

The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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Vice Chairman: Adrian Danson

Membership Secretary:

Bernie Bickerton c/o/ 10 Malcolm Road

Wood side, London SE25 5HG

membership@scpsw.co.uk

Meetings Secretary: vacant

meetings@scpsw.co.uk

Treasurer:

Jonathan Atkinson, Flat1, 10 Royal Crescent, Whitby, N.Yorks YO21 3EJ

Competition Secretary:

Nina Mattar, 4 Redruth House, Grange Road, Sutton SM2 6RT

Publicity Officer:

Jenny Chamier-Grove

publicity@scpsw.co.uk

Poetry Editor:

Terry James, 1 Thornleigh Park, Bangor, Co Down BT20 4NN

Editor:

Mike Boland, 11 Boxtree Lane, Harrow Weald, Middlesex HA3 6JU

gothic.garden1@btinternet.com

The SCPSW Author

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Contents

3	Editorial	
4	Society News	
6	Competition Pages	
8	The Bear	<i>Michael Baum</i>
9	Failed Flâneur	<i>Tom Oulton</i>
11	Left Footed Lionel	<i>Morna Sullivan</i>
16	Poetry Pages: (ed. Terry James)	
21	A Trip of a Lifetime	<i>Beryl Jones</i>
25	Heaven Sent	<i>Trish Rissen</i>
30	Poetry Workshop News	
32	Charlie & His Dreams	<i>Wendy O'Mahoney</i>
35	Dad	<i>Terry Rickson</i>
36	Individual & Community	<i>Tom Oulton</i>

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With thanks to Vertas Group Ltd of Ipswich for printing this issue.

Editorial

Welcome to the summer issue of 'The Author'.

Thanks once again to everyone who has sent me material for inclusion in this and future issues. As with the previous issue, this one is heavily weighted to the various competitions the Society runs, both news of upcoming ones and the results and winning entries of those held recently. The position is complicated by the erratic and /or non-appearance of the magazine during 2016; consequently, the results, judges' reports and winning entries have not previously been published. I am attempting to rectify the situation, and can bring you in this issue the results etc. of the 2016 Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition, plus the two winning poems. I have also included the second placed entry in the 2016 Short Story Competition. As I have concentrated on including all this competition material, I have been unable to include some of the items advertised in the last issue – they will appear in the autumn issue, with my apologies for the delay.

One item we are missing this issue is the regular 'Chairman's Chat' column. Unfortunately, our Chairman, Terry Rickson, has been unwell and has been unable to produce his column this time. He sends his apologies and hopes to be able to contribute to the next issue.

In the last issue I mentioned some good habits to get into when submitting to magazines, such as enclosing a SAE if you want a reply. Following on from that, could I ask that you don't send your material by Recorded Delivery or forget to attach the correct postage to the envelope – both occurred this time, and meant I had to make two visits to the local sorting office to collect the offending items. Not guaranteed to make an editor predisposed to a submission!

That's about all for this issue. Until the next time, good luck to you all in your writing projects.

Mike Boland

Society News

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the SCPSW took place on Saturday 13th May 2017 at 1pm at the Civil Service Club, 13-15 Great Scotland Yard, London SW1A 2HJ. The Minutes of the Meeting will be published in the autumn issue.

Meetings Secretary

A vacancy still remains for a new Meetings Secretary. The main role of the post is to book the committee meeting and AGM, both of which fall on the same day, with the Civil Service Club, and take the minutes of both meetings. Further details can be obtained from Ethel Corduff, whose contact address is given on page one. She can also be contacted on 0208 656 3891.

It is important that offices of the Society are filled, as without volunteers for the various positions, the Society will be unable to function.

Diary

Some dates to remember:

15 July 2017

31 July 2017

31 July 2017

Submission deadline for next issue

Closing date: Gordon Gompers Comp

Closing date: Vee Bradley Poetry Comp

Competition Pages

Gordon Gompers Competition 2017

Entry Fee: £3 per entry

Prize: £50

This competition is for a non-fiction piece, including travel articles, 2000 word maximum. Entries should not have been published, either in *The Author* or elsewhere, be clearly typed with word count, and entered under a pen name. Real name and address should be provided on a separate sheet.

Closing date 31 July 2017

Entries should be sent to Competition Secretary, Nina Mattar, 4 Redruth House, Grange Road, Sutton SM2 6RT.

Vee Bradley Poetry Competition 2017

Prize: £25

No entry fee

Poems entered for this competition should be humorous, no longer than **30 lines**, clearly typed and using pen name on entry. Real name and address should be provided on a separate sheet. **There is no entry fee.**

Closing date 31 July 2017

Entries should be sent to Competition Secretary, Nina Mattar, 4 Redruth House, Grange Road, Sutton SM2 6RT.

These competitions are open for SCPSW members only. Those eligible include serving or retired members of the Civil Service, Armed Forces, National Health Service, Local Government, the Police Force or any Public Service.

For details of membership send SAE to Bernie Bickerton, c/o 10 Malcolm Road, Woodside, London SE25 5HG. Email membership@scpsw.co.uk

2017 Lewis Wright Short Story Competition Results

First Prize:	The Psychedelic Moth	by Tony Oswick
Second Prize:	Getting Home	by Lizzie Lowe
Commended:	Tinker Tailor Circus Clown	by Tony Oswick

Judge's Comments:

The Psychedelic Moth:-

"This story was well written with an interesting plot, which kept reader's attention, the description of the characters was excellent, and the conversations realistic, a well thought out story, with an unusual plot".

Getting Home:-

"This story carried the reader along awaiting the next event. Well written with a short quick style, and a surprising twist at the end".

2017 Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition Results

First Prize:	The Bear	by Michael Baum
Second Prize:	Failed Flâneur	by Tom Oulton
Commended:	London	by Brian Jones
	The Colour of Fear	by Trish Rissen
	Noteless	by Andy Millican

Judge's Comments:

The Bear:-

"A well rhyming and well-constructed poem that has diversity which gives the poem varied meaning and has very friendly yet sad scenes."

Failed Flâneur :-

"Well and meaningfully constructed, has a rhyme as well, good one, showed great imagination especially of places."

2016 Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition Results

For some reason the previous editor failed to print the results of last year's competition, but having tracked them down I'm delighted to be able to reproduce them now, albeit slightly belatedly.

First Prize: Swan Song *by Trish Rissen*
Second Prize: A Road to Remember *by James Lancaster*

Judge's Comments:

"I have enjoyed reading these poems. Some were written in rhyme and others in free verse, many were constructed from personal experience and others were very imaginative and inspirational.

Swan Song

This poem has beautiful rhyme, conveying the sadness of loss with sensitivity and simplicity.

A Road to Remember

This well-constructed poem clearly portrays hardship, perseverance and growth, while drawing the character into a successful conclusion.

Arriving in Malang

Arriving in Malang is described with well-chosen words giving a sense of anticipation, while cleverly ending the poem with a similar scene.

All Saints' Day

This thoughtful poem evokes scenes from the past, with many cherished memories, and finally acceptance of the present."

Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition 2017

First Prize: The Bear

Michael Baum

Now Grizzly Bear is quite aware,
That he is quite a fearsome fellow.
And Black Bear knows, that as he grows,
His size and strength give cause to show,
A beast which might appear to strike,
Terror,
Dread,
And quite a fright,
On those who know not why the Bear,
Is in truth full of despair.

Now Bear, for many years has been,
Perhaps the saddest creature on the scene,
He wanders through the woods
Alone.

All his friends have long since flown.
With a regular but grumpy growl, and a low, menacing prowl
The Bear appears to be irate,
Cross, enraged, and prone to hate.
But Bear has had a troubled life,
He's conquered hardship, suffered strife.
For way back then,
A hundred thousand years back when
A Unicorn and a Bear (quite young)
Were playing Hide and Seek among,
The Gooloo Groves
And Seagull Coves.
And it was there that Bear's dear friend
Was lost and never seen again.

Now, the details here are far from clear
but it seems Unicorn just disappeared.
Bear hunted high and low for him,
But long after all the lights had dimmed,
Unicorn could not be found.
His fate is known, to two alone,
And so Bear is left without a clue
Of where Unicorn has gone, or who
Knows the tale of the Gooloo Groves,
Or what took place at Seagull Coves.
And although it was an age ago, the Bear is left to wander so,
Rage and Sadness, all the same,
In his strong, but mortal frame.

Second Prize: Failed Flâneur by Tom Oulton

I will go – before I am much older –
By streets where blossom drops upon my shoulder,
Through suburban darkness I will go,
Where blossom in the lamplight hangs like snow.

I will rise up – shortly – from the sofa
And amble out like any other loafer
To wander through another soft spring night
Where stars are dimmed by haze and city light.

With no dog leading I will be quite shameless
In strolling down the pavement wholly aimless
And blandly blink at disapproving cats
Who sit by small and tasteful blocks of flats.

The Friday-maddened motorists are departed;
Until the tumble from the pubs has started,
There's only the odd group of rowdy teens to

Make the slouch walk faster than he means to,
Or claim his easy, well-rehearsed derision
From all the thousands watching television
Behind magnolia and leylandii
And curtains drawn against the dull-starred sky.

By each light wind the flakes of blossom flutter
In spirals down to brown the gutter,
And, caught within the circles of the lamp,
The pavements show alternate dry and damp

And lead by wall and garden border
And gardens kept in reasonable order,
Whilst even those that show a modest wildness
Do not disturb the all-enfolding mildness...

So why not, in the hour or two till bed,
Excuse myself from going out to roam,
And simply push the French doors wide instead
To contemplate the darkness nearer home?

Short Story Competition 2016 – Second Place

Left Footed Lionel

Morna Sullivan

Lionel had begun his deliberations after yet another unsuccessful night out at the school disco. As usual, he had not ventured on to the dance floor for fear of either tripping himself or someone else up. While he was tall, dark and extremely handsome, Lionel just could not dance. He had been blessed with good looks, a magnificent brain....and two enormous left feet. He was often able to disguise the fact that both of his feet were left by walking slowly in public. However, having two left feet came at a price. He always had to buy two pairs of shoes to get one pair to fit. He often tried to sell the two spare right shoes on eBay but usually with little success. Once or twice he sold them for a pound or two. He reckoned the buyer was looking for them for a fancy dress costume or to complete a farmyard scarecrow. Why else would anyone buy them? Who else could need to buy two very large right shoes? He knew this wouldn't be how he'd make his millions.

That evening he sauntered slowly home wishing he'd been able to try and dance. He'd chatted to a number of girls in his class but was scared to ask them to dance in case he stood on their toes or tripped them up. It wasn't the first time that had happened. One time he'd tripped over his feet and pushed a girl down on the dance floor. She'd claimed he was trying to attack her and after a sojourn outside the headmaster's office he was given a warning. He'd really liked Emma tonight. She was pretty in an old-fashioned way and had kind eyes. But he could imagine her eyes wouldn't look on him so kindly if he landed on top of her on the dance floor.

As he lay in bed that night, he imagined what it would be like to be able to dance. As usual, he sipped a cup of tea at bedtime to help him sleep. He checked his social media accounts on his phone. He flicked through a couple of episodes of last season's 'Strictly Come Dancing'. He knew all the moves off by heart. He'd watched them countless times. If only he could get his feet to follow all the steps in the right order without each foot tripping over the other one.

Lionel had tried. He had taken dance lessons at school but after two classes the teacher had given him a refund and told him not to waste his money coming back. It looked like there was no hope for him. He'd never be able to dance. And then he spotted it – the advert on the 'Northern Times' Facebook page for contestants for 'Wickly Come Dancing'. "Are you the worst dance in the north of Scotland? Why not enter our competition in Wick Town Hall on Saturday 30th January and become our first ever 'Wickly Come Dancing' champion?"

Lionel could think of nothing worse. Public humiliation just to prove to everyone you can't dance. Why would anyone in their right mind put themselves through that? Absolute madness! The things people did nowadays for their five minutes of fame! It was embarrassing enough not being able to dance without inviting an audience to poke fun at you.

But it made him think and it gave him hope. He obviously wasn't the only person about who couldn't dance. And it gave him an idea. There must be lots of other failed dancers out there. If only there was some way to help them all. He jumped out of bed and shuffled downstairs to his laboratory in the cellar and brewed himself a fresh pot of tea. It always gave him a clear head for thinking and resolving problems. He was convinced his tea had magical, mystical powers. And then it came to him. Why had he not thought of it before? He would invent a special pair of trousers for men so they could dance. He would invent dancing trousers. He imagined how the advertisement would read –

"Do you, do you, do you, do you wanna dance? Discover Dancing Trousers! Put them on and suddenly you CAN dance! Programme them to dance to any music or set them to dance non-stop for an hour. The most popular setting is disco / hip hop / rave but they can also be set to salsa and tango. The next prototype will include ballet and tap, though this has still to be confirmed."

Over the next few months Lionel spent every night in his laboratory in the cellar after he came home from school. He spent weeks assembling the trousers' electronics. Eventually, after many attempts, he got the fabric just right. All that stumped him now was perfecting the trousers with various types of music. They worked for about two minutes and then, lost their energy, fell over and seemed to die in a heap on the floor. It reminded him of his disastrous turns on the dance floor. There was still one elusive, missing ingredient required.

Lionel scanned all the chemicals in his laboratory cupboard and tried various combinations of them. He'd exhausted all the possibilities and still hadn't found the answer. He'd have to search elsewhere. He rifled through the bathroom cabinet, going through every possible combination of substances. Shampoo and aftershave would give a zing – as well as a pong – but without success. He looked in the kitchen cupboard – olive oil and tomato sauce. A salsa for a salsa? It would taste good but it didn't work. He knew the answer had to be within his grasp. It was just a matter of time but he was running out of options. He brewed himself a pot of tea and savoured the invigorating taste. He stretched out, yawned and put his feet up on the bench. As he curled his long limbs back in, his two left feet knocked the brown pottery chipped teapot over, spilling the warm sweet contents over the prototype trousers on the table beside him.

“Oh no! All my work is now ruined! I'll have to start all over again. And that was the last tea bag!”

He mopped up the mess with kitchen roll and sponged the trousers with towels to remove the excess liquid. He lifted them up to inspect them.

“That's strange. I'm sure the legs twitched. That's all I need – the tea has wrecked the electronics.”

He rubbed the trousers, trying to wring the excess liquid out of the legs. The trousers kept jerking and twitching to Mahler's 'Fifth Symphony' playing on the radio.

“That's strange. I must be so tired I'm imaging it.”

There was definitely something going on. The trousers were beginning to take on a life of their own. He stood back and watched as they began to pick themselves up from the table and started to waltz across the cellar floor in a way he could only dream of. It was like watching Anton Du Beke on Strictly Come Dancing. The grace and ease with which the trousers danced around the laboratory seemed effortless. They danced the entire waltz. Lionel switched the radio channel to Easy Jazz FM and the trousers danced to a bossa nova.

“Eureka! I've found it! I've discovered the missing ingredient and it was right in front of my nose all the time! Now I CAN dance! Now I can ask Emma to dance with me. I can't wait for the trousers to dry out so I can try them out.”

He pegged the trousers on the clothes line outside. The electronic workings and special fabric made them heavier than his other pairs of trousers. They were going to take an eternity to dry. It was an extremely windy night so he put a couple of extra clothes pegs on the waistband to secure them to the line. He couldn't afford to lose the trousers now.

Lionel ran slowly round to the corner shop to replenish his supply of tea bags. He bought all the boxes of tea bags on the shelves. He was going to need them now. Every half hour he shuffled out to the washing line to check progress to see if the trousers were dry enough to try on. As the night wore on, he shuffled out by torchlight to check for rain, becoming more and more anxious about when he could try on the trousers. He was glad of his endless pots of tea to keep him calm in trying circumstances through a long, long night.

At around 6.15 am the next morning Lionel unpegged the trousers from the washing line and brought them into the kitchen. Never had he anticipated putting on an item of clothing so much. He wriggled his long legs and his big feet into the trouser legs, pulled them over his hips and pulled up the zip. They hadn't shrunk. They fitted perfectly. He was ready to go. He was ready to dance now!

He switched the radio channel to Uptown Funk FM, flicked the button on his trouser pocket and immediately started dancing around the kitchen to the current no 3 in the singles chart, followed by a seventies medley. He could dance! His two left feet were amazing! They were moving in time to the music, spinning round, jumping, moon-walking and side stepping. Wow! This was such a wonderful feeling and he hadn't tripped, stumbled or fallen over. Lionel could dance for the first time in his life!

He switched channels to the classics show and began to waltz to the 'Blue Danube'. Then he danced a polka followed by a few pirouettes to 'The Nutcracker Suite'. This was more than he'd ever dreamed of. He'd wanted to be able to dance a bit so he could pass himself at the school disco but now he could dance better than the professionals on Strictly Come Dancing. This would change his life forever. And it would change the lives of every man in the country and beyond forever. He had discovered a cure for 'Dad dancing' and 'Twoleftfeetitis'. All that studying in chemistry would bring him fame and fortune after all!

The next day he applied for the patent for his invention and soon began marketing his soon-to-be-famous dancing trousers online. He set up a small factory employing a few local women who stitched the trousers together. The trousers sold out sooner than the next batch could be made. The only rules he enforced in the factory were that all of his workers MUST drink tea and music MUST be played all day. The Dancing Trousers factory started to win awards for export and innovation. Lionel became a local celebrity very quickly, judging the local flower show and was invited to highland dancing competitions and ceilidhs.

Two months later he and Emma were regularly seen out together. He'd plucked up the courage to ask her to dance at the school disco the Saturday after he discovered the secret ingredient for the formula for his amazing dancing trousers.

“How did you ever learn to dance like this Lionel?” Emma asked him one night at the disco.

“Well, it's all about having the right partner. And it's all in the chemistry,” he replied.

He looked down and met Emma's eyes. She smiled back at him. Sometimes being a little bit different made you look at things differently, which made all the difference in the end.

Poetry Pages
(edited by Terry James)

A New Day

Ivy Hudson

What shall I write upon its skin –
etch truth and faith,
delete unbelief, lies,
with a big, messy black pen?

I can no longer
see those words now,
but the blanks remain
in permanent ink.

Truth and faith
with enough power
in my shaky writing,
to change worlds,
transform my day
to lightness, mercy, peace.

I can't erase the blanks,
But today, I add the words
Salvation has come.

Bredon Hill

Roger de Boer

To reach Crophorne
You must be passed
You are here in reality
But were part of my imagination
More than fifty years ago
When at school I painted
KETT'S REBELLION
Only one view is seen
On the journey to Crophorne
But many Saturdays ago when
The 382 used to wind its
Way through Worcester villages
You were seen at many angles
In your magnificence
Only last Tuesday the red sky
Echoed God's creation!

08.10.2016

Andy Millican

It sat among the tombstones
offensively ostentatious
in Barbie/Barbarelli pink
brilliantly efficacious.

It looked like a giant casket
to hold the ashes of a whale
or something science-fictiony
an undiscovered fairy-tale.

But as we stared it dawned on us
how embarrassingly unfit
it was to place this item here
a toddlers pink sandpit.

29.11.2016

Andy Millican

Not something to be unsure
or uncertain of.
No room to be shadowy
hazy or cloudy.
Not the type of thing to be
nebulous vague imprecise
about.
There must be no obfuscation
about such matters nothing
unforeseeable otherwise
life can be unsettling.
Unclear is one small step
from nuclear.

Kemble

Steve Glason

In Gloucestershire let's assemble
On the platform serving Kemble
Restored to mellow Cotswold glory
Every picture tells a story.

Vanished branches cut by Beeching
Tetbury folk at once beseeching
Cirencester – township – sever
Connections have just gone for ever.

Friday teatime – shadows creeping
For this railhead gently sleeping
Down from London – those weekenders
Fulham's City moneylenders.

The corridor was heaving – uniforms in brown
As the train meandered up to London Town
A solitary soldier was deep in private thought
Heading for the East End – family he sought.

In the middle distance – eerier sirens wailed
Fear and apprehension – emotions now prevailed
Rumours that his Plaistow had been blown to bits
Streets with little houses receiving many hits.

He needed not to worry – somehow they survived
Mentioned in a letter – Thursday night arrived
Moving to the country to be with Aunty Flo
She loved to gossip daily – kettle on the go.

It was no idyllic – brief the Weekend Pass
Away from Blitz & mayhem – bombs and shattered glass
Peaceful was the setting – he could have stayed for days
But back to camp on Monday by the slow railways.

He was killed in action – his grave in Northern France
I'm glad he had this visit – to take the lovely chance
Of seeing wife and kiddies – his cherished kith and kin
Safe from mortal danger and the battle din.

I've been sitting in my armchair for fifty years
Watching the fires bright flames
I've been learning my lines, though the theatre's long gone.
Then one day I had a visitor
He thought I was mortal
'You look very pale, why don't you go outside?'
Outside in the street
I pushed him with all my strength into a car.
Above his screams was my silvery laughter.

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in the SCPSW Author are those of the contributors and are not necessarily those of the Editor or of the Society.

A Trip of a Lifetime

Beryl Jones

Julie's jaw dropped as she looked at her husband in amazement, not quite wanting to believe, but knowing Alan, knew it to be true. Once he'd set his mind to something he wouldn't budge.

'Close your mouth Julie, you're not a flycatcher', Alan remarked quite unconcerned by his wife's reaction. 'Just think about it, that's all I ask. I've thought long and hard and have come to the conclusion that it's a brilliant idea, the best I've had for a long time.'

Julie closed her mouth and took a deep breath. 'I don't have to think about it. It's the most hare-brained scheme you've ever thought up. What about Vicky and Michael, have you thought about them?'

'Of course I have. Vicky can stay with your mother, the same with Michael when he's home from uni.'

'She's still a child, Alan, she needs us, not to mention the extra burden it would place on my mother.'

'Now you're being melodramatic. Vicky will be fine, these teenagers cope a lot better than we give them credit for. As for your mother, she'll love every minute of it.' Alan stood up from the table. 'Right, I'm off to pack the car and hitch up the caravan. I want to leave about four, you know what the traffic's like on Fridays.' He rubbed his hands. 'I've found a lovely spot for this weekend.'

Julie sat with her head in her hands for a long time, Patch the dog leaning against her as if in support, only moving when they heard Alan muttering to himself in the hall. She hardly spoke on the journey.

By the time they arrived at the site, it was getting dark, the wind was beginning to pick up and it had started to rain. 'My ideal caravanning weather,' muttered Julie under her breath as she sat about preparing their evening meal.

'Well, what do you think love?' asked Alan like an excited schoolboy as he shovelled shepherd's pie into his mouth at a rate of knots.

‘Slow down for a start, you’ll give yourself indigestion and we don’t want that, do we?’ The sarcasm was lost on Alan, his mind was on one thing and one thing only, his new scheme.

‘It’s you that needs to do some very serious thinking, not me. This is bound to be another of your hare-brained projects that stutter to a halt after a couple of weeks, never to be referred to again. I can’t say never to be seen because we can’t get away from them.’

‘This time it’s different. Any shepherd left?’ Alan held out his plate. Julie automatically took it, refilled it and had put it front of him before she realised what she had done. She shook her head in exasperation. ‘I can’t believe I’ve just done that. I’m going daft.’ Pushing her own plate away she said, ‘I’ve lost my appetite, I’ll make some tea and feed the dog.’

‘This is different, Julie. This is the big one. The one I’ve been wanting to do for such a long time.’

‘I know it’s a big one, in fact it’s so big I can hardly perceive of it. But I don’t think you’ve been wanting to do it for very long. Probably only in the last couple of weeks. And with you, Alan, you get a notion in your head and it’s the be-all and end-all of life until a couple of months down the line when something new takes your fancy.’

‘That’s not true and you know it.’

‘Isn’t it?’ Julie thought back over the years to Alan’s projects or hobbies that had never been completed. They’d started off small, such as model aeroplanes, or cars supposedly for Michael but which Michael never got to play with because they were never finished. Then he’d progressed to a doll’s house which Julie had completed, otherwise Vicky would have had a roofless, doorless, windowless empty shell of a house for Christmas. The list went on and on. Then Alan had really got adventurous. ‘Remember the boat?’

Alan had the grace to look sheepish. ‘Ah well, there was a piece of the drawing missing.’

‘Missing my foot. You’ve just got fed up with it. Where is it now? A garden decoration, covered in greenery, along with the eyesore of a motor-bike

abandoned next to it. What about the pond, the so-called rockery, the roof-less dog kennel, the trellis that was going to be covered in beautiful climbing plants and would transform the whole garden. The list is endless. You can't believe how thankful I am that your so-called hobbies don't extend to the house. But this time Alan I think you've really lost it.'

'I'm very serious Julie, and if you think about it deeply enough you'll come round to my way of thinking. A trip of a lifetime. Anyway, I'm determined.'

It was now quite late and so heated had been their discussion they'd not noticed how the weather had deteriorated to the extent that even the dog was whimpering. Julie couldn't sleep for, apart from Alan's wonderful 'idea', the rain was coming down so hard and the wind was so strong, the caravan was rocking from side to side. She fully expected a 'Wizard of Oz' experience and would soon be flying through the air clutching Patch. Alan slept blissfully on.

Around dawn, the wind and the rain having eased, but not by much, their malevolent intentions towards the caravan and its occupants and still with her problem unsolved, Julie slipped into a deep sleep. She was woken several hours later by a cold nose snuffling at her hand. 'OK, Patch, hang on, I'll get dressed. Both of us might as well get wet. We'll walk to the village for a paper.' Alan was completely unaware of their leaving.

Julie and Patch were away about an hour, and returned to find the field full of people, cars, uniforms, flashing blue lights, a gash in the hedge and no caravan.

She stood there unable to speak as a police-woman explained that due to the ferocity of the storm, it appeared the wedges had been washed away and the caravan had simply slid forward in the mud, its momentum and the wind sending it through the hedge and onto the rocks below.

Still unable to speak Julie thought well at least now I won't lose my home to that man's silly whim. Sell up indeed. Buy a luxury motor home and travel the world, who was he kidding? They'd get as far as France, he'd lose all interest then where would they be? Living in a caravan for the rest of their lives. No thanks.

She looked down at Patch, she'd swear he was smiling. The idea hadn't appealed to him either. Who'd have thought that by simply kicking the chocks away she had solved her dilemma?

Heaven Sent

Trish Rissen

‘A new job,’ said Angela staring at Miss Gooding her supervisor. ‘But I don’t want a new job, I’m happy doing this one.’ She gazed down at the letter on her desk. ‘I like being an agony aunt, I’ve been doing it for years,’

‘That’s the point,’ sighed Miss Gooding, ‘You need a challenge and this is a heaven sent opportunity to look at things differently.’

‘Do I need to look at things differently?’ Angela asked.

‘I think so,’ said Miss Gooding, ‘and you must think about it too. I’ll be back in a day or two to discuss your new position. But I think you will find that it is a direct order from on high.’ She pointed to the ceiling. Angela followed her gaze and shrugged as Miss Gooding left the office. She liked her job and wanted to keep it.

But later staring down at the letter before her Angela began to think that perhaps Miss Gooding was right. A new job would take her in a new direction, and she would she supposed meet new people. In her office she seldom saw anyone except Janie her secretary and occasionally, if he had a question about the advice that Angela was giving, the magazine Editor. She had been working for the current Editor for the last five years. During that time the magazine had been rebranded twice and now had, in Angela’s opinion, a rather garish look to it. It had become brighter and bolder to, according to the Editor, compete in the market place.

Over the last few years the letters asking for her advice had changed too. A few decades ago she had received letters on such topics as adoption and family planning, how to cope with the in-laws and just occasionally matters of etiquette. She had sent out countless leaflets on those subjects besides many more on how to cope with illness in the family and what to do following a bereavement, believing the advice she was giving was sound. Nowadays the letters she received were more complex and involved problems regarding alcoholism, drugs, increasing infidelity, how to cope with step-children and low self-esteem to name just a few. And she had noticed that recently she had been receiving fewer and fewer letters but more and more emails.

She was just pondering on this when she received a rare call from the Editor. Swiftly she hurried up the stairs to his office.

‘Ah, there you are Angela,’ he said following her tentative knock on his door. ‘Come in I want you to see this.’

Angela stared as the Editor pointed to the impressively large television screen on the wall behind him. Angela watched fascinated as in front of a television audience two rather angry flamboyant ladies argued over the affections of a thin bored looking man who each of them declared, to be the love of their life. While an increasingly annoyed lady in a bright blue suit tried to mediate between the three of them and suggest a way forward. Without it appeared very much luck.

‘Wonderful, isn’t it?’ said the Editor switching off the set and turning to Angela. ‘That’s what the public want these days my girl. They want to see other people’s problems at first hand because it makes them feel better about their own lives.’

‘Really?’ replied Angela. ‘Don’t they want to keep their private lives private? Don’t they want to solve their problems amicably?’

‘No,’ said the Editor, ‘not necessarily. They want to feel vindicated, they want to tell the world that their troubles are not of their own making but of circumstances beyond their control. Of course, there are also those who want their five minutes in the public eye and if that means that they have to air their problems in public on national television they’ll do so.’ He paused and looked Angela in the eye. ‘And that’s why I’ve called you in, we need to boost our circulation figures my girl,’ he continued, ‘so I think what we need to do is to get you on the television.’

Angela gasped, ‘but I don’t know anything about working in television,’ she said.

‘I know,’ agreed the Editor, ‘but here we have a heaven sent opportunity,’ and he pointed to a letter on his desk. ‘I have an invitation here from a television company. They want our agony aunt, that’s you of course, to appear on a new talk show with agony aunts from other newspapers and magazines. They want to discuss the art of giving advice and whether or not the concept of an agony aunt is outdated in these times of television and interactive social media where

advice is free to all on Facebook and Twitter etc. And when everyone wants immediate solutions to their problems. The television people are thinking of calling it '*Agonising*'.

'I see,' said Angela, 'but I have to confess I'm not really conversant with social media. I'm afraid I don't know anything about Facebook or Twitter.'

The Editor gaped at her open-mouthed. 'Haven't you got a tablet or a smart phone?' he queried.

'No,' replied Angela, 'I've heard of them of course, who hasn't, but', she tailed off as the Editor gazed in bewilderment at her.

'How on earth do you manage your social life?' he queried.

'Apart from singing with the choir I really don't have much time for socialising,' Angela retorted.

'Now this programme is going to be recorded next Wednesday afternoon. You'll need to be at the studio at noon,' the Editor began, 'so make sure you are up to speed by then with everything that you need to know about social media and the chat show format. I want you to give a good account of yourself. I want a sterling performance from our agony aunt so that we can use it to maximise our publicity. I want to be able to put the words, 'as seen on TV' after your name and I want the public to remember you and want to read what you have to say. If not...' he tailed off abruptly.

Angela spent the entire weekend watching all the advice shows that she could on the television, some English and some American, but they all seemed to have a similar format. Most people seemed to want to unburden themselves by telling the truth. Some seemed determined to hurt those closest to them by telling them something they would rather have heard in private on national television. All the participants seemed to talk as loudly as they could and they all seemed extremely angry. Besides which they all seemed to be very young which made Angela suddenly feel very old. Which of course she was.

By Sunday evening Angela still needed to understand the workings of Facebook and Twitter, so she decided to enlist Janie's help on Monday morning. It was while Janie was talking her through the intricacies of Facebook that Angela had

what she considered to be a brilliant idea. And when Janie had finished explaining how to send a tweet Angela proffered a suggestion.

‘You want me to go on television in your place?’ Janie yelled with excitement.

‘Why not,’ said Angela, ‘I saw the letter on the Editor’s desk. It just specified the magazine’s agony aunt, there was no name mentioned. You just have to turn up at the television studio on Wednesday afternoon for the recording and say that you are representing our magazine.’

‘But I’m not an agony aunt,’ argued Janie. ‘I couldn’t possibly take your place.’

‘Janie, you’ve been my secretary for the last two years,’ Angela said firmly, ‘and you’re always ready to give your own opinions about the problems that we receive.’ Janie blushed recalling that she had disagreed with Angela’s advice on several occasions. ‘Besides,’ Angela continued quickly, ‘you are much younger and prettier than me, you’ll make a far better impression on the viewers than I would.’

It was a couple of weeks later when Angela was summoned to the Editor’s office to watch the screening of *‘Agonising.’* As the camera panned around the studio audience and then the panel, the Editor suddenly realised that he couldn’t see Angela on the screen.

‘I sent Janie instead,’ Angela said before the Editor had a chance to speak. ‘I thought she would make a better job of it than I could.’

‘The Editor glared at her briefly before turning back to the screen.

‘And I was right,’ Angela continued. ‘Just look at her, she’s just what you need to boost your circulation figures. She’s vibrant and talented, and she knows all about current trends in social media. She should be your new agony aunt. You can certainly put ‘as seen on TV’ after her name.’

‘You’re quite right,’ agreed the Editor smiling broadly. ‘But Angela, you’ve just done something I’ve never seen in my career before – you’ve just talked yourself out of a job. We don’t need two agony aunts on the magazine.’

‘I know,’ smiled Angela, ‘but it’s time for me to move on, and it’s a heaven sent opportunity for Janie.’

Angela was just clearing her desk when Miss Gooding arrived. ‘Are you quite happy to take up your new position now?’ she asked.

‘Oh yes,’ said Angela with a grin, ‘after being an agony aunt – sorry advising angel – for so many years, a couple of decades as a recording angel will be a doddle.’

Contact details of members

To speed up contact with individual members, it would be enormously helpful if you could please give your email address to the Membership Secretary, Bernie Bickerton.

Please email Bernie at: membership@scpsw.co.uk if you are prepared for us to contact you in this way. Thank you to those who've already done this.

Poetry Workshop News

Chair: Jane Arthur, P6 Wexler Lofts, 100 Carver Street, Birmingham, B1 3AQ

Treasurer: Terry Rickson, 48 Marlborough Road, Ashford, Middx, TW15 3QA

Events Coordinator: vacant

Editor 'wavelengths': Mike Boland, 11 Boxtree Lane, Harrow, Middx, HA3 6JU

Waves 2017

Publication of this year's Waves, our annual anthology of members' poetry, will take place later this summer. As previously reported, successful contributors will be asked to purchase four copies to support the production. Full details of the anthology will be given in the next issue of this magazine, due out in September. Copies of last year's anthology, priced at £4 (inc p&p), can be obtained from the Poetry Workshop's Treasurer and Membership Secretary, **Terry Rickson, 48 Marlborough Rd, Ashford, Middlesex, TW15 3QA**. Please make out all cheques to: **SCPSW Poetry Workshop Account**.

Postal Folio

There are four circulating postal folios in which participating members can exchange critiques of each other's poetry, encouragement and news. There is room for any member of the Poetry Workshop who would like to take part. If you are interested, please contact me, **Mike Boland**, at the address above or by e-mail to gothic.garden1@btinternet.com

e-folio

The PW also runs an efolio for members who have access to the internet. Anyone interested in joining the e-folio should contact Sylvia Neumann. Her email address is: sylvia.neumann@btinternet.com

Wavelengths

This is the Poetry Workshop's quarterly magazine which is issued free to all its members and consists of twenty pages of poems, articles on poetry / poets and all the news of the group's activities. It appears regularly in the spring, summer, autumn and winter. The summer issue, number 51, will be posted to PW members in June.

Subscriptions

Just a reminder that Subscriptions to the Poetry Workshop fell due on 1 January. Membership remains unchanged for 2017 at £7 for Society members.

The Poetry Workshop

Membership of the Poetry Workshop provides:

- four issues of our 20 page magazine **wavelengths** each year
- the chance of publication in **Waves**, the PW's annual anthology
- access to the popular Postal Folio scheme
- access to the e-folio scheme
- eligibility for the PW's one day Workshops

If you are interested in joining us, contact our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, **Terry Rickson**, at the address above. The cost of membership is £7. Cheques should be made out to: **SCPSW Poetry Workshop Account**.

PW Dates:

June 2017	summer issue of wavelengths published
1 August 2017	deadline for wavelengths # 52 (autumn issue)
September 2017	publication of wavelengths # 52
1 November 2017	deadline for wavelengths # 53 (winter issue)
December 2017	publication of wavelengths # 53

Charlie and his Dreams

Wendy O'Mahoney

Charlie, aged 10, sat on the banks of the river Dart situated near the edge of a small village in Devonshire; he was not a country child, raised in the East End of London he was out of his comfort zone.

He looked at the clear water as it ran over the pebbles. Chattered and bubbled, he thought, that man was right. Charlie was reading 'The Wind in the Willows.' It was the only decent book he could find in his Dad's small library. Charlie liked reading; sometimes he thought it was even better than football.

On this particular June morning he'd decided not to go to school but sit and think. The trouble with this school was that everyone talked too much and he couldn't always understand what they were saying. His teacher's voice was all right but it was loud and interfered with his imaginary stories. He was always the hero, saving people from burning buildings when he was a fireman, saving trains from hitting cars stuck on the crossing and accepting the cheering after swimming the channel in the fastest time.

A shadow – his Mum. Charlie was downcast. He wondered how she was. He had the best Mum. He'd not been allowed to see her, she was too ill. She worked so hard at the tea factory in the day and in the evenings, at the Pub. Charlie didn't like her going out at night; she'd told him it meant they could go out somewhere nice on Sundays.

He remembered the police coming one evening when he was watching Eastenders. Mum always said not to answer the door when she was out and he hadn't at first. They said they would force their way in if he didn't open the door, so he did. Mum couldn't afford a new door. He hadn't been a hero then, he cried when they told him his Mum was in hospital and he'd have to go and live with his Dad.

He looked at the river again, thinking of Ratty and Mole and the picnic basket; all that lovely food. Dad's new wife, Amy, had funny ideas about food. He hadn't seen a decent plate of chips since he'd been here.

Charlie scrambled up, spiralling his long thin arms and legs as he did so. He was hungry but he wasn't going home, - Huh home, that's a laugh. Home was in London with his Mum. He walked along the bank, looking to see if something was moving. A fish, but he didn't know what kind. Did Ratty and Mole eat fish he wondered? He remembered the chicken and the cress sandwiches in Rattys' picnic hamper but not fish. He felt even hungrier. Charlie thought about going back into the village but Amy might see him. He had a little money and could buy a bag of crisps. He'd be brave and walk into the one and only shop like Toad and flash his change. He didn't really think it would convince Mr Searle, the owner, that he didn't need to be at school but he was hungry.

Back at the river, watching the midday sun making flashing diamond shapes as the water surged over the stones washing away the earth, he was about to sit down again when he saw his Dad walking towards him. He squared his shoulders and glared. Dad smiled and took something out of his pocket and waved it at Charlie.

'You can share my lunch,' he said. Dad always had good sandwiches, thick bread and lots of meat.

They sat down on the grassy slope and while they ate the food and drank the hot sweet tea, which Charlie didn't much like but thought he'd give it a go, Dad talked about the lack of trout this season and various other things concerning his job; nothing about school. When they finished Dad asked Charlie what he would like to do next and much to even Charlie's surprise he'd said, 'Go on the river, mess about in a boat.'

'Well,' said Dad, 'We've had our picnic so let's find a boat.' They did and Dad rowed while Charlie sat in the stern with his eyes closed and let his hands drift through the water. 'Messing about in boats,' he quoted in imitation of his current favourite hero, 'nothing like messing about in boats.'

Dad laughed, a very happy laugh, and for the first time Charlie felt a sort of affinity with his Dad. He's all right really thought Charlie. He listened as Dad told him about the otters upstream and offered to take him one night to see them hunting. It would be something to tell Mum about when he finally got to visit her, although she didn't like animals much. Perhaps they would go when the moon was shining in the sky as it did for Mole and Ratty when they

were looking for Portly. It would be eerie especially if they were on the river but Dad would be there.

He wondered if Dad would also take him to see badgers, after all there were two lots of wooded areas. He'd been to one quite a bit as the railway line to London ran by the side of it and seeing the trains made him feel nearer Mum. The wood was dark and it made him feel creepy as something was always rustling. He supposed it was the wind in the trees. It sounded different from the wind in London, there you could hear it picking up the bits of paper people dropped on the road and swishing them up in the air before dropping them in another place. He loved London.

Charlie opened his eyes, his peace shattered by the cacophony of ducks and moorhens.

'Up tails' he called out but they swam over to the banks. He turned to look at his Dad, and had yet to realise that Dad was glad of the feeling of kinship that this outing had given them because they would both need it in the dark days to come.

Charlie laughed at the antics of the river birds, feeling happy and thought there must be something here in this empty place where his Dad and Amy lived. No proper neighbours. It seemed miles from the little village where the school was. He should know he walked it every day. No buses.

He was getting used to it so perhaps he could come again and Dad could let him have a go at the boat. It didn't look that difficult. He recalled that Mole had seized the oars and he and Ratty landed in the river. No, he would learn, do it properly, it would be good.

Dad pulled the boat over to the bank and said, 'Charlie, I've got something to tell you.'

As Charlie looked at the man he'd only just got to know, he saw the tears glisten in his eyes, the look on his face... and he knew.

'Mum,' he whispered, 'oh Mum.'

The moorhens and ducks squawked again and he picked up a piece of earth and threw it as hard as he could. Dad pulled him out of the boat and hugged him.

‘Mole and Ratty, Toad and Badger, they’re all here.’ He whispered.

Dad **Terry Rickson**

Eez ninety-two.

Eez wot?

Eez ninety-two.

‘Oo?

Bert.

‘Oo?

Bert, your brother Bert, Uncle Bert.

Eez ninety-two, yer know.

I know!

Ow jer know?

I’ve just bin saying’.

Wot?

Never mind! Aunt Maud sez, do yer want ter go ter tea Sundy?

Eh?

Do – yer – want – ter – go – ter tea – Sundy?

Wot for?

Uncle Bert’s birthday, that’s wot for.

It’s ‘is birthday yer know.

Dad! ‘ere, you got yer ‘earing aid in?

Wot?

I sed, ‘ave yer got yer

I’ll ‘ave a cuppa tea if yer making one, gel.

Gawd ‘elp us!

Individual and Community: *The Brensham Trilogy* by John Moore (1907-67)

Tom Oulton

One day in my mid or late teens my mother recommended a writer called George Moore. By serendipitous mistake, I returned from the library with a novel by John Moore, *Dance and Skylark*. The novel (pub. 1951) is not profound, but its tale of a festival in an English country town hooked me.

Dance and Skylark led me to *The Brensham Trilogy*, still the only other of Moore's many writings that I have read, and probably still today the easiest to find. The first book in the Trilogy is *Portrait of Elmbury*, a scarcely disguised Tewkesbury. It describes the period from just before the Great War until the beginnings of the Second World War. It is broadly divided into chronological periods reflecting events in Moore's own life, but those events are off-stage, punctuation rather than plot. The subject is the town and its inhabitants, and there is little linear narrative, despite recurring characters.

The second volume, *Brensham Village*, according to Moore a synthesis of several local villages, is probably based on Kemerton or Bredon. "Brensham Hill" is certainly Bredon Hill. Covering the inter-war period, it is even less linear and more impressionistic than *Portrait of Elmbury*. The third book, *The Blue Field*, takes Brensham through the Second World War and into the immediate post-war period. It has a stronger narrative focus than the first two volumes, namely the life of farmer William Hart, especially his defiance of the wartime and post-war authorities. In my view Moore introduces William in the final volume to personify and so render more explicit the themes of the Trilogy.

Defining the genre is not easy. The three books are not novels, but neither are they straight factual reporting. Moore is certainly intending to construct a truthful portrait of his native town and surrounding villages, although events, locations and characters are mingled together to an extent that is not wholly clear. Chapters are divided into shorter sections, not necessarily following chronologically, and the cumulative effect is to produce a sort of tapestry in words. The other consequence is to emphasise continuity: the picture presented is broadly accurate across the period covered.

Moore alludes to social and technological changes during this time, but the essential nature and spirit of his communities and people have not significantly changed by the outbreak of the Second World War. His characters are even recognisable in Shakespeare's. Moore names three of his ne'er-do-wells Pistol, Bardolph and Nym, and William Hart of *The Blue Field* is compared to Falstaff. William's catchphrase is, "You carsn't touch I. I be a descendant of the poet Shakespeare."

Moore does not conceal the horrors. Opposite his family's beautiful Tudor house is the entrance to Double Alley, the worst of Elmbury's many slums and the domain of filth, drunkenness, domestic strife and literally naked children. The inhabitants would nowadays be referred to as "chaotic families" and subject to any number of official interventions, rather than being generally allowed to get on with being chaotic. Double Alley is the haunt of many monsters, such as the deranged, grime-encrusted, gin-soaked Black Sal, who rages round the town yelling obscenities (and who incidentally seems to have invented hip-hop – "The Mayor has banquets, but we ain't got no blankets" etc.). Sal is eventually taken to the workhouse, but it takes an awful lot of provocation before that happens.

Moore's early employment in the family auctioneering firm exposes him to financial reality. The predominant "export" of Elmbury and its hinterland is agricultural produce, particularly vulnerable to the fluctuations of the wider economy and of the weather. The fortunes of the farmers affect the prosperity of the whole community. Then there are the harrowing personal tragedies, vulnerable individuals evicted as their few remaining sticks of furniture are knocked down to people almost as poor as the foreclosed bankrupt.

These hardships are alleviated by a river of booze as wide as the nearby Severn, floating all classes except chapel folk. Again, Moore does not hide the results: violence and vandalism, both public and domestic, antisocial behaviour of all kinds, personal ruin. But alcohol also enhances fellowship and conversation, community solidarity and just about every social occasion. You have to drink huge quantities to be thought to have a problem, and Moore describes in detail only one such case – Billy Butcher of Brensham, who boozes to quell the poetry within him. Billy is wrecked, but when he temporarily goes dry under the influence of a religious group he seems to lose his self. Billy enlists and is killed

at Dunkirk, leaving his new wife Sally with a baby. And a good thing too for Sally, says Mr. Chorlton the schoolmaster: better the memory of a dead hero than a live dipsomaniac husband. Discuss.

The inescapable intermingling of good and evil in social drinking can be applied to the entire vision that Moore presents. In fact it is the key. In places he makes it explicit: "...in Elmbury beauty and ugliness grew up side by side and merged into a single entity, indivisible and unique, in which you could no more easily separate and distinguish those two qualities than you could winnow out the good and evil in the heart of men." He cannot divide the love, community identity, mutual help and other blessings from the poverty, personal disasters and conflicts. The threads of good and evil that make up Moore's bright tapestry of the region that bred him cannot be separated without destroying it. And you don't want to destroy it, because the repetitive lives lived by these quite insular people appear as of great richness and value. Well, see if you can read *The Brensham Trilogy* without succumbing to a warm nostalgic glow.

Moore is attracted to the village of Brensham because it is (a) crack-brained – its people are deeply individualistic – and (b) "allus hangs together", two characteristics which you would think are contradictory. But it is Moore's belief that communities such as Brensham, growing up organically over the years, have developed a natural equilibrium that can easily accommodate eccentric individuals such as the unsanitary hermit in the folly, the Mad Lord who gives away all his wealth, Billy the drunk, and others; and that this ability to tolerate and absorb (within limits) edge-of-spectrum types enriches everyone. And this collection of individuals turns out together to rescue the Colonel's livestock from a flood or to tear down the burning thatch from the cottages when a damaged bomber comes down in the village.

Only when this internal equilibrium is meddled with do you get disaster. This is neatly illustrated when officials decide that a bend in the Avon should be straightened in order to move flood water downstream more quickly. Cricket captain Sammy Hunt's riverside property has survived years of natural floods perfectly well, but now half the garden falls into the Avon and a crevasse appears within yards of the house.

In *The Blue Field* Moore sees the writing on the wall: the tension between the untamed individual and the requirements of post-war society is about to become

irreconcilable. The desire to meddle, organise and rationalise is personalised in Vicky Halliday, wife of the new Labour MP elected in 1945. Vicky tidies up the village that does not want to be tidied up. One night she is horrified to drive into a pram abandoned at the side of a lane, catapulting the pair of babies therein on to the grass verge. William Hart's daughter of his middle age, the staggeringly mischristened Prudence, is courting again and as usual has taken her infants with her. Vicky threatens Pru with the police, the NSPCC and being sent to a home; but shortly afterwards she unknowingly awards first prize at the baby show jointly to Pru's illegitimate little girls as they are clearly the best cared-for babies. Pru gets a red lamp to attach to the pram.

William Hart has more serious concerns. Losing patience with being told what to grow by the Government during the war, he plants a field of sunflowers. Reprimanded by officials, the next year, against instructions, he plants a field of linseed that blazes a defiant blue from Brensham Hill. The authorities cannot ignore this, and very reluctantly they take steps to appropriate the farm.

William dies just in time, and it is at his wake in the pub that the question is made explicit. Mr. Chorlton asks Halliday: "These people, however headstrong and wrongheaded, nevertheless reaffirm the ancient freedom and dignity of man... Can you fit in the William Harts?" Brensham has at least partly absorbed the Hallidays, and the MP says, "I don't know, but by God we'll try." The schoolmaster then quotes Norman Douglas: "The ideal man is not the ideal citizen." Will the post-war world be able to live with that idea? Moore was writing soon after the war and perhaps did not know the answer, but I suspect that he feared that it was No.

Next Issue

The next issue will be the autumn one, and will be posted to members early in September.

It will feature news of both the Society and the Poetry Workshop, news about the Society's competitions, short stories, articles and poems from our members. It will feature the promised article, held over from this issue, by Kathleen L. Barber about her experiences as an evacuee in World War Two.

I hope you all have a good summer and keep well until we meet up again in September for the autumn issue.

*

Contributions are still invited from members; guidelines for submissions are given on the rear cover. The deadline for submissions for the autumn issue is **15 July**.

Submissions for the Poetry Pages should be sent to the poetry editor, Terry James, at the address given on page 1. All other submissions should be sent to me, Mike Boland.

Don't forget to include a SAE with postal submissions if you want a reply, or would like your material returned.