Griffiths.  
ian@poetryanglia.org

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**From the Coalface**

An observer of our committee this last half year could be excused for saying that we have experienced the collective collywobbles. I too prefer to think thus, rather than dwell on a chapter best closed. Suffice to say that more than half of our number had to deal with serious illness or losses in their immediate families one of which was unforeseeable and tragic. In August our Chairman and Newsletter Editor Gerard Melia suffered a serious stroke thus leaving two posts open. This, and other crises made for a testing time.

We now have effectively a new committee. New in the sense that most members have only attended a few meetings; new in the sense that events have caused most of us to take on different roles (musical chairs) whilst covering unfamiliar tasks such as the preparation of this newsletter or the 2010 programme both of which, as a consequence, are running late; and new in the sense that we are learning to work together.

That said, our team includes many of the talented and creative activists that delivered in 2009 one of the most successful years in the Society's long history; successful by any measure and measure it we will, and celebrate, at the AGM to be held at on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2010 - see Notice.

How we move forward depends somewhat on decisions and elections made at that AGM but we hope to proceed in as follows:-

- o Ian Griffiths will take over as Editor of a new-look Newsletter. We hope that this will be an excellent outlet for his artistic, literate and dare I say technological talents.
- o Ann Knox Whittet will continue as Competition Secretary even though she has given herself a tough act to follow; her first, 2009, Crabbe Poetry Competition being a triumph.
- o Anne Boileau and Rosalynde Price who won their spurs in the staging of 2009 events will direct the 2010 programme with the assistance of myself (Schubertiad) and others (not necessarily on the committee) who will stage individual happenings.
- o Ivor Murrell will continue as Treasurer in which role he now has his feet firmly under the desk.
- o Florence Cox, our member without portfolio will provide wise counsel and support to all.

Also, in the last quarter:-

- We have secured the services of non member/ non poet Kristine Faucette who, for a small honorium, is providing administrative and systems support. For example; Kristine pasted up and distributed this newsletter and the enclosed subscription/ data audit form all driven by our accurate and centralised database. This is how we have to work with a growing membership of now 140 spread out over East Anglia as compared to 40 local members in the 1960's. This means that we may not need a classic Membership Secretary, as such. Instead, all committee members will share the pleasure of really knowing members in their locality, following up new ones, and providing pastoral care. Ian Griffiths for example who lives in Shotley will cover the peninsular up to Ipswich. Ann Knox Whittet will cover Norfolk. More info as this evolves.
- We have sought out and enjoyed the support of four past chairmen; Marguerite Wood (76 – 88), Catherine Dell (88 – 97), Mike Bannister (97 – 02), Frank Wood (2007), out of which has come a Briefing Book to document the heritage of the Society and provide a fact book of ideas and initiatives that will not need reinventing. This has been distributed to all committee members. It is not the intention to restrict the committee to following the old tried ways, we are after all a progressive poetry society, but we also need to respect a proud heritage and recognize and learn from past achievements. For example we once celebrated National Poetry Day. What a chance to ride into the community on the back of a national publicity– lets do it!

I am confident that 2010 will see a renaissance in this friendly society of poets: we just have to hope that the grim reaper will turn his attention somewhere else: the banking sector perhaps?

Fred Ellis  
Acting Chairman in Committee

## Notice of Annual General Meeting

The 2010 AGM will be held on January 31<sup>st</sup> 2010 at 2:30 pm in Greater Ipswich at:-  
The Kesgrave Community Centre  
Twelve Acre Approach  
Bell Lane  
Kesgrave, Suffolk, IP5 1JF

Attendance at the AGM is for members only and there will be no charge for admission.

We decided to bring the AGM forward to January back in 2008 but it has taken time for the change to work through programming. The change is fortuitous as it will enable our much co-opted committee members to be more formally mandated.

We have also changed the venue. The Kesgrave Centre is a warm and attractive place for January with excellent facilities including plenty of parking. We chose Ipswich to put on more poetry in the County Town where the Society first started. Put on we will for the formal business of the AGM will be followed by...

### "The Year in Revue"

to be presented by Rosalynde Price with a vast cast to take us through the milestones of 2009. This will be some whistle stop tour and a chance to get a flavour at least of an amazing year.

## Hadleigh Poetry Group

This winter the group will be meeting at Bert Keele's house: 83 Aldham Road, Hadleigh, on the first Sunday of the month at 2.30 pm. The programme will be as follows:

1 November Read and discuss poems by Imtiaz Dharker and Philip Levine followed by a dvd of the poets reading their own work.

6 December Poetry readings by the group members, followed by Bert's Pre-Christmas Bash when we can invite guests to join us for a social gathering.

3 January Discussion on "Is popular poetry good poetry?"

7 February Jill Dawson will talk about the process of writing a poem.

7 March Angela Pickering (Highly Commended in this year's Crabbe Competition) will give a reading of her work.

Maggie Andrews

## Workshops

Contact:- anne.boileau@poetryanglia.org

### In The Nick of Time

A Poetry Workshop with

Gregory Warren Wilson.

Time: 2.00 pm — 4.30 pm on May 12th 2010.

Place: Wefan House, 39 West Street, Coggeshall,

Essex C06 1NS.

Cost £10.00

Time is one of the most telling subjects a poet ever addresses — reflecting on their childhood, celebrating the moment, or in intimations of their own mortality. But time is embedded in poetry itself; a poem takes time to write, and its form determines how long it will take us to read it — haiku or epic.

In this workshop we will be looking closely at how several contemporary poets have approached the subject of time, with a view to writing original poetry of our own. Time will be given to writing exercises and poets of all levels are welcome.

GW. November 25th 2009.

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### The Nature at the Heart of Poetry

Judy Gahagan, Poet, Ecologist, Psychologist and Tutor at Poetry School is offering the following course to members of the Suffolk Poetry Society. There are 10 places.

A six-day once-a-month course in Eco Poetry

Time: 11.00 am – 4.00 pm on Third Wednesday of each month, starting on March 17th, then April, May, June, July, September.

Place: at a fine old Mill on the Stour near Cavendish.

Cost: £15 per day, payable in advance. Tea and coffee provided but bring own lunch.

For details see flyer at end of newsletter.

## 2009 George Crabbe Poetry Competition

The Competition was celebrated with a lunch and award ceremony at Belstead House on Sunday 11th October.

Once again I would like to congratulate all of our winners led this year by Mike Bannister. You will find a full commentary in the excellent report given by the adjudicator Clive Scott enclosed with this newsletter.

The competition this year attracted 346 poems from 115 poets across the UK and as far as New Zealand, a small number were from SPS Members the others had strong Suffolk connections that made them eligible to enter. This year we had entries from 35 poets whom we have had no previous contact, which was encouraging.

Ann Knox Whittet  
Crabbe Competition Secretary

## Café News

### Making Friends Through Poetry

Poets are a shy species. They hide in the grass, lurk behind trees, in the marshes, on the heath. They love language, but should you try to bring them together they can become tongue-tied and awkward. In the last eighteen months, though, that has begun to change. Poets are emerging from all over the county, and from Essex and Norfolk; they are gathering once a month in four distinct groups known as Café Poets: they meet in Sudbury, Bury, Woodbridge and Halesworth, to listen to good poetry well spoken; they learn from one another, sharing poems and ideas.

Our local Café Poets meet in Sudbury on the second Wednesday of each month. Jill Dawson and Gill Phillips set it up in May 2008 and I was pleased when they invited me to help them with the publicity and programme planning. The formula for our café (each one has its own particular house-style) is this: an invited, published poet reads his/her work during the first part of the evening; we can then ask the guest poet questions, possibly buy their books, and chat to him or her over coffee.

In the second half of the evening, anyone can read out a poem of their choice, usually, but not necessarily their own work. Each reading is followed by a brief pause for reflection, reaction,

questions. It is a safe, kind and affirmative environment.

I have observed how, over time, the atmosphere has become more jolly and relaxed. Faces grow familiar, people feel at ease; this is a time and place for talking about important matters, the sort of things English people often find hard to confront: birth, death, grief, love; the natural world, a sense of place; anger, laughter, irony, regret; you never know where a poem will take you, so every meeting is an adventure. New friendships form; and out of these friendships has grown collaboration, on both a local and regional level.

From the four cafes across the county, thirteen poets came together to perform their own poems in a barn called Toft Monks near Beccles. This was the third Schubertiad in early June. The pianist, Holger Aston, was sent the selected poems three months in advance, and he chose and practised appropriate pieces to play between the readings. The cast met twice before the event, once for a public speaking workshop with Catherine Dell, and once for a rehearsal in the barn three days before; this careful preparation paid off, and those who have heard the CD agree how professional it sounds.

Working together on a project is a wonderful way of making friends. The Schubertiad brought together poets from all over Suffolk as well as from Essex and Norfolk. We rehearsed, we laughed, we ate sandwiches; and in performing alongside one another, we shared a sense of excitement and achievement.

It did not end there. Many of us met again a few weeks later to take part in the Sutton Hoo Poetry Festival at the end of June, which Mark Baker has described elsewhere in this issue.

There is another strand to the story of the Cafés. Colin Whyles has begun to tap into this emerging talent by creating a website called Poetry Aloud. Anyone who reads out a poem at one of the cafes can ask Colin to record it; he posts the recording on the site, along with the text; the poet's voice can now be heard again at any time, in any place, at the touch of a mouse!

There are four Poets' Cafés. One of them must be within reach of where you live. So if you haven't already, why not give it a try? Whether you write poetry yourself, or simply enjoy reading and listening to it, you may find it becomes a regular fixture in your diary.

Anne Boileau  
November 2009

## The Suffolk Poetry Society at Sutton Hoo

Time – that is what dominates my memory of the Suffolk Poetry Society's day of readings at Sutton Hoo. Time as a punctuation point – a moment in our history when the conflict between 'new' Christianity and ancient paganism was so finely balanced that a baptised king could be buried with a rich assortment of household goods, wealth and weapons to provide comfort in the next world. Time as a river, flowing through fourteen centuries of forgetfulness and peace, threatened but not polluted by grave robbers, before the quiet clink of Basil Brown's trowel on a ship's nail diverted the stream back forever into our national consciousness:

'The flame gone long before the wax,  
locked in fourteen centuries of night.

And then  
sand breaks and sun's light reveals all'  
as Elizabeth Bracken puts it.

Time as a challenge to the work, with the supremely skilful exposure of the long ship's sandy outline completed only just soon enough to be photographed before a new conflict rolled irreversible damage across the mounds. Time as a distortion, expanding the antiquity and remoteness of Raedwald and the awed respect it forces on us, while Britain's earlier Roman history is familiar and more accessible. Time as a softener, reducing the great graves and their far-visible statement of power to 'gentle grassy mounds' hidden from the sea and the river by trees.

Much of the poetry recited so movingly was caught in the same web of perplexity about us, here and now, and Raedwald and his kingdom, here but then. One poem bridges the gap with the imagined meeting of a horse from the graves with another that had carried its owner through the latter-day horrors of the First World War. Another brings home the sweating reality of the preparations for the funeral through the stench of the herring offal used to lubricate the progress of the great ship up the hill from the estuary. Other writers imagine themselves as observers or participants at the passing of the King, whether as Raedwald's wife (perhaps forgivably I kept hearing her described as 'raddled wife'), his mother, the jeweller who made his precious relics, or a serf pulling the ship. More than one focusses on modern life in the place, bringing home the continuity of man's tensions – new ways

versus old, the lure and the pain of secret relationships, the listening emptiness of widowhood. Still others use rhythms and word-forms like those of old English ('We are bone-house and empty-blood', 'Earth-heavy and bitter-bound I find myself 'Gold-gift/Dream-draught/ Word/weft') to give a sense of presence in the past. Notably, many invoke Mrs Pretty herself to unify the spirit of the place, watching and listening, protecting the mounds, watching the diggers as they bring the dead past back to life, and even in one poem sharing a dream with a liegeman of Raedwald.

The poems are like fossils, recording for the present great truths about the past: the dead of old who lie diffused in the sands of Sutton Hoo – imagined now, rather than remembered – hallow the ground in ancient wonder.

Mark Baker  
1st November 2009

## Out and About

We live in a vibrant place for poetry: there is always something going on. It is not possible to attend or comment on all of these events but here, as a sampler, are two accounts of autumn evenings at Halesworth.

### RUBERT BROOKE

#### by The Useful Donkey Theatre Company

The 'props' were an old suitcase, a bundle or two of old letters, one or two scraps of writing paper, an old newspaper, a white seashell, a kit bag, shoes and socks, against a backcloth of names of those killed in action.

Dressed in Army uniform with peaked cap, (jacket and cap removed at times, not to mention the shoes and socks!), Jonathan Race – Actor, presented the life and poems of Rupert Brooke magnificently at the Cut in Halesworth on Friday October 2nd. His presentation, non stop for an hour and a half, of the War Poet's early life, his early loves, his political position, his socialist views, his peer group, family and his travels abroad (which often re-kindled his love of the home country and sent him scurrying back in thought and deed) and of course his poetry, was a privilege to watch. His movement around the stage and use of the few 'props' for his sojourns in the different countries and his war action was cleverly done.

The small but enrapt audience hardly moved a limb for the whole performance and the Director Juliet

Forster as well as the Actor Jonathan Race should be congratulated, as indeed should the play's writer, Mark Payton, who brought out the complex person behind Brooke's war poet image, his early life, including his humour. Yes, it was funny in parts and the audience did chuckle.

The Useful Donkey Theatre Company (in partnership with York Theatre Royal) are on tour with this production and going to Cambridge 5th Oct, Canterbury 25th Oct, Leeds 30th Oct, York 9th Nov, Bracknell 11th Nov.  
(www.usefuldonkeytheatre.co.uk)

Penelope Cutler

### Utter:Jazz

Lovers of poetry and Jazz gathered to see the show (part of an Arts Council Tour) on Saturday 31st October at The New Cut, Halesworth. It was of course Halloween and so those who wished could also wear fancy dress –and there was a prize for the best.

Ruthie Culver, singer, song writer and poet sang authentic Jazz numbers and her trio of three musicians accompanied her with appropriate improvisations on a variety of instruments making some fairly spooky sounds for Halloween and to accompany the tone of the poems she read.

Here's the best bit for SPS, Ruthie chose to read a poem of our own Angela Pickering, that was a Highly Commended Poem in the Crabbe Memorial Competition. It's always a joy to hear a poet's work read by another and for Ruthie to pick out Angela's poem to read and have her musicians improvise appropriate accompaniment for the poem and for Halloween, I think should get a big mention in our SPS Newsletter. Well done Angela and of course Ruthie and her musicians for giving a great Halloween Jazz and Poetry performance.

Penelope Cutler

## Book Reviews

### Suffolk Boy

Twenty poems by Alasdair Eoin Aston

M.A. Cantab. F.L.S., F.E.S

Orphean Press ISBN 2009 978-0-9545094-9-1

£6.00 (Good Bookshops)

In July 2006 Alasdair Aston read 19 of these poems to the Suffolk Poetry Society in Kelsale. It was a meeting like no other. In a gesture that was both

charming and open *hearted, the guest-poet*, generously invited his audience to take home copies of the poems they had listened to in rapt attention. There was a scramble, and within seconds, every single copy had disappeared!

Suffolk Boy is a most readable collection of poetry, and to my mind, one of the best to come out of Suffolk in a very long time. It is at the same time a beautifully designed book. To open it, is to be in touch with the rarest of beings; a gifted poet, who is also a respected naturalist and a scholar. Alasdair Aston's deep understanding of the nature, and his sensitive use of language, combine to create a haunting love-tribute to the natural history and changing pastoral ways of his beloved Suffolk.

Poems such as 'Framlingham February' 'Stowmarket to Onehouse' 'Advent Night, Star Lane', and many another, will bring to mind something of John Clare, Richard Jeffries, Edward Thomas, even John Donne. Words matter to this poet; he deploys them to great emotional effect, and brings you, the reader, close to the true significance of birth, life, change and decay. The secret lives of moths, of moorhens, flowers and fishes emerge here as the runes and symbols of our own glorious, yet fleeting life. Treasure this book; it is a most exquisite thing.

Mike Bannister.

Halesworth August 2009

**Review: 'A Trace of Life' by Chris Grahn, published by PoetryPort, 2009. £5.00 (Sally Grahn 01743 738219)**

I never really knew Chris Grahn but I saw him on a few occasions when he was determined to take part in a poetry event and read his poems. It was painful to watch his battle with his body but impossible not to admire his courage.

In this volume, Chris describes, in prose and poems, what it is like to live with Parkinson's Disease and to know with certainty that he will die from it. He travels from depression, for instance, in *The Death of Love*, to elation in *Dancing with Allah*. His fear of dying is an ever-present ghost. Woven through the book is the importance to him of his family.

Are these "great" poems? Who is to say: they are important because they demonstrate graphically his experience of Parkinson's Disease, holding it up for those of us without it, forcing us to understand. In "It's Rude To Stare", he says he made a sign to hang round his neck which read, "Please do not stare. Ask me and I'll tell you. Staring just upsets me." And later, in the same prose piece: "... I stumbled

my way into the waiting room, crashing into the door and knocking over a chair, not a bad haul for a very shaky afternoon." It has such a warming ending it brings tears. In "This Summer" he states: "...I put down the phone/ Grab paper and a pen and I can't write/Whilst standing looking at this page/ I've forgotten who said what to whom ..."

Chris shows that he is a human being, who is not afraid to say how he feels, who does not try to sound "positive". In "No Record Found (Death & Decay)", he writes: "I feel Death at my shoulder/ I feel his long gaze/ Reeling in my future/ Until it's my past", and, "In The Death Of Love": "Despair grins greyly through the smoke of failure" He wonders, in "The Before Days", whether the disease is a punishment: "It's like I died/ Somehow, somewhere/ And was given this mockery of a life/ As some sort of punishment". He yearns to believe: "If I had believed, would I have suffered so/ From this shaking captivity?/ If I believe will I be restored?" ("My Christmas Eve") and: "My heart is desperate for relief/ For something to believe in/ My spirit aches for the balm of belief".

("A Sense Of Christmas").

He is a man, not only wanting the reader to understand but, in the writing, trying to find answers for himself. And, in the end, we are shown his sheer doggedness, his determination to go on to the finish. In "The Before Days" he states: "But stubborn to the end I'm still here" and in "For The Children": "I didn't give in/ I simply lost/ As we all do/ In the end".

He wonders, in "My Christmas Eve", whether he will have to endure his disease for eternity: "Will that be my present/ Or will it be my future/ To endure to the end/ ... Should I wait with the angels? If I had wings, would they tremble too?"

I prefer to think of him on the threshold between death and the life beyond asking, as he does in "This Summer": "Isn't that Dad waving to me?" And he can relive what he describes in "Skylarks", all his suffering at an end:

He scoops me up on his shoulders

My scream of delight sends the skylarks into the air

Their warning song becomes a cornucopia of delight

Which lasts all the way home

The illustrations are from 'The Wonderful World Of Sheds' by John Grahn, Chris's father, with John's

witty captions, which add a wonderful uplift and quirkiness to this collection of poems and prose.

ROSALYNDE PRICE  
NOVEMBER 2009

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### COLOUR NOTES, Marguerite Wood, Poetry Monthly Press, £6.50

Sometimes, reading a poetry magazine, I wonder why did the poets bother: the poems don't seem to be about anything in particular. Margot's poems are all about something in particular, sometimes very particular, as when she and a man once saw what must have been a supernatural face in a moorland tarn and never spoke about it: ... I often think about it / cannot forget.' In 'Freefall' a Sunday parachutist loves to delay the ripcord in order to feel released from time and his working life and feel the buoyancy of space like a swimmer, till one day he leaves the ripcord too late.

The poems recreate deeply felt moments in precisely imaged places. A girl swings like and not like a Fragonard girl, watched by bullocks, while another observer is reminded of a long-ago lovemaking surrounded by a ring of watching bullocks. A mountain stream after rain breaks from the rock like a woman in childbirth. But 'fear smiled from the eyes / of a carnival mask', the dead are fortunate, and there's a time for birth and dying.

Beautifully illustrated by Helen Cockburn, the book is in subtly musical, spontaneous-seeming words that must have been carefully weighed: a revelation of the interior life one might otherwise not divine. These records of memory and observation by a founder member of the SPS are Margot's seventh book of poems and will stand re-reading.

Herbert Lomas

## Obituaries

### I.M. JOHN WITHERS

PORTFOLIO SECRETARY 1989 – 2002  
CRABBE MEMORIAL PRIZE WINNER 1994

TRIBUTE BY MIKE BANNISTER  
DELIVERED ON MAY 22ND 2009  
AT ST MARGARET'S CHURCH  
SHOTTISHAM, SUFFOLK.

"He shall not hear the bittern cry  
In the wild sky, where he is lain,  
Nor voices of the sweeter birds  
Above the wailing of the rain..."

(from "Lament for Thomas McDonagh"  
by Francis Ledwidge.)

- 1) I would not be a poet, but for John.
  - 2) In the early nineties, when first I came to Suffolk, and after 30 or so years in public service, shyly put about my verse, it was John Withers, in his capacity as Secretary to the Suffolk Poetry Society's Portfolio Group, who stood my ground among Sunday-afternoon poets and entertainers.
  - 3) John's true strength as a poet lay in his intellectual reach and the breadth of his reading. In 1994 Elaine Feinstein and David Dabydeen selected John as Winner of the Crabbe Memorial Poetry Prize. He seemed conversant the English Cannon, at ease with European and Ecclesiastical history and could quote from both at the drop of a hat. To be in contact with John, even by correspondence, was to warm oneself at the Heraclitian fire. He could recognise allusions, make connections and corrections with grace and sensitivity. He was a man who truly earned the role of "Poets Poet" For all that he was a private, modest man, and was slow to reveal to us all his own strengths in the craft of poetry. For many years, John was a poet and a father of poets, young and old, across the County of Suffolk.
  - 4) John, before that, had been Honorary Secretary to The Suffolk Poetry Society, and brought to that task the formal skills and attributes of an experienced administrator. There never would be his like again, when after 15 years, reluctantly, he decided to hand on the baton.
  - 5) After this, his second (or was it his third ?) retirement, John did me the honour of acting as informal editor for both of my own collections. He was forensic in his analysis, and a ruthless purger of adled or redundant punctuation. He could spot a list toward mawkishness at fifty paces, and was, without a doubt, the most bracing of literary critics & mentors.
  - 6) Now that he is gone from us, I feel somehow rudderless, a boat without steerage way, and 'at a loss' without my true friend in poetry.
- If we were, John and I, to be asked, "When and where was the high watermark of English poetry?" I'm quite certain we would both assert that it came with T.S. Eliot and "Four Quartets" and so it is with particular pleasure that I will try, at the behest of

John's closest loved ones, to share with you, the closing stanza of "Little Gidding"

"We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, remembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning;  
At the source of the longest river  
The voice of the hidden waterfall  
And the children in the apple tree  
Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.  
Quick now, here, now, always –  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing be well  
When the tongues of flame are infolded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.

Mike Bannister

### John Withers

by Malcolm Gluck

The Guardian, Saturday 13 June 2009

John Withers, who has died aged 78, was the antithesis of the advertising copywriter in every respect bar two: he loved words and he adored food and wine.

It is generally accepted that copy-writers of the 1950s, 60s and 70s were exceedingly literate, and that they could not get by without a very long lunch. For John, two hours for lunch was rushed, three hours proper. He was also outstanding in being not only literate in English and French (modern and medieval), but also Anglo-Saxon (he studied it under JRR Tolkien at Jesus College, Oxford). He could get by in Spanish and Italian and had a smattering of Russian, Chinese, Greek and Hebrew.

He was born in Birmingham and educated at Dudley grammar school. He became a copywriter in the 1950s, working for Doyle Dane Bernbach in New York when that agency was the most vibrant in the world. In 1964 he helped set up its London office. Every copywriter and art director of any talent in the UK wanted to work at DDB London. The best TV commercial of 1965 was John's for Remington razors where the voiceover was a Dalek's. It

demonstrated DDB's then unique knack of exploiting popular culture.

John also introduced me to fine wine and how to appreciate it. In 1966, he paid 75s 6d (nearly £4, a large sum in those days) in Henekey's wine bar in Thayer Street, Mayfair, for a bottle of Château Cheval Blanc 1947 - and changed my life.

By the mid-1980s, advertising had changed, but John had not. The lunch-hour was shrinking to mere minutes; writers who could craft newspaper ads with 800 words of irresistible copy were rarer than hen's teeth. John had had enough, and he retired in 1997 to Suffolk. Here he wrote not ads but poetry, winning the admiration of many poets in the county who turned to him for help and inspiration.

In 54 years of married life, each Valentine's Day John presented his wife Jean with a poem. She survives him, as do their three children, Emma, Polly and Tom.

Malcolm Gluck

### Chris Grahm

Chris Grahm was born in London in 1950. He was seventeen when he made his first sortie into writing what has been described "young man's poetry". He wanted to follow a career in journalism but the necessity of making a living pushed him, instead, into accountancy. It was work he never enjoyed. Nevertheless, he assiduously applied himself to his job despite stress and long hours.

In 1996, at the age of 45, Chris was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. The illness released him from his work so that he was able to find expression in the form of writing, both poems and prose. As the disease progressed and he became more trapped in his body, he found he had the ability to demonstrate, through writing his thoughts and feelings, what it was like for him living with, and in the expectancy of dying of, Parkinson's disease. He showed much courage and determination in the last years of his life.

Chris's wife, Sally, has collaborated with Fred Ellis to publish Chris's writing in a collection called 'A Trace of Life'. (as reviewed in this Newsletter)

Rosalynde Price

Judy Gahagan, Poet, Ecologist, Psychologist and Tutor at Poetry School is offering the following course to members of the Suffolk Poetry Society. There are 10 places.

**THE NATURE AT THE HEART OF POETRY**

A six-day once-a-month course in Eco Poetry

Time: 11.00 am – 4.00 pm on Third Wednesday of each month, starting on March 17<sup>th</sup>, then April, May, June, July, September.

Place: at a fine old Mill on the Stour near Cavendish.

Cost: £15 per day, payable in advance. Tea and coffee provided but bring own lunch.

This is a course designed for those poets for whom the natural world enters into their feelings, thoughts, memories and life events. It's timely that the devastation of the natural world be countered by an expression of our reverence for it, and the poem offers the ideal medium.

The course will involve working on material for poems on the themes listed below. We'll also read poems, past and contemporary, matching the sessions' topics.

*before we say goodbye*

focuses on elements in our landscapes that are threatened, disappearing or only remembered. Our reference will be John Clare and his visions of his local landscapes before they were engulfed by the Enclosures.

*inscapes-outscapes*

from passing moods to important life events the natural world offers a context and also a mirror to produce a moment that is essentially poetic.

*painting the elements*

when weather is more than a hindrance or facilitator of our plans and activities; we will focus on the *qualities* of rain, mist, frost, sun

*there's always the sky*

many people live in environments so removed from nature all that remains to them is the sky. Here we focus on clouds, moonlight, dawns, sunsets, light

*home and habitat*

like all living creatures we create habitats. What are the natural landmarks of the places where we live. How do they contribute to our sense of home?

*nature and beauty*

the natural world is a major source of beauty and thus offers us moments of transcendence, of the beyond in our midst evoked by such beauty and creating the most powerful poetic moments.

*To apply for a place on the course poets are invited to submit 3 poems that show their engagement as poets with the natural world.*

*Please submit by 25<sup>th</sup> January 2010 by sending to Anne Boileau,*

*39 West Street, Coggeshall, Essex CO6 1NS. Or [anne.boileau@poetryanglia.org](mailto:anne.boileau@poetryanglia.org)*