

Suffolk Poetry Society



NEWSLETTER SPRING 1996

Chairspeak

Dear Members

A few years ago, one of the Crabbe Competition adjudicators suggested to us that a prime function of poetry was to illumine today's world from a privileged vantage point. I was reminded of this recently listening to Thought for the Day on Radio 4. In the aftermath of the Canary Wharf bomb, Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford, turned to Auden's poem In Memory of W B Yeats. Quoting the lines

Follow, poet, follow right
To the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice...

he reflected on how poetry can provide a different perspective on things. And I went on to think that in our Society, which is dedicated to promoting poetry, we should remember that poetry has not only its pleasures, but also its responsibilities.

This year sees an important development in the Society's affairs - a constitution. Since its beginnings, over four decades ago, the Society has flourished with a minimum of rules and regulations. Situations, however, change. Membership has risen; the Society's activities have expanded; costs have escalated; the committee's workload has increased.

In the light of this considerable evolution, it seemed desirable that the Society should now benefit from the structure and safeguards provided by a constitution. Accordingly, the committee - after much consultation and discussion - drew up the document which is enclosed with this newsletter and which we hope will be approved and adopted at the AGM. I urge you to read it carefully and, if you wish to comment, please do so in writing as instructed in the preamble.

The introduction of a constitution does not mean the Society is about to strangle itself in red tape. Informality is one of our key attributes, and shall remain so. What the constitution will achieve is to guarantee a secure framework for our continued well-being.

Another major innovation taking place this year involves the Crabbe Competition Awards meeting. In October, the meeting - and lunch beforehand - will be held at Belstead House, on the outskirts of Ipswich. Inevitably, the new venue will occasion some changes but we hope that, overall, the Awards meeting will be just as memorable as it was at Aldeburgh.

As you will have read in your programme, we have the bonus of visiting Aldeburgh earlier in the year. The July music-cum-supper event promises to be a magical evening. I look forward to seeing you there and at the Society's other meetings throughout the summer.

With every good wish

Catherine Dell

SPS PROGRAMME 1996: WHO'S WHO

Claire Margaret Blunden, (14 April, 2.30pm: Red Cross Centre, Theatre Street, Woodbridge) is the widow of **Edmund Blunden**, (1896-1974), poet, autobiographer and critic. Born in 1918 in Manchester, where she went to school, she read English at St Hilda's College, Oxford and trained to be a teacher. She served in the ATS from 1942 until 1945, in which year she married Edmund Blunden, later spending some time in Japan, where Edmund was Cultural Adviser to the UK Liaison Mission. In 1953 Claire Blunden moved with her three daughters to Hong Kong when her husband was appointed Professor of English in the University. In the late '50s, not long after her fourth daughter was born, she became Lecturer in English at the same university. The family stayed in Hong Kong until 1964, after which they settled in Long Melford, Suffolk. A few years after her husband's death, Claire moved to Cambridge and worked for the Open University. **Edmund Blunden**, who fought in the First World War and was badly gassed, spent most of his life as a university teacher. His selection of John Clare's poems (1920) was the first scholarly one of the century. Like Sassoon, Blunden published his first collection before the war. Although labelled 'Georgian', there was a period of some ten years during which, under the influence of the horrors of the war, Blunden wrote excellent and original poems which are in no sense Georgian. Nearly all these poems are in Poems 1914-30 (1932) and some of the best were incorporated into the prose memoirs, Undertones of War (1928). The fullest collection of his poetry is Poems of Many Years (1957). Read the poems, Report on Experience and The Midnight Skaters to see him at his very best.

Neil Powell (19 May, 3pm: Old Church Hall, Commodore Road, Oulton Broad) was born in 1948 and studied English and American Literature at the University of Warwick, subsequently being awarded an M Phil for work on English poetry. He taught English for several years, then became a bookseller and is now a freelance writer, editor and lecturer. He lives in Aldeburgh, Suffolk. His books include a literary biography, Roy Fuller: Writer and Society (1995); a critical study, Carpenters of Light (1979); a novel, Unreal City (1992); four volumes of poetry, At the Edge (1977), A Season of Calm Weather (1982), True Colours (1991) and The Stones of Thorpeness Beach (1994). He has also edited the Selected Poems of Fulke Greville (1990). Apart from writing and editing, Neil Powell teaches literature courses for the WEA in Suffolk and is a part-time tutor on the Cultural Studies degree course at Norwich School of Art and Design. Born in 1912, **Roy Fuller**, was a building society solicitor by profession until retirement. He made his reputation as a poet during the Second World War, though he had been publishing poetry, criticism and fiction since the mid-thirties. His best poetry is in his Collected Poems 1939-1961 (1962), which established him as a major poet of his generation. His novels are well observed and plotted and include My Child, My Sister (1965) and The Carnal Island (1970). Second Curtain (1953) is an excellent thriller. Fuller was Professor of Poetry at Oxford for the period 1968-73, Owls and Artificers being his best volume of lectures.

Pauline Stainer (16 June, 3pm, Library, 29 High Street, Hadleigh) was born in Stoke-on-Trent in 1941 and now lives in Essex. She was awarded a Hawthornden Fellowship in 1987 and two years later produced her first collection, The Honeycomb, followed by Sighting the Slave-Ship (1992) and The Ice-Pilot Speaks (1994), all of which, published by Bloodaxe, were Poetry Book Society Recommendations. The sequence called The Ice Pilot Speaks also won the Skools/Index on Censorship Poetry Competition in 1992. Pauline Stainer was featured as one of the 'New Generation Poets' in 1994.

The Zephyr Ensemble (13 July, 6.30pm, Church Hall, next to parish church, Aldeburgh), five musicians and a speaker, was formed five years ago by a group of instrumental teachers wishing to enter the field of performance and bring to their audiences some of the best repertoire of the genre. Their programmes range from Mozart to Grainger and back to Bach (not my pun, ed) with some

jazz in between. Their line-up consists of flute, Alan Smith; oboe, Judith Weale; clarinet, Mike Vorndran; horn, Marian Hellen; bassoon, Lewis Dann. Speaker Janet Dann, who comes from a background in drama, selects and presents poetry to link the musical content, reflecting or contrasting with the mood, to provide an experience which is becoming increasingly popular with audiences in the region.

U A Fanthorpe (11 August, 3pm, Library Lecture Hall, Old Foundry Road, Ipswich) was born in Kent in 1929 and now lives in Gloucestershire. She read English at St Anne's College, Oxford, following this with a PGCE at London University. From 1954-70 she taught English at Cheltenham Ladies' College, becoming Head of English there in 1962. In 1971 she decided to be a writer, and as a 'middle aged drop-out' had various part-time jobs between 1971 and 1974. A spell as clerk/receptionist at Burden Hospital, Bristol prompted her to begin writing poetry. She was writer in residence at St Martin's College, Lancaster, 1983-85. In 1987 U A Fanthorpe became a free-lance writer. She has since given many readings and workshops and made contributions to numerous radio and television programmes. She has on several occasions worked in collaboration with musicians and artists; the one with Nigel Dodd, the Bristol composer, and Frank Shippesides, the painter, resulted in The Bristol Triptych. She has also written a dramatic monologue on Tyndale and his translation of the Bible. In 1980 she won third prize in the Observer/Arvon/South Bank Show Poetry Competition and more recently a travelling Fellowship (1987) from the Royal Society of Authors (1986), and a Hawthornden Fellowship (1987). She became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (1988), gained an Arts Council Writers' Award in 1994, the Cholmondeley Award (1995) and an Hon D Litt from the UWE. She has also been a judge in the National Poetry Competition. Publications, all by Peterloo Poets, include Side Effects (1978), Standing To (1984), Selected Poems (1986), A Watching Brief (1987), Neck Verse (1992) and Safe as Houses (1995), a Poetry Book Society Recommendation.

Hardiman Scott (8 September, 3pm, The Priory, Stoke-by-Nayland) spent most of his professional career with the BBC. He was their first political correspondent - in the days when MPs (unbelievably!) were reluctant to be interviewed. Then he became their first political editor and finally chief assistant to the Director General. He regrets that he didn't continue writing at full pelt during these years, but says that, somehow, there didn't seem to be time. He has tried to make up for it since. At the request of the then government, Peter was one of a four-man team who went to Zimbabwe just before independence to advise the new regime on the reorganization of its broadcasting services but says that, not unexpectedly, things haven't turned out as they should have done. For eight years he also served, as a founding member, on the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, now merged with the Broadcasting Standards Council. In 1989 he was appointed OBE for his services to broadcasting. Peter is proud to be what he calls a thoroughbred East Anglian. He was born in King's Lynn, Norfolk, of a Norfolk father and Suffolk mother, and he spent his boyhood in the two counties. He and his wife live now in a fifteenth-century house in the West Suffolk village of Boxford. His Selected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt is Peter's fourteenth published book. Among the rest are three collections of poems and seven novels. **Sir Thomas Wyatt** (1503-1542), 'the first great English lyric poet', remains one of the most popular writers of Henry VIII's court, and the most romantic, given his entanglement with Anne Boleyn, which resulted - legend has it - in passionate and vulnerable poems. Hardiman Scott sees Wyatt as a modern poet before his time and will demonstrate the impact he had on the development of English poetry. Wyatt introduced the sonnet, terza rima and other Italian verse forms into English and invented forms and processes of his own.

I keep Friday as...my poetry writing day, and I have to arrange for the Muse to attend between 10am and 4pm - Alison Chisholm

William Scammell & Susan Wicks (13 October, 3pm, Belstead House, Ipswich)
Susan Wicks grew up in Kent and studied French at the Universities of Hull and Sussex, where she wrote a D Phil thesis on the fiction of Andre Gide. She has taught in France, America and Ireland. She lives in Tunbridge wells with her husband and two daughters and works as a part-time tutor for the University of Kent. She was one of the featured poets in Poetry Review's new poets issue, Jostling at the Sacred Gate (Autumn 1992), and one of the 'New Generation Poets' in the Spring 1994 issue. Her first collection, Singing Underwater, was published by Faber in 1992 and was shortlisted for the Eliot Prize. Open Diagnosis was published by Faber in 1994. Susan Wicks writes, 'I think irony is still our best friend and worst enemy. I think we still want the luxury of being able to say, "I am writing a poem", with an ironic twinkle in our eye. For me there is a kind of intellectual cowardice in that. If we are not prepared to take emotional and aesthetic risks, not prepared to lay ourselves open to the dangers of sentimentality or melodrama, how can we expect our readers to be fully human and vulnerable as they read us?''*

William Scammell, who lives in Cumbria, received a Cholomondeley Award for his first book of poems, Yes and No, and went on to win the National Poetry Competition in 1989. Other books include Eldorado, Bleeding Heart Yard, Five Easy Pieces and a book of tennis poems, The Game. His New and Selected Poems will be published by Sinclair-Stevenson in 1996. He is also well-known as an editor and reviewer and writes regularly for the Independent on Sunday, London Magazine, The Spectator, Poetry Review and other journals. His edition of Ted Hughes's selected prose, Winter Pollen, appeared from Faber last year.

*Information taken from Poetry Review, Spring 1994

 Like ordinary people, poets long to be loved. But all that is necessary is that they should be understood. - Roy Fuller

A SATURDAY EVENING TO REMEMBER

Members and their guests are invited to 'Borne on the Wind' - recital of poetry and music followed by a buffet supper to be held at the Church Hall, Aldeburgh on Saturday, 13 July at 6.30pm.

Tickets, £5 each, must be pre-booked. They will available from 1 May - on sale at SPS meetings (in May and June) or by post from Douglas Wood, Sandy Hill, Sandy Lane, Woodbridge IP12 4DJ. Please enclose an sae and make cheques payable to Suffolk Poetry Society.

Last date for applications: 30 June.

THE PRESIDENT AND THE SEXY POET

Our President, Peter Hardiman Scott, tells me that has given up writing novels and, in future, is going to stick to poetry and 'whatever comes along'. Well, the first thing that has come along is editing the Selected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt, which Carcanet are publishing in the Fyfield Book series in April @ £6.95.

Peter confesses that he had not read Wyatt, or his younger contemporary, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, for many years. The pair of them are credited with revitalizing English poetry, and Peter began his research with the assumption that Howard (whose tomb is in Framlingham church) was the greater poet. By the time he had finished he was convinced that Wyatt was not only the better poet but the finest poet from Chaucer to Spenser and, for today's reader, a 'modern' poet before his time. He introduced the sonnet to England, revived lyric poetry, and has left us some of the most delightful lyrics in the English language.

Peter will be enthusiastically telling us about the life, work and poetry of Wyatt in a talk, 'Sexy Poet and Diplomat', at Stoke by Nayland Priory. He says cheekily (his word), you might like to buy the book in the meantime.

 Poetry is something between the dream and its Interpretation - Roy Fuller

NEWS FROM MEMBERS

I had the pleasure of meeting **Renee Harris** when she launched her first book of poetry, No Headstone, at Woodbridge Books shortly before Christmas. She was doing brisk business and looking forward to her second anthology, having already written the first poem in hospital after a heart attack. No Headstone, whose title is taken from a poem written in memory of Renee's husband, is published by Pressenda Publishing in paperback at £5.99.

Helen Burke, a member from York has been having a breath-taking run of successes in poetry competitions. Last year she took the first prizes in York and Manchester, 3rd prize in the Open University and was runner-up in Jersey. Thanks to these feats she has been able to bring out two booklets of poems. She also adds that the programme at the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival last year was the most well-organized and wide-ranging she had been to. Several members, including myself, attend every year and always find something to enjoy.

In Outposts 180/181, (1995), **Hardiman Scott** has two poems, Bosnian Labels and Black and White (for Pauline Stainer - see page 2), and **Theresa Turk** goes all Byronic on a visit to Missolonghi Cemetery.

Charles Hunter, a new member, has had poems published in four anthologies: Me in Across The Table (Anchor Books), Sleepy Suffolk? in East Anglican Poets, The Chequered Flag in Pulse Rate Rising, both published by Arrival Press and Man's Best Friend in Island Moods and Reflections (Poetry Institute of the British Isles).

Ionne Hammond, who joined us at the end of 1994 has also had a poem published in Poetry Now's 1996 East Anglia Anthology

Nick Morgan has just informed me that his poem, King David Moved to Find His Lyre is to be published in an anthology, Sunlight and Shadows (PI of the BI).

Finally, **Marguerite Wood's** poem, Past the City Cemetery, will appear in a forthcoming anthology of railway poems, Marigolds Grow Wild on Platforms, edited by Peggy Poole and published by Castles in paperback at £9.99.

EYE TREE DRESSING

This heading suggested so many possibilities that I wondered whether Alan Wells, who submitted it, had been reading William Empson's, Seven Types of Ambiguity. The best thing will be to let Alan explain things for himself:

On Saturday 2 December 1995, as part of the celebrations for National Tree Week, SPS was invited to join with others, including children, by Mid-Suffolk District Council in presenting an evening of poetry, prose and Morris dancing under the Horse Chestnut tree at Eye Castle.

Four writing members participated in a very enjoyable couple of hours of mixed entertainment, contributing a thirty minute reading of their own poetry and that of other poets on the theme of 'trees'. Congratulations must go to Mid-Suffolk D C for a very well organized event, including punch and mince pies for all, completely free of charge. My thanks go to my fellow poets Mike Bannister, Ionne Hammond and Christopher North.

I never dared to be radical when young/ For fear it would make me conservative when old - Robert Frost, Precautions, 1936

NEWS FROM THE WOODBRIDGE GROUP

This group is flourishing to such an extent that it has had to be closed to further members for the time-being. There are twenty members, many from the Ipswich area, who meet at various venues during autumn and winter. Meetings so far have included presentations on Seamus Heaney and Keats, a reading from Twelfth Night and consideration of Poems Published from 1993-6 and Poems on Water. The final meeting, in late March, will look at Poems on Plants.

If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way? - EMILY DICKINSON in a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson

KEY NOTICE**OULTON BROAD, 19 MAY, 3pm - HOW TO GET THERE**

Follow signs from the A12, or whichever route, to Oulton Broad. In Oulton Broad, look for the Wherry Inn and, nearby, a chemist's shop. Commodore Road turns off beside the chemist's. The Old Church Hall, a white building with green woodwork, is on the right. Car parking is available at the Commodore pub and at Hoseason's (adjacent); there is on-street parking further down Commodore Road.

THE 1996 CRABBE MEMORIAL POETRY COMPETITION

Closing Date: 31 May 1996. Prizes £150 (and the chance to polish the Crabbe Memorial Silver Challenge Rose Bowl for twelve months), £100 and £75. Entry fee £2 for first poem; £1 for each additional poem. Adjudicators: William Scammell & Susan Wicks. Details and entry form from Competition Secretary, John Watts, Kingfisher Barn, King's Lane, Weston, Beccles, Suffolk. NR34 8TX

DODGY COMPETITIONS

The heading and what follows below come from a recent edition of Poetry News, an organ of the Poetry Society:

'There is a new danger, that of the dodgy poetry competition...The new breed of competitions act like vanity presses in little. They typically advertise in local and regional newspapers and there is no entry fee. Instead they make their money through selecting a very high proportion of 'winners' whose poems are included in an anthology. Winners are notified and offered advance sales of the anthology at a discount price of anything up to £30, plus an extra £10 or so to include a biography of the author, who does not receive a free contributor's copy of the publication. We can always tell when such a competition's results are out as we receive several phone calls asking whether or not these are scams. We advise that, whilst not illegal, such practice is bad practice and likely to be harmful to the poet's reputation. It is clear these competitions are making their money through the advance sales of the publications. It is rare in these cases to know who the judges are, and buyers are often disappointed by the quality of the book they finally receive in terms of both the quality of production and of the work contained within it...The organizations we receive the most enquiries about are the **Poetry Institute of the British Isles**, based in Huntingdon, **Poetry Now** and its imprints **Arrival Press**, **Forward Press** (no relation to Forward Publishing or the Forward Prizes) and **Anchor Books** based on Peterborough and **The National Library of Poetry Maryland USA**. The Poetry Society and other literature organizations are advising writers to steer clear of these organizations. They rarely have any interest in literature; Vanessa Sydenham, organizer of the Poetry Institute of the British Isles competitions admitted that she knows nothing about poetry and has never published a book before.'

The article concludes by saying that **no poetry editor will take seriously the claim that a writer has been published if these anthologies are cited as evidence.**

EDSPEAK

Members of the Committee have been getting queries for some time about the standing of some of the organizations mentioned above. Marguerite Wood and I, misguidedly but in good faith, submitted poems to anthologies published by the Peterborough group and were disappointed firstly at having to pay for our first copy of the anthology, secondly by the variable - I'm being kind here - standard of the contents and thirdly by the quality of the books themselves. Poets should remember that even if their work is of a good standard it may well be judged by the company it keeps. I'll return to this topic in the next issue of the NL and in the meanwhile would welcome members' views. I also invite news, book titles & authors for a **Poetry Bookshelf** feature and contributions to a proposed **Opinions** column in which readers are invited to express their views on any aspect of poetry. Send sae for list of poetry competitions but be patient.

Write to 20a Lynwood Avenue, Felixstowe, Suffolk. IP11 9HS

FRANK WOOD

20 March 1996