

SUFFOLK POETRY SOCIETY

Newsletter April 2003

Dates for your diary.....

Sunday 13 April. Annual General Meeting 2.30pm
followed by "This glad summons". Gill Phillips

Saturday 31 May. This is the closing date for
entries to the 2003 Crabbe Memorial Competition.

FROM THE EDITOR.....

We live in dark and dismal times; there are the distant sounds of the drums of war.

I am reminded of the words of an anti-war poet, who lived in equally grim days, John Scott of Amwell (1730-1783) "I hate that drum's discordant sound/ Parading round, and round, and round...." Most poets are against war. There are exceptions, of course. Some of Rupert Brooke's words seem to welcome the prospect of a fight, "as swimmers into cleanness leaping"; but his last letters home acknowledged the harsh reality of war.

Elsewhere in this News Letter, Anne Beresford writes on her own feelings about war. Poets, more I think than prose writers, tackle the cruel and wasteful aspects of conflict, and present to the reader visions of battles and the subsequent costs in human loss with a more gentle, sensitive approach. "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", wrote William Wordsworth. Perhaps this explains why so many men, facing certain death in the mud of Flanders, in the North African deserts, and in other spheres of war, have produced such fine and memorable poetry. Does peace produce such "powerful feelings" within us ?

Will a sudden outbreak of peace produce not only more poets, but poetry which will both live, and outlive ? Perhaps we should give peace a chance. Meanwhile, may I suggest that we might take comfort from reading some verse by a gentle and sensitive poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins. Reading Hopkins will reveal the obverse side of the coin; try reading his poem "Peace". Read it daily, thrice daily.

Michael Stagg

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And on a more mundane but practical note....those who have been bitten by the computer bug - and those simply curious, will be interested to know that there is a Suffolk Poetry Society web site: www.blythweb.co.uk/sps where details of the Society may be found. The same need to be aware that the Editor can be contacted via email: margie.stagg@breathemail.net and to where contributions for the News Letter can be sent. Please note the proposal made for the establishment of an email "Poems Swop"; details appear in this News Letter.

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"Overtaken by events...OR...How I became Chairman by default"

The only reason I joined the Suffolk Poetry Society, some eight years ago, was because of my mum, Renee Harris. She was the poet; my main interest was drama, and I'd recently joined the Deben Players. For all that, I enjoyed SPS meetings (I've always loved poetry) and found people friendly and interesting. But I never dreamed I would one day be on the committee, let alone become chairman.

Well, the events of last autumn overtook us all, and there I was, chairman by default as it were, inheriting a depleted committee, a programme in disarray and a financial crisis.

While I was still recovering from the shock, the remaining committee members swung into action. Bertie Lomas, our President, was requested to help tide us over the crisis - and gave unstintingly of his time and expertise. Marguerite Wood was co-opted on to the committee because of her vast experience of chairing and serving on it. Maureen Butler resumed the post of Secretary, and Michael Stagg took up his editorship of the Newsletter again. Peter Davey took over the Portfolio, and Terry Butler combined the already onerous task of Treasurer with the organization of the Crabbe Competition. (I think that we are lucky that Terry has recently joined the ranks of the retired !) Gerard Melia managed to obtain some much-needed sponsorship, and Judy Ryland, who had worked so hard to encourage the active participation of all SPS members, also hosted our committee meetings, providing a warm and cosy atmosphere - not to mention tea and biscuits - that helped us to work together more as a group of friends than as a committee. Every single member of the committee dedicated an unbelievable amount of time and effort into ensuring that, in spite of the lack of money, we had a viable programme for 2003. I still do not quite know how they did it.

So this is by way of a tribute to all the members of the committee, and to our President. Thank you all. Without you there would be no Suffolk Poetry Society for me to chair - or for our members to enjoy.

It is up to you, the members, now. Come to meetings, support the speakers who have generously agreed to give their services free, or almost free, and ensure that this historic Society, the Crabbe Competition and the much-appreciated Portfolio continue to flourish well into the twenty-first century.

Beryl Sabel

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"By heaven, I do love, and it hath taught me to rhyme, and to be melancholy".
"Love's Labour's Lost"

"Rhyme is the rock on which thou art to wreck". John Dryden 1631-1700

"No, I was not born under a rhyming planet...." "Much Ado About Nothing"

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"This 'n That"

Ted Hughes says that poets are like pigs, only valuable after their death; but I would like to put in a claim for two living poets, both SPS members: Anne Beresford and Pauline Stainer. They are both great visionaries and, as I like to say too often recently, a non-visionary poet is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, if not an actual moron.

Anne read from her new book **Hearing Things** (Katabasis) for us on March 30 at Kelsale, along with her husband Michael Hamburger, who read from his new book, **From a Diary of Non-Events** (Anvil). I pass lightly and unjustly over him here because his just and great fame tends unjustly to overshadow Anne, in spite of her ten volumes of witty poems - so quiet they creep up on you, elusively, allusively, apparently limpidly, but leaving something darker but ultimately more illuminating to digest, something very human and slightly more than human.

Pauline was reading in the hospitable, imaginative and enterprising Aldeburgh Bookshop in February to help launch Wendy Mulford's excellent and handsome new **Selected Poems** (Etruscan Books). Pauline herself is bringing out her **Selected Poems** with Bloodaxe in the autumn. SPS members have heard her read, and will remember how she comes "softly into the underground chamber", "working by touch alone". When she reads and fills you in on the origins of the poems, they seem so lucid. The penny drops, but when you read them again you see there's another penny, or rather a sovereign, waiting to drop if only you give it time. Whatever the poem seems to be about at first is a trope for something sacred, seen quite newly by a keenly scientific mind.

Bertie Lomas

Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze it with itself, but with its subject".

John Keats

"The Crabbe Memorial Poetry Competition 2003"

This year we are hoping for a bumper entry to the annual competition. To date, entries have been steady, but as the closing date (May 31) draws nearer, we are hoping for a sudden surge of inspiration from our members. Look to your muse; Winter is past, Spring is here and Summer yet to come. The Sun will shine, the Moon and the Stars still inspire - and all the world's a stage ! So come on poets; give vent to your heart, and let your soul burst forth and startle our adjudicator with the splendour of your creation !

If you cannot find your entry form which we sent you with the last News Letter, you can get one from your local library - or contact me by telephone: (01394 277360) Or you can email MaureenandTerry@aol.com But please support the competition; and, whether you win or not, come and enjoy the lunch and presentation of the prizes at Belstead House on October 12. I have entered the competition every year for the past seven years and never got into the reckoning; but the lunch and social event are so enjoyable. There is the opportunity to meet fellow members, to be inspired by the winners and to hear

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them read their own work. All members will be contacted at a later date regarding bookings, and the menu for lunch; but please put the date in your diary now.

With each competition, we produce an anthology of the winning and commended poems together with comments from the adjudicator. These anthologies are good value (2.50) and can be ordered when you enter the competition, or purchased at the lunch. We have a number of back copies which can be purchased (1.00) and can be obtained from me. I look forward to an avalanche of entries, and wish you all every success.

Terry Butler Competition Secretary.

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We need to be reminded.... "Science is for those who learn; poetry for those who know"
Joseph Roux

The Summer Garden Party

The party will be held on Sunday June 29 2003 from 3pm until 5pm in Marguerite Wood's garden. The musical entertainment is being finalised - but a pleasant social gathering is guaranteed. We shall have a light buffet tea whilst being entertained; and there will be a raffle. What could be better than to spend a summer afternoon lazing in a garden, listening to music, and enjoying the opportunity to meet other members of the Society on this purely social occasion? Please bring your friends!! Entrance fee will be £5.00. Please mark this date in your diaries. Nearer the date, further information will be sent to all members - including directions - and a tear-off booking slip. Do PLEASE attend! We look forward to meeting you, and your friends.

Maureen Butler

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A consoling thought....."You know who critics are; the men who have failed at literature and art".

Benjamin Disraeli

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Hadleigh Poetry Festival

The annual Hadleigh Poetry Festival was held on Sunday March 9 2003 in Hadleigh Town Hall. A section of the Hadleigh Choral Society launched the proceedings with a small selection of madrigals; this was followed by a welcome from the Mayor of Hadleigh.

The first seven poets from the Hadleigh district, which included Pauline Stainer, gave readings from their current work. This was followed by the awards to pupils from local schools. Throughout the year, school staff set aside poems which they consider noteworthy, and suitable for public reading at the Festival. Each pupil (there were thirteen this year) receives a book token for £20, from money donated to the Hadleigh Charity shop. In addition this

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year, an extra award was made by Julia Hanford, in memory of her husband Dr Robin Hanford who died last year. This award was made to the best poem from Hadleigh High School. (During the interval, a couple from Bury St Edmunds offered to pay for the publication of the children's poetry, read at the 2002 and 2003 Festivals)

Following the interval, Michael Laskey and John Hole gave readings; musical interludes were provided by Tom Veasey and Ann Melia. The audience came from Sudbury, Bury St Edmunds, Polstead, Clacton, Colchester, Maldon and Wickford as well as the Hadleigh area - over one hundred and eighty lovers of poetry attended the Festival. Plans are being laid for the 2004 festival - watch this space !

Gerard Melia Festival Organiser

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(At the beginning of February, the Editor wrote to several members asking for contributions to the News Letter. This piece was written mid-February.)

"For or Against ?"

To sit down and write about poetry when we are on the brink of war, feels wrong. Even to contemplate writing a poem feels wrong. We come up against the old argument, the question which I get asked at poetry readings "What **good** does art do ? Does it do **any** good ?" The answer must be "**YES**". But at this moment, poetry is almost the last thing on my mind.

At the same time, I am aware of the birds singing; for, in spite of the cold, they are preparing for Spring. There is a woodpecker busy in one of the trees, and there are muntjac deer in the orchard. The kind of war for which Bush and Blair are preparing could destroy all that. Politicians have messed up this beautiful world of ours. I wonder if the poets, painters and musicians would do a better job ?

Anne Beresford

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"Poet in Cape Town"

Many readers will remember Lewis Watling, Crabbe Award winner, pillar of the Bungay Poets. Twenty months ago, at the age of 83, Lewis flew out to start a new life in Cape Town, with his daughter Maria and her family. He left us with the immortal phrase - "I am determined not to die in Kessingland".

Lewis now teaches three mornings a week - 'a treasured link', he says ' with a generation, which despite, or perhaps because of, the huge task of turning things round upon our beautiful planet, helps make all the things I am trying to do, significant'. He also maintains a steep, triple-terrace garden, which needs daily watering. No wonder that the medics report that his health profile has improved, since he arrived there.

Of a recent mugging encounter, on the coastal cat-walk, the response is

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typical of the man. 'I was so angry, I simply stormed "How dare you go around, threatening people like this" at a youth who brandished a screw-driver at me. He was so taken aback that we eventually parted friends....'

Lewis has written more poetry than ever before, and brought his biography up to date. His final word? 'I live to focus on what is breaking through, rather than focusing on what is breaking down'.

Mike Bannister

(Readers will also be pleased to learn that Mike Bannister's forthcoming collection **"Greenstreet Fragments"** will be published in May 2003. A review written by John Withers, will appear in the Autumn/Winter News Letter 2003.)

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"Suffolk: A Celebration" An anthology selected by Peter Hardiman Scott.

It may be recalled that in 2001, the Society produced this anthology, not only as a tribute to our late President, **Peter Hardiman Scott OBE**, but also as a means of raising money for the Hospice Movement. The anthology consists of a programme of poetry which Peter had intended to read at The Priory, Stoke by Nayland, in 1999. Regrettably, he was too ill to attend, but the collection was read by three members of the Society, to a very appreciative membership.

The anthology was duly produced, and sold extremely well, supported not only by members of the Society, but was well-received by poetry lovers everywhere. We are grateful to all members who persuaded their local bookshops to take a supply of the anthology, for sale. These bookshops were truly wonderful, and raised a considerable amount of money which we were able to donate to the movement. Eventually, we gave £900 - and also the unsold copies of the anthology - to the Hospice Movement. We have no doubt that they will soon sell the remaining copies (through their own shops) and this will realise a total of £2000. From the balance of the unsold books, we retained 25 copies. If members wish to purchase this anthology, (£5.50 to cover cost and p & p) please write to Terry Butler 9 Gainsborough Road, Felixstowe Suffolk IP11 7HT. Cheques/postal orders should be made payable to 'The Suffolk Poetry Society'.

Terry Butler

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"Swop-a-Poem!"

It was suggested at a recent committee meeting that some members might like to use e-mail to exchange poems and, hopefully, (helpful!) criticism. Not everyone is computer literate - and this involvement will not impinge on the Portfolio, or its members; the two systems will not be in competition. The "Swop-a-poem" will be a simple system; for a fee, six poets with e-mail facilities, would register their intention to take part in the scheme, in an edition of the News Letter. A list of their e-mail addresses would appear in the News Letter. Members who are interested in being involved in this pilot scheme should contact Gerard Melia. E-mail gerardthomas@melia32.fsnet.co.uk

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Stoke by Nayland Meeting - September 2003

As you will be aware, at The Priory this year (September 14) we shall be entertaining each other. We ask that you submit your poem(s) - your own, or one which has a special meaning for you, or simply one which you like, so that we will be able to prepare a printed programme. This will keep the programme varied and entertaining, and avoid repetition. You are free to read the poem(s) yourself - or have them read for you. The meeting at The Priory is the highlight of the SPS annual programme; it is a special venue - with generous and kind hosts. With your enthusiasm for this new style of meeting, we shall enjoy a wonderful afternoon. For those who have not yet been to the annual gathering at The Priory, please ensure that you attend this year ! In order that we have time to prepare the programme for the printer, please send copies of the poem(s) which you intend to read - or have read - to the Secretary, Maureen Butler, by the end of July. (9 Gainsborough Road, Felixstowe, IP11 7HT

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Which are you.....? "Some men are good for righting wrongs - and some for writing verses".
Frederick Locker-Lampson 1821-1895

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Portfolio News

From your **Portfolio Secretary**, whom you have warmly welcomed.....!

Our thoughts and prayers go out to three members who have had to give up membership through illness - Mrs Joan Emmens, Mrs Anna Evelyn and Mrs Eileen Newberry....we hope that you will soon return to good health. The Folio membership still stands at twenty-two, with three new poets. We welcome: Mr Gerard Melia, Mrs Polly Clarke and Mr David Mead. Membership is almost split evenly - twelve ladies, ten gentlemen.

The Membership Secretary informs me that one or two members are somewhat tardy in their payment of subscriptions.....and a few members are equally tardy in forwarding folio sets onto the next member. Please respond swiftly to both, and help to reduce telephone and postage costs.

Interest in the new Portfolio Competition has been surprising; many of our more prolific poets have sent in as many as six poems - others none. However, as long as people continue to comment on the poems which they receive, this should not present a problem. I hope that enough members will use their voting papers to enable us to adjudge a winner at the end of the year.

And some answers to a couple of queries....NO..you do not vote for your own work...and YES, the results will be checked by someone who is not a member of the Portfolio group. May your muse be with you.

Peter Davey

And talking of criticism.....this is Coleridge talking about Tennyson...

"The trouble is, that he (Tennyson) has begun to write verses without very well understanding what metre is".
"Table Talk" April 24 1833

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Mrs Hazel Fisher 1907-2002

On October 30th last year, members of the Aldeburgh Poetry Circle went to a service at the church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul - a Thanksgiving for the life of **Mrs Hazel Fisher**.

Soon after she came to live in Aldeburgh more than thirty years ago, **Hazel** joined our group, and remained a devoted member until she died in her 96th year. **Hazel's** love for poetry went hand in hand with her love for music. During her early years, she trained as a singer, and it was originally, she told me, through the settings of poems by musicians like Vaughan Williams and Ivor Gurney, that she was drawn to poetry. Poems like D.G. Rossetti's "Silent Noon" married magically with Vaughan William's setting, were an inspiration to her, leading her on to explore the wonders of poetry. Over the years, music and poetry became an essential part of her life.

Hazel was one of those gifted poetry lovers whose enthusiasm was able to touch us all. For years she shared her lovely home with us, where we read our poetry each fortnight in luxurious comfort surrounded by her very special garden. Looking back, I realise how lucky we were, for she made it possible for us to enjoy lectures given by Peter Hardiman Scott on a whole range of poets, for ten successive years. I think of those lectures as a vital period of expansion and widening our knowledge of poetry.

As **Hazel** became increasingly frail, her enthusiasm for poetry never waned; in fact, if anything, it deepened. Although she found it impossible to get to the Suffolk Poetry Society meetings - particularly regretting the autumn visit to Stoke Priory, a great memory for her - she remained interested in the ways contemporary poetry was developing, with festivals, poetry competitions, and workshops springing up all over the country. She rejoiced in this upsurge of interest in poetry internationally, as well as nationally.

Trix Cockshott

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From Ecclesiasticus....."Let us now praise.....such as found out musical tunes, and recited verses in writing..."

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And further reminders...(the Editor being of the opinion that one cannot be told good news too often)

Please...please remember the Crabbe Competition...send your poem(s) to the Competition Secretary. The closing date is May 31 2003. It is important to support all SPS activities, to keep the Society alive and involved. **PLEASE DO** make the effort to attend meetings - we would love to see you at any - or all - of the events.....Annual General Meeting...the Garden PartyThe Priory event (see page 7)the gathering at Belstead.

And...the Editor lives in fear of redundancy.....please keep your articles, news, opinions, information..etc, flowing. All contributions will be warmly received, on paper. tape, disc, incised in stone if needs be.....Thank you.

You never know what you can do until you try -A somewhat backhanded tribute to a great lady

"I can't write poetry!" she said a mere 12 years ago. Who? My mother, Renee Harris. Yet in the last 10 years of her life poems poured from her pen and I think she was only truly happy when writing. In the poem *Anon* she describes her room as "littered with plants and papers, paper spilling madly everywhere," an accurate reflection of how she lived for some 3 years before moving to Suffolk with me. Once here the poetic activity continued unabated, first in the cottage in Brook Street, Woodbridge, then in the bungalow in Martlesham, the only difference being that now I was on had to clear away the paper! And I only joined SPS because of her.

Ironically enough, it was because of me that Mum started writing poetry. When Dad died at the age of 76 Mum took it hard. They'd been married for 53 years and it had been a real love match. A year or two after his death, in an attempt to take Mum out of herself, I persuaded her to come with me to some Creative Writing classes being run at a local school by my friend, the poet Myra Schneider. That September 10 or 12 of us sat at desks in the big, high-ceilinged, echoing classroom. We pushed the desks back and sat in a circle, but it was still difficult to achieve an intimate atmosphere.

"It's draughty!" grumbled Mum in a stage whisper. "And this chair's killing my back."
 "We're none of us very comfortable," I whispered back.
 "Quite, and I'm older than the lot of you." She was, of course - by far. The other students smiled sympathetically, whether at Mum or me I wasn't sure.

Then she discovered that most of the class wanted to concentrate on poetry and that the first writing exercise was to be in verse. "This is ridiculous!" she muttered in that penetrating whisper. "I can't do this!" The others were scribbling furiously and so was Myra, who always joined in the exercises. "You didn't tell me it would be poetry. I can't write poetry!"

Unable to ignore her any longer, Myra came over. "Why not just write something, Renee? Don't worry about it being poetry."

"I've been writing all my life, you know," Mum informed her, "but not poetry. Short stories mainly. I had some success with them too. I used to go to a writing class, you know, back when Beryl was still at school."

I remembered then: Monday evenings, me left in charge of my little brother while Mum went off to her writing class. (Dad worked nights on the black cabs); other evenings sitting in front of the fire being read her latest story; the bitter disappointment when another rejection came through the post, the giddy euphoria at the occasional acceptance.

The weekend after that first Creative Writing class we unearthed a box of carbon copies on flimsy quarto paper of the stories Mum had written in the late 40's and 50's. They were rather dated, of course, but most were basically good, I felt, and sensitively written. Rarely were they the standard romantic stuff churned out for women's magazines; some were about young love, others about childhood, but most concerned the slightly older woman seeking independence or yearning to achieve something in life; a few were about death.

The best of these was *Flowers for the Living*, a story about the thoughts and feelings of a woman on a bus journey across London after she has been told she has cancer. "She knew, and there was enough of shame in the knowledge, that she herself was too much in love with living, with beauty, to be either calm or philosophical about death. A deep shuddering seized her, an unconquerable abhorrence that was not fear and was yet worse than fear. If she had to accept it, well then, she had. But reconcile herself to it she could not." Gradually she is lifted out of this bleak emotional stoicism by an almost reluctant awareness of the beauty of the City of London and the natural friendliness of her Cockney fellow travellers. Then a flower seller gets on the bus. "She saw a huge, weathered basket, and in the basket, jostling each other, bowing lovely heads in confusion, masses of giant chrysanthemums. Yellow and white, pink and drenched gold, petals crisply curled. For Lean the loveliest of them all were the white ones - tight, secretive pale-green hearts protected by closely-folded show-white petals." (The poet-to-be has crept in here, I feel.)

Mum sent the story to a then prestigious women's magazine - *Woman's Journal* I think it was - and had an exceptionally nice letter back saying they liked it very much but didn't print stories that dealt with death. The following month the same magazine printed a story with a similar theme to *Flowers for the Living*, but not as well written or sensitively handled. After that my mother wrote no more short stories.

Her next venture, a children's novel called *Follow That Fiddle*, about the theft of a supposed Strad, had a cast of characters drawn from her own children and her nephews and nieces. By this time, I was at University in Bangor. Mum, find that writing novel called for a longer span of concentration than a short story, abandoned the hubbub of family life for the peace of North Wales where she stayed with my landlady's sister in nearby Bethesda for six weeks. That such a family-orientated woman as my mother would leave her husband and young son for so long says a great deal about her dedication to writing. Sadly the book wasn't published. It was a comedy/adventure, its climax an amazing race from Crewe to Liverpool between the villains, on a train pulled by a steam engine, and the children on board a train with one of those - then - brand-new diesel engines. I'm sure young readers would have loved it.

Now in her fifties, Mum stopped writing for the first time in her life. Even in her teens, inspired by Ibsen and Shaw, she'd written what she later referred to as "serious plays with long monologues and little action." That was why I'd thought of the creative writing classes. But after three weeks of increasingly vociferous mutterings I was beginning to regret my impulse.

The following week Mum turned up with a poem. "It's prose really," she declared, "just divided up into lines." Nothing if not obstinate, my mother! "I've called it *The Chair*." (It later became *Joys and Sorrows* but I think the original title is better). She read it to the class.

I laugh as I read, then read the line aloud
and laugh again.
Look across the room for the echo
the twofold pleasure of reciprocation.
Stolid the chair stares back at me
merely confirming its vacancy.
We say a sorrow shared is a sorrow halved.
Surely a joy is doubled twice over
with the loved one by
to throw his head back and laugh along.

There were no more mutterings. From now on she produced at least one new poem every week. Myra suggested some poetry magazines; one poem was accepted, then another. *ENVOI* published four. Gradually over the years she wrote her husband's death out of her system, turned to other subjects: nature, people, our troubled world. In the ten years that she was writing poetry she had over 40 poems accepted by various magazines and published two collections of poetry. She had a hunger for writing that I can only envy.

Sometimes I think back to that Creative Writing class and remember how hot under the collar I used to get at those mutterings: "I write prose - I can't write poetry!" You didn't do too badly, Mum, considering.

Beryl Sabel

The Summer Programme 2004

It seems a long way off, but we do need to plan well ahead for next Summer's programme. You will be aware that the Society has been struggling financially for the last year; it was thanks to the generosity of several professional poets and some of our talented members, that we are presenting a varied programme for 2003. A full programme of professional poets would stretch our resources to breaking point. So we are appealing to members for ideas as to how we can present a full and varied programme in 2004. We really need to find a main sponsor - or several small sponsors - to finance the programme or particular meetings in local areas. It is possible that you know a poet who may agree to read at a meeting either free or for a reduced fee. If, of course, we can increase membership, that will also help the Society's funds. If you have a contact, or know someone who can help, or have any ideas, please get in touch either with the Secretary Maureen Butler (01394 277 360) or the Chairman Beryl Sabel (01394 272 494) or email Suffolkpoetry@aol.com

A FINAL PLEA

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE make an effort to support all the Society activities. Crabbe Competition closing date is 31 May 2003.