



Suffolk Poetry Society

NEWSLETTER Spring 2001

DIARY DATES..

Annual General Meeting. April 8 2001

"Thomas Hardy, Live". June 10 2001

Crabbe Competition Awards

Open Meeting. Belstead. Oct. 14 2001

With this edition we enclose a request form, hoping that all members will want to purchase a copy - or two - of the anthology selected by our late President, **Hardiman Scott - "Suffolk, a Celebration"**.

Production is limited to 500 copies; the anthology is a delightful collection of old and new, some written by members of the Suffolk Poetry Society. The purchase of this collection of poems will not only raise funds for the Hospice Movement, but the book will be a superb gift and permanent commemoration of all that Hardiman Scott contributed to poetry, and to our Society.

What is it....that encourages and invites us to read - or write poetry, to study it, to fill our bookshelves with with new and second-hand volumes. **How is it....** that some people are able to live their lives without poetry.

Perhaps one should ask...**who was it...**who inspired us, perhaps as children, to open a poetry book, and make the subject of poetry such a vital spark in our lives, being both a comfort and a solace in difficult and dark days, and such a joy when sunlight fills our horizons.

I was fortunate in that, as a child in a village school in my native Wiltshire during the grim days of the second world war, our much-loved Head Teacher planted the seed of poetry into the hearts and minds of all her charges. Our school days were happy - on fine days we roamed the fields and hedges on nature rambles; on wet and cold days, we sat and read and recited poetry. They were idyllic times; and throughout my life, I have never ceased to quietly thank that lady. The wonders of the natural world, and the delights of rhyme have indeed been a joy and source of delight.

Why am I telling you this.... We need to invite and persuade young people to read and write poetry, to add balance to life. Young people need to discover the pleasure and the delight of reading and writing poetry; they are essential to the future of this Society. **Please** draw to the attention of the young members of your family, young friends, to the posters in your local Library which give details of the Hardiman Scott Award for Young Poets.

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"Most people need poetry, but not much of it; it is a vitamin of which small familiar doses are enough. The poems most people know and enjoy, and turn over and over again through their lives, are like prayers addressed to the mystery of themselves"

Geoffrey Grigson 1905-1985

THE REV. SYDNEY SMITH 1771-1845....."oil of Lucca....."

In the Autumn 2000 edition of the "News Letter", readers will recall that we published a poem, appealing to both rhymers and epicureans, listing the ingredients for a salad dressing. A request was made to readers to shed light on the word "lucca".

Catherine Dell writes: The author is Sydney Smith. The poem "Recipe for a Salad" was quoted by Lady Holland in her "Memoir" published in 1855; Smith was a "star" of the Holland House set. As for "oil of lucca"...it is oil of Lucca", the olive oil from Lucca in Tuscany which is reckoned to be of very high quality. Interestingly, my copy of the poem uses only three spoonfuls of oil. There are other slight differences e.g 'which' in line four, not 'that', but the last four lines are completely different. The version I have, in an elderly, anthology ends:

'Then, though green turtle fail, though venison's tough,
And ham and turkey are not boiled enough,
Serenely full, the epicure may say:-
Fate cannot harm me - I have dined today.'

On the same topic, Eileen Newberry writes:

"Re. the 'oil of lucca' referred to in the Autumn News Letter.....Lucca is in northern Tuscany, where some of the finest olive oil is produced. It was, and still is, greatly prized. According to 'The Food Lover's Companion to Italy', by Marc and Kim Millon, "Tusca olio extra vergine d'oliva has a fragrance and flavour - lean and elegant, peppery when new and wholly ungreasy or fatty, that is, quite frankly, unrivalled by oils that we have tasted from anywhere else in Italy or, for that matter, the world. Often sold in bottles....these aristocrats, especially from the select estates in Chianti Classico, Carmignano and Lucca areas....are too good to be used just for cooking". The accompanying sketch map shows a bottle of olive oil next to the town of Lucca. So Sydney Smith (1771-1845) would be using the place-name for the product in his salad dressing".

(My sincere thanks to Catherine Dell and to Eileen Newberry for taking time to write, and to offer this information. Editor)

A THOUGHT....."For rhyme the rudder is of verses,
With which like ships they steer their courses"
Samuel Butler 1612-1680

THE BUNGAY POETRY CIRCLE.....Ivy Collins writes to give news of this group.

The Circle, which I run, has just published its anthology, "Lines from a Circle". I started the group in 1994 for those in the area who were writing poetry; the primary aim being to discuss and enjoy our own work. But at each meeting we also explored the work of various poets of the last century, preferably contemporary writers - subject, of course, to being able to find sufficient copies of their work from the local library where we meet.

We have now widened our approach to published work to include favourites - or pet hates - from any age, although no-one has yet stunned us by doing Beowulf in the original (and I do not somehow think they ever will). So our programme now is two meetings of our own work, and the third a personal choice night. Apart from this we enter competitions, with success sometimes; and one member is organising a series of informal talks to W.I groups. Now and again we try to identify some of the Lost Quotations which I download from the South Bank Centre Poetry Library web-site, and distribute it around the group as "homework". The pleasure this gives to the enquirer when I e-mail them to identify the poem, or complete it from the fragment they supplied, is sometimes quite overwhelming.

The anthology is our first and, if anyone is interested in having a copy, perhaps they would contact me on 01986 893208. The cost of the book, together with postage, is £4.95.

Ivy Collins.

Some men are good for righting wrongs -
And some for writing verses.

Frederick Locker-Lampson 1821-1895

SOUNDINGS..... According to Milton 'printed poems are the flat score of the spoken word'. And that flat score leaps into life when read aloud. If you, too, think that poetry takes on a new dimension when voiced, read on....

In the autumn, Suffolk College's Leisure Learning programme will include Poetry Out Loud, a course led by Catherine Dell. Since resigning as SPS Chair four years ago, Catherine has spent much of her time training to be a speaking skills teacher - and is now putting that training into practice. She describes Poetry Out Loud as 'an opportunity for people to share their enthusiasm for poetry and, at the same time, develop their vocal abilities'. If all goes to plan, Poetry Out Loud will take place on Monday evenings and be repeated on Friday mornings. For more information, contact Suffolk College (01473 343666) from June onwards.

Poetry Out Loud is about reading other people's poetry - from Anon's earliest to contemporary pieces. But if you write poetry, and give readings, you will

certainly be interested in another of Catherine's projects: reading aloud workshops for writers. The enclosed flier gives details of the next workshop which is happening locally, on **Sunday 22 April**, in Ipswich. Of course, if you belong to a writers' group, the group could have its very own workshop. Find out more from Catherine on **01473 730293**.

"A poem begins in delight - and ends in wisdom".
Robert Frost 1875-1963

A WORD FROM THE TREASURER.... As members of the Suffolk Poetry Society, whether as poets or poetry lovers, do we live in a world of dreams? Do we imagine our world of illusion and fantasy is not real and detached from any concern. I regret that, as your treasurer, should you suffer from such delusions, I must ask you to face the bald truth.

The art we follow, the beautiful world of poetry, costs money to run, and we never have enough. During my membership of the society, some five years, I have been an enthusiastic member of the portfolio section, and through my participation have made many friends. I took over as the treasurer from Douglas Wood, two years ago and was told it was a simple book-keeping job. Just as well, because I am no accountant. The reality is that our activities are underwritten by generous support from various sponsors. In the harsh reality of the twenty-first century, however, this open-handed support is no longer as freely available. Thank goodness we can still rely on some support, but our prime activities have always been financed by our main sponsor, the Eastern Arts Board.

Regrettably, their support has dwindled, and they, through a draconian bureaucracy, make it harder and harder for a small society such as ours to apply for a funding. We used to be funded with very little effort by this excellent body. Of late, they have intimated that we are 'too small' to be considered worthy of support. You can be assured that your committee, ably led by Mike Bannister, are not going to take this rebuff lying down.

Should our efforts fail, it is not, however, the end of the line; but it does mean that a more commercial approach to our activities must be made. I am loathe to suggest an increase in membership fees, but we do require a more positive form of support from all members; perhaps bigger and better attendance at the programme of speakers which we hold each year. We have made it easier for you to bring friends and non-members to these events, by making a simple entry fee of £1.50 for all. We need you to support the fund-raising activities, the garden party in the summer, and the Crabbe lunch. Please become more involved, and join with us in raising the profile of the Society. Encourage your friends to be active members, especially your young friends; spread the gospel of the beautiful art which we enjoy.

Your committee would welcome any suggestion to help us improve the Society. Do you know anyone who might be interested in helping us financially, perhaps by

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either sponsorship, or a generous grant ? Donations have always helped to ease the burden as the administrative costs rise.

You are blessed with a committee whose hard work and personal generosity have kept the society solvent up to now. Please continue to back them up, and kindly give consideration to any way in which you can help us to improve the running of your society.

Terence Butler Hon. Treasurer.

REVIEWS....New Readings....Collected Poems, by R.F.Langley Carcanet.

Tom Thumb is a reflective poem from the mind of a man shelling prawns; a stream of apparently simple sentences, clear as spring water. The flow (if you will pardon my metaphor) eddies and returns, as do the unexpected and buried rhymes. The images, like molecules within, turn and spin to make a deep, and magical harmony; for R.F.Langley, it is swifts and midges, owls and herons, who keep time across the landscape of his adoptive Suffolk.

'Jack' is some kind of alter ego, present through these poems of nature and human nature; a sort of Green Man. Jack o' Lantern, Jack of the woods, Jack Frost, Southwold Jack, or Jack Springheeled ? We are never sure, but his slightly sinister presence pervades. He is the essence of what lies deep beneath our love of the wild.

Langley draws us into the cycle of life; up close with moths and spiders, the world that insists on going on, implies we have a part; affirms the living. It has taken him twenty years to make these beautifully turned lines. It will take me another enjoyable twenty to get to the bottom of them.

If you like the 'meaning' of a poem to spring out and hit you over the head at first reading; R.F. Langley is not for you. If, on the other hand, you sense in the old song 'Green Grow the Rushes, O' a thousand possible clues to all that has ever been known and forgotten, then this poet is your poet. Buy his intriguing book, which came close to winning the Whitbread Poetry Prize this year.

"Greenstreet" January 2001

Collected Poems by R.N.Currey, published by Philip and Currey £30
(£20 to members of SPS)

The life of a man. Ralph Currey, born Mafeking 1907, traveller,pedagogue, poet,parent, some time President of the Suffolk Poetry Society has seen through a century, to bring us now, a beautifully finished volume of his work. The historical, geographical, and domestic range is, in itself, astonishing. South Africa, India, War, and the impact of war. Europe, The Caribbean, America, The Antipodes, and throughout all, Currey's own family and the family of mankind.

What is important about this hugely diverse collection, is the equanimity of the poet's view. Few can have seen so much, and maintained a level gaze.

These are words of a gentle and fond philosopher, whose pleasure is to show us **how it was**, not just for the writer, but for all time and history. Respect for the reader is at the heart of it; a tenderness(I am tempted to say innocence) that rules out partiality, excitability, tendentiousness or worse. The writer's poetic craft has many aspects; typified for this reader in Boy with a Rifle (p78) Stretchers (p77) & the Rajputan Poems (p128/9)

In a brilliant introduction, **Ronald Blythe** outlines the life of R.N.Currey, the poet and his roots. Members should treasure this volume for years to come, and are fortunate in being offered a special discount by the publishers. Here is a feast of verse, not to be missed.

"Greenstreet" January 2001

"Angling is somewhat like poetry, men are born to it".
Izaak Walton 1593-1683.

RETURN OF THE NATIVE.... A famous son of Aldeburgh comes home at last, after an exile of one hundred and eighty years ! Strange news, but true in the most poetic of senses. **GEORGE CRABBE** (1754-1832) poet, cleric, botanist, some-time apothecary, and surgeon's apprentice, now manifest in the form of a carved statuette in palest marble, will soon take pride of place in the Council Chamber of Aldeburgh's historic Moot Hall.

Our unique statuette was presented to **The Suffolk Poetry Society** long ago by a mysteriously un-named donor. For some years, the little icon was brought to the Society's Annual Open Meeting, at which the prizes for the Crabbe Memorial Poetry Competition were awarded. The Christchurch Mansion Museum in Ipswich later became its home, until recent changes caused the Society to seek a new and more appropriate setting for the presiding spirit of poetry in East Anglia.

At the suggestion of Catherine Dell, we approached the curator of the Aldeburgh Museum, Clare Foss, who was quick to appreciate the felicity of such a "homecoming", and began at once to make appropriate arrangements for the return of **George Crabbe** to his native town.

Mike Bannister.

(This is an extract from a longer article due to appear in the **Suffolk and Norfolk Life** in April 2001)

"(Poetry) a criticism of life, under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty"
Matthew Arnold 1822-1888 "The Study of Poetry".

THINGS BEING VARIOUS

I was puzzled by Sheila Hudson's reasons for wishing Christina Rossetti had remained amongst the great unpublished: her *sombre works reflect her obsession with self, and death and all things melancholy*. Do they? What about *A Birthday*, which begins,

*My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;*

and is a fine love poem, or *Song*:

*When I am dead my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me:*

It's true that many of the poems about death do not have this cheery sound, but many of the ones I can remember having read are uplifting: poems such as *Uphill*, which begins

Does the road wind uphill all the way?

but promises *comfort* after life's journey. Yes, there is irony here, but that makes the poem more interesting. There is also the moving *Remember*, which ends

*Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad*

which must have given consolation to many people at times of danger or bereavement. Certainly morbidity vies with Christian yearnings, providing an interesting tension in some of her poetry, and yes, occasionally morbidity wins.

Poets are of the age in which they live. The Victorians were surrounded by death in a way which is difficult for us to imagine. One has only to look at the tombstones of the era and see the lists of infants, and we know that many women died in childbirth. A glance through Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* will reveal many poems about the deaths of children and wives and lovers, some, to our ears, verging on the mawkish.

So I am glad Christina achieved publication, but while we're on the subject of sombre works, self-obsession and death, how about a prime candidate for jettisoning from the balloon – Sylvia Plath?

Now for something completely different. No matter what form or subject-matter you use in your poems, why not enter *The First Isthmus Open Poetry Competition*. This one is unusual in that it runs from February until October 2001 and the closing date is the 25th of each month. The cost is £3 per poem: monthly winners are short-listed for the November final. I don't know who the adjudicators are or what the prize money is. Contact 07770 748558 in the evening only.

A series of Poetic Weekend Breaks are being held in Ledbury in March (Langland, tutor Ronald Blythe), April (Edward Thomas, tutor Jem Poster), and Elizabeth Barrett Browning (tutor Gillian Clarke). Contact 01531 634156.

A great second-rate poet, is what Sir Malcolm Bradbury called Sir John Betjeman. Which knight do you support?

Frank Wood

Suffolk Poetry Society Programme 2001

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| <p>To Hadleigh by way of Orkney</p> <p>Pauline has published five collections with Bloodaxe. <i>The Wound-dresser's Dream</i> was shortlisted for the Whitbread Prize. Her most recent book, <i>Parable Island</i>, evokes the seascapes and landscapes of Orkney, where she recently lived for three years.</p> | <p>Pauline Stainer</p> | <p>March 1st, 7.30 pm</p> <p>The Public Library
29 High Street
Hadleigh</p> |
| <p>AGM
followed by
Poet, translator, critic... and President</p> <p>Our very own Bertie once served on the North West Frontier and is a Knight of the White Rose of Finland. In between is much writing, teaching and many awards. His ninth book of poetry is <i>A Useless Passion</i> (London Magazine Editions 1998).</p> | <p>Herbert Lomas</p> | <p>April 8th, 2.30pm</p> <p>The Red Cross Hall
Theatre Street
Woodbridge</p> |
| <p>Songs of Experience</p> <p>Dinah has read her poetry in all kinds of venues, at home and abroad. Her latest collections are <i>Second Sight</i> (1993), <i>May Day</i> (1997) and <i>Time on Earth: Selected and New Poems</i> (Rockingham Press 1999). She lives in London and runs the small press Katabasis.</p> | <p>Dinah Livingstone</p> | <p>May 13th, 3 pm</p> <p>[Address to follow]
Bury St Edmunds</p> |
| <p>Thomas Hardy, live</p> <p>We last saw Geoff as a totally convincing Kipling (give or take a few inches). He's been Dickens, Trollope, Lear and many other 19th-century authors, since he gave up teaching English in Cambridge in 1985 and turned himself into <i>Travelling Theatre</i>.</p> | <p>Geoff Hales</p> | <p>June 10th, 3 pm</p> <p>[Address to follow]
Beccles</p> |
| <p>"Low-key but rich with delays"</p> <p>So Les Murray described Myra's poetry (with unconscious irony: her visit last year had to be postponed!). Her eighth collection, <i>Insisting on Yellow: new and selected poems</i>, was published in 2000. Myra is a tutor at The Poetry School in London.</p> | <p>Myra Schneider</p> | <p>September 9th, 3 pm</p> <p>The Priory
Stoke by Nayland
(Members only)</p> |
| <p>Crabbe Competition Awards (Open Meeting)</p> <p>Presentation of prizes; award-winning poems; comment by adjudicator Anne Beresford, who will then read from her own work and answer questions.</p> | | <p>October 14th</p> <p>Belstead House
Ipswich</p> |
| <p>"Our Diogenes"</p> <p>"Truth-teller to a meretricious age, he continues with each book to break new ground," wrote Paul Merchant in <i>PN Review</i>. Ken's twelfth and latest book with Bloodaxe, <i>Wild Root</i>, was a Poetry Book Society choice.</p> | <p>Ken Smith</p> | <p>November 1st, 7.30 pm</p> <p>[Address to follow]
Ipswich</p> |

PRIZE WINNER.... Members will be pleased to know that Mrs May Sumser-Ali was awarded second prize for her poem **REMEMBRANCE DAY**, in the Literary Review Poetry Competition. The set subject was "Battle" and the prize was £150. May is a member of the Portfolio group, and the members of that group will have read her poem; we all offer our warmest congratulations on her success.

"DEAD WIFE'S DRESSES".... was published last year, and is a book of selected poems written by FLORENCE COX. The book contains some of the poems written by Florence during the last decade, and cover a wide range of subjects including old age, war, love, dancing, bullying and childhood. Florence has been a prize winner and has received commendations in recent Crabbe Competitions. Comments about her work include : "Concise, yet warm, humorous, alive..." (Judith Kazantzis, writing about "Disney in Hades") "Reminiscent of Edwin Muir's best work and of the young Wordsworth...." (John Mole, writing about The Block"). "I was struck by the breadth of your content and yet admired the consistency of your voice. Yours is a voice that speaks of sufferings, joys, and laughter, of compassion and wonder".(John Watts, writing after the publication of "Dead Wife's Letters")

"Dead Wife's Dresses" is available at Waterstone's in Ipswich, Magpie Books and Poor Richard's Books in Felixstowe, Woodbridge Books and the Aldeburgh Bookshop, price £4.00. Members of the Suffolk Poetry Society may purchase the book for the same price (postage and packing free) by sending a cheque for £4.00 (payable to Florence Cox) to: Florence Cox, 25 Constable Road, Felixstowe. Suffolk.IP11 7HN.

MILLENNIUM TREE PLANTING.... Ten members of the Suffolk Poetry Society gathered at the home of Mr and Mrs Henry Engleheart, The Priory, Stoke by Nayland on the morning of February 7 2001. In a quiet and dignified manner, we planted a Birch tree - a fine specimen of *Betula alba sinensis* variation *Septentrionalis*; planting it close to the pond, and visible from the house. It was a splendid morning, the weather was both kind and clement, with the sun appearing during the actual planting. A small plaque was erected beside the tree to mark the occasion; Mike Bannister read an appropriate poem over the newly planted tree; "The Birch", by Robert Frost - and we then gathered in the library to drink coffee and to chatter. The Priory has become a second home to many members of the Society over the years, and we are grateful to Mr and Mrs Engleheart for their continuing hospitality.

Our Birch tree is a very special tree; eventually it will develop grey-pink bark which peels in thin strips. Its leaves are matt-green, and the tree could grow to a height of 80 feet. *Betula alba sinensis* is a native of Western China. The Priory grounds support a variety of trees, both conifer and broadleaved - and the owners are full of enthusiasm for their trees.

Michael Stagg.

POETRY GREECE.... We have received the Winter edition 2000/2001 of this magazine. It is a well-produced work, full of poems in both English and Greek, articles and interviews, news of competitions and web-sites, and numerous advertisements appealing to "Greekophiles" and those who are sun-worshippers. Please contact the Editor if you would like to borrow this magazine.

SUFFOLK POETRY SOCIETY LIBRARY.... Members are reminded that the Society has a collection of poetry - including books of poetry produced by members. If you would like to borrow a book(s) - please contact Marguerite and Douglas Wood, who kindly house and administer this library. All members should be in possession of the Library List, but anyone who does not have this, should contact the News Letter Editor.

WILLIAM HOUSE.... Three members of the Committee paid another visit to William House, (a warden assisted housing complex) on Thursday 15 February. This was by invitation of the residents, and the Warden, Mrs Yvonne Dix. The visit was the fourth made by the society during the last year, as part of the Ipswich Arts Association Adopt-a-Centre Scheme. On this occasion, there was a slight addition to the programme in that the poetry was illustrated by slides. (An example of this was the reading, by Mike Bannister, of "The Wild Swans at Coole", by W.B.Yeats, illustrated by a slide of the painting, "Pastures at Coole", by poet's brother, Jack Butler Yates) The themes for the readings were "Wild Life", and "Love" - we were only a day beyond Saint Valentine's Day !

The event was enjoyed by readers and audience alike, and the tea and gossip afterwards allowed us to strengthen the bond of friendship which has grown during our visits.

Frances Gilson, Secretary of the Ipswich Arts Association wrote to us:

"I am asked to convey their thanks and congratulations to the Suffolk Poetry Society for the success of this project...."

We shall return !

Michael Stagg

AUTUMN NEWS LETTER.... The proposed date for the despatch of the Autumn edition is mid-September, and so copy for this would need to be with me by August. Please send contributions to me at: 4 Saxon Way, Woodbridge, IP12 1LG. Do write...about local poetry groups, readings, events, competitions, etc... we would be pleased to hear from you !

Last, but by no means least... Thank you, to our sponsors...

