

The Bridgend Centre Bollington

Creative Writing Group

*A small collection of our
recent work*

We hope this small sample of our recent work will give you pleasure and that it might encourage you to come along and contribute a bit!

CONTENTS:

Middlewood Arch	Mike Pomfret
Sweeping the Leaves	Dave Risley
Pause for Thought	P Rose Gosling
A Christmas Tale for Today	Sandy Milsom
Growing Old - Who Me!!	Carol Lockhart
The British Palate	Gay Horton
The Sniper	Dave Risley
2008 - A Happy New Year?	Ann Clowes
It's Only a Game	Sheila Hattie
At Leisure	Sandy Milsom
Bring me the heart of Alfredo Carson	Dave Risley
Flood	Gay Horton
A first taste of banana	Sandy Milsom
Haiku	Muriel England
Humbug	Mike Pomfret
Fight	Eileen Williams
The Seduction of Thocelaco	Gay Horton
We were on our way to Tesco's	Sandy Milsom
Exercises in writing Haiku Poetry	Ann Clowes
The Letter	Mike Pomfret
Spellbound by Cats	Eileen Williams
The Spectacle of Stones	Gay Horton
Bats	Sandy Milsom
Clock-gazing	Mike Pomfret

Copyright © September 2008
Copyright remains with each individual author

The moral rights of the authors have been asserted. All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior
written permission of the copyright holder.

Published by: The Bridgend Centre, 104 Palmerston Street
Bollington, Cheshire SK10 5PW, England
Charity number 1000605
Available from: www.bollingtondropincentre.org.uk

Middlewood Arch

(I live in a wheelchair. Going from Bollington to Macclesfield I travel along the Middlewood Way, crossing the wooden bridge spanning the Silk Road)

Wheels hum through a tunnel
of peace and green solitude.
Tyres whizz onto gravel -
snap, crackle and pop
as chippings spit from rubber
onto the grassy banks.
The path snakes to and fro to the summit -
straight, bend, straight, turn,
bend, turn, straight, bend,
turn - straight to the top.
Greeted by a wooden arc of EU friendship
covering a moving river of steel.
Chair vibrates across the slatted floor,
di-dum, di-dum; di-dum, di-dum.
Glimpses of humming cars,
roaring lorries and snarling motorbikes
combining like white water in a never-ending torrent.
Time to leave the metal madness,
wheels drumming down the arch
and onto the spiralling path.
Wending down to a heady scent of May's hawthorn
on the way to Macclesfield.



Mike Pomfret - 16th May 2007

Sweeping the Leaves

Across the path in swirls they lay;
A drift of brown and red
I put the sweeping brush away
And scour the garden shed.

I look for yet another brush;
One made of camel hair.
I find it and in quite a rush
I set the garden chair.

With easel, pastel, oil and lead
Then sit and frame the piece.
For now the leaves swirl in my head
And will not give me ease

Until in paint I take their glow
With sienna burnt and raw
In cadmium red and yellow
For ever fix my awe.

At last I rest my aching hand
The light is fading fast
By strokes on board but not as planned
I'd swept the leaves at last.

Tomorrow will do for a mundane chore
The path will be brushed then I swear for sure.

Dave Risley - 4th December 2007

Pause for Thought

There isn't a single snowflake
Drifting from the sky;
No sound of a carol's descant,
Pure and clear and high.

No sign of a special radiance
From star-shine on a shed;
No print of a camel's footfall,
No babe in a manger-bed.

But if our world remembers
And pauses in its play,
We might hear the rush of angel wings
On the night before Christmas Day.

P. Rose Gosling - 5th December 2007

A Christmas Tale for today

'Twas some weeks before Christmas and inside the house,
Mother was shopping with the click of a mouse.
The family had all been to Argos to choose,
Their presents from Santa, there was no time to lose.
The children excited by the gifts they could pick.
To northpole.com they had emailed St Nick.
Way back in October the lights were switched on,
In all shopping precincts they brightly shone.
Now into December the buying reaches a peak
The high street is bustling, it's now the last week.
The school Christmas play, a multi-cultural feed
Included Divali, Hannukah and Eid.
Mary and Joseph with tea towels on head,
Placed baby Jesus in his manger bed.
While Mums, Dads and Grannies with tears in their eyes
Went into the hall for mulled wine and mince pies.
To Tesco's they went with fear and with dread,
And hoped that they wouldn't go into the red.
Their trolley was filled right up to the top
With turkey and mince pies, cakes sherry and pop.
'Tis the night before Christmas and stores are now pressed
To last through a siege, famine or civil unrest.
In front of the telly, the family sit eating their fill
To watch "Strictly Come Dancing", "Corrie" and "the Bill".
At last peace settles on all in the home
Their dreams playing wildly as through them they roam.
I wonder, as sleeping they snore gently and sigh
If the message of Christmas has just passed them by.

Sandy Milsom - December 2007

Growing Old - Who Me!!

I'm not really sixty, it's all a big joke
But my bones creak and groan in pain.
What I need is a bath, a reet good soak
And then I'll be mobile again.

When I was young I was not told
That the years would take their toll,
And just what it means to grow old
Dear, dear, I am a poor old soul.

But my mind you see is quick and true!!
I go upstairs but then have to return
Cos' I forget what I was going to do,
You would think by now that I'd learn
To write a note so that I won't forget
Just what I was going up for
But you could seriously take a bet
I'll forget the note to be sure.

However, I'm really very young at heart,
I like discos, dancing and pop
People may say 'look at that silly old fart'
I don't care 'cos I'm not going to stop.
It's sad that the years pass so quickly by,
Life's too short to cram everything in,
I'll live life to the full before I die
Please don't tell me I'm committing a sin.

So I'll do all the things that I wish I'd done
In the years that have already flown by,
I'm really determined to have loads of fun,
You'll not stop me, so please don't try.
Life's not a rehearsal, or so they say,
And growing old and grey is pure hell,
Although I expect I will eventually pay,
Right now - I've never felt so well.

Carol Lockhart - 3rd December 2007

The British Palate

'Tis an integrated dish is Irish stew.
So much nourishment and less for chef to do.
Give the meat and veg a chop,
avalanche them in the pot
and then oven cook it for an hour or two.

Now, you couldn't give me cash for quiche lorraine.
I'd prefer to tip the whole thing in the Seine.
All those French oeuffs, ooh la la
and that pastry, au revoir.
I need a little less cholesterol for my main.

I am partial to a rarebit now and then.
It sings to me, a little like their men.
'Bread of Heaven' with a bite,
Cheesy topping, oh, the sight!
I'd sing its praise from Cardiff to Carmarthen.

I have never understood the trend for pasta
except, compared to boiling spuds, it might be faster.
I'm told it's one of the world's staples,
well, please keep it all in Naples
for their ruins. It would make an ideal plaster.

For a treat, I've tried a dish of Cullen Skink.
It's a Scottish soup to put you in the pink.
Eaten weekly, you may gain
an extraordinary brain.
At least, the experts promise there's a link.

What really turns my stomach is a curry.
Vindaloo, madras or bhuna looks like slurry.
And those spices, Gungadin!
have my innards in a spin
and running for the loo in quite a hurry!

Now, a bit of British beef and Yorkshire pud
coupled with a meaty gravy and roast spud
is a feast for any taste
and there's never any waste.
There's no debate on that in my neck of the wood.

It is no secret that I'm fond of home-cooked fare.
It is better than the rubbish served elsewhere.
I'm so proud of what we offer
to the average British scoffer,
but I'm ready for a challenge if you dare!

Gay Horton - December 2007

The Sniper

Sokolov was sweating. Beads of moisture lay across his forehead. He took his hand off the butt of the gun and wiped his palm on his combat fatigues. At that moment MacDonald came into view walking cautiously round the side of the building in front of him. The target! But just when Sokolov had a clear headshot his hand was off the gun. He grabbed it up now and peered down the sight. Too late! MacDonald had moved round the other corner of the building and was out of sight. Sokolov slumped back against the wall and massaged his aching back. He had been crouched in this awkward position for at least ten minutes and he was beginning to feel it.

He swore quietly to himself. In every training session he had rehearsed the moment of the kill. The first view of MacDonald. Zeroing in of the sights. Target acquired. A soft squeeze of the trigger so as not to disturb the aim. The hit. Target down! And a swift escape from MacDonald's henchmen. And now he had blown it. All because of sweating, shaking hands.

Time to change position. He pulled himself into a crouching posture. No sign of any movement anywhere. Nothing behind the windows of the buildings overlooking the dusty ground in front of him. Where was the rest of his team? For God's sake, were they leaving the whole operation to him? So be it.

He reviewed his training. A sniper must be able to read ground - to see pockets of potential danger where the enemy could hide, invisible to the sniper. It looked clear. A sniper must be able to move across the ground - to take advantage of every scrap of cover. Taking a deep breath he sprinted across the square in the direction MacDonald had taken - running crouched and zigzagging commando fashion. Nothing! No impact like a fist blow. No crimson stain spreading like an opening flower on his camouflage jacket. Thank God. He eased

himself through a broken door and took the stairs two at a time to the first floor. Squeezed against the wall by a window he looked out at the still empty square.

He settled into the new cover. He had blown his first chance. He would have to seize any second one that MacDonald gave him. Minutes passed. Perhaps the rest of his team were already dead. Was he the last to be rounded up?

He blinked. The shadow in the dark alley between the buildings opposite looked different - darker. Peering at it he discerned the outline of a figure standing upright. It was MacDonald. He was urinating against the wall. Raising the gun Sokolov took aim. A moment of hesitation. He told himself he must put compassion to one side. The target was not an identifiable being doing human activities like laughing, eating, drinking - and pissing. The target was an it - a plywood outline that had to be downed. The trigger was squeezed. The projectile was delivered. A red stain spread across MacDonald's right temple.

But MacDonald did not fall. Instead a referee appeared and tagged the chief exec as dead. MacDonald pushed his goggles onto his forehead, wiped the paint from his right eye and bawled up 'Is that you, Sokolov? My office: Monday morning, 8 am'

Andrew Sokolov gulped and cleared his throat for a reply but all that came out, to nobody in particular, was a *sotto voce*, 'Uh, oh.'

Dave Rislely - 18th October 2007

2008 - A Happy New Year?

2008 - a brand new year - and all the bright, bouncy people I meet are full of bonhomie and are slapping me on the back asking what resolutions I have made and then, without even giving me the chance to answer launch into long, boring descriptions of their own brand of seasonal self-deception of the kind that runs: go to gym more often, lose weight, eat healthily, eat less etc. etc., you know the usual January foolishness - and we all know that 'the best laid plans of mice and men gang oft awry'. There! I've paid my annual nod to things 'North of the border' - 'Auld lang syne' and all that.

Now I can get a word in sideways - as the brightness, noise and brilliant colour of the New Year fireworks died away and the cold reality of another January first dawned what did I promise myself? Not the hopes, fears and aspirations of my youth - it's too late for that. There'll be no setting the world on fire, no moving mountains. It's all just too much effort. Shall I settle instead for the level, middle ground of mediocrity? No more struggles to climb those mountains or the effort of dipping down to the valleys. No more euphoria or hysterical laughter but then no more depression, frustration or hot tears either. Things are much easier this way - well yes they are but then that would be a really boring way to live. If every morning dawned the same with no new challenges, no surprises, no excitement - no stress even! Life would be dull indeed.

So instead my new year will be filled with wonder, with anticipation, with change. I'll go on struggling up that mountain - maybe at a slower pace as befits my aging frame, maybe even grumbling all the way but I'll press on and I know - I just know that the view from the top will have the WOW factor. By the way there are several vacancies for climbing companions. Interested....?

Ann Clowes - January 2008

It's only a game..

The stadium's full, the Gods arrive,
Worshipped by the faithful crowd
Singing hymns that glorify
Ideology football style.

This deity of flesh and blood
That can be seen and sometimes touched,
Must reach beyond their mortal frame
Of skill and strength within the game.

For expectations so decree
Hungry souls on passion feed.
Water must be changed to wine
To show who are the true divine

That lift the spirits way beyond
The mundane life of those that throng.
When miracles are not produced
Thirst and hunger change the mood

To a baying mob of unfed souls
Longing for that Feeding Goal.
If none arrive, they'll crucify
Without a cross, their man - made Gods.

Sheila Hattie - 2008

At Leisure

A Sonnet

Slow-paced sweet days, leisurely and long
Walking at peace on the heathered slope.
Hear curlew's rhythmically rippling song,
The lark soaring up high to sing of hope .
This frantic world moves now at gentler pace
I watch a buzzard wheel above its prey.
A million miles away from life's fast race.
I leave that now for some long distant day.
Today I shall seek out the windy moor,
Where tufted grass springs live beneath my tread.
A rough and steep climb from my own back door,
Letting thoughts tumble free inside my head.
Wonder wells up and fills my hungry soul,
Bursts in my heart, restores me till I'm whole.

Sandy Milsom - 2008

Bring me the heart of Alfredo Carson

Uggh! First my friend and workmate, Tracey, masterminded long-time live-in boyfriend Theo the Greek into popping the question. Then she gave me the job of organising the hen party, saying, 'You've got to do it, Sally. You're the only one that can do it.'

Oh, the mess wasn't my fault. I know at work I'm always saying, 'It isn't my fault,' but this time it really wasn't. No, this time I could honestly say, 'It was like that when I came in.' What I inherited was Tracey's plan to drive in a champagne limousine to Manchester, to top up at a taverna, carry on to a cocktail bar and trail back to Macclesfield on the train. So far, so bad. If you know Tracey's friends you know that we were bound to have a few casualties during this massive logistical exercise. It was fine in the limo. The champagne corks popped and we all relaxed. There was a slight hiatus in the joviality as we paused in Manchester to let the chauffeur decant us outside the taverna. 'Good luck, girls!' he shouted after us. *And good luck to him*, I thought, as I saw him depart with our three hundred quid.

The first casualty was Gemma. She got talking to one of the waiters - a friend of Theo - who offered to take her clubbing when his shift finished so she stayed on when the rest of us moved off. Innocent abroad as I am, I know not to listen to Greeks bearing gifts.

And then there were seven.

I knew the cocktail bar was a mistake as soon as I saw the outside. All fancy ironwork, gilt and pretentious fabric in the windows. In the doorway stood a six-foot man in a monkey suit complemented by the natural charm of a gorilla. The greeter - and that's a misnomer - took one look at us and grunted, 'No horns.'

Alex, who's the sensible one, said, 'Let's go somewhere else.' I agreed but we were overruled. So it was off with the horns, sling the trident and pack the pointy tails away.

We entered quiet and dignified. But, after a few minutes, I put the horns back on my head. The barman just smiled so gradually the rest of us re-horned. I texted boyfriend Freddie, *Am in cocktail bar, where you?*

He texted back, *Am watching Macc Town winning three-nil.*

Football - it's all men think about. But then I had an idea. His team was winning; it was 29 February. I texted, *Alfredo Carson, will you marry me?* and waited for the answer.

The place was livening up. A group of nuns entered. Either the doorman was mellowing or he was on the side of the angels (and nuns). Rianna, who is a Welsh wizard in the accounting department but not so clever at counting drinks, while staggering back from the loo, collided with a fake nun who got stropy. Caroline, Rianna's friend, came to her defence and the two hen parties, Devils v Nuns, squared up to each other. The only civilian in the place hastily drank up and left. The barman was still smiling when he threw us out. Probably for the best really. At five pounds a throw I couldn't have afforded many more shots. Besides I was the soberest and had to keep a clear head to support Rianna. Caroline showed the doorman her abdomen and was moving on to more intimate parts when Alex dragged her off before the man got more than a glimpse of her bum.

It was up to Alex and me now. We consulted how to get to Piccadilly station - a tricky manoeuvre. We had five squaddies in bad shape. They were suffering from poor quality combat rations. They were dehydrated. They had taken a hell of a beating through impact with street furniture. One particularly pointy post-box did for Jenny. On the walk across town she collided with it and got a cut on her arm. Alex had to take her off to MRI in a taxi. So I lost my lieutenant.

And then there were five.

I don't know how I did it but I got the four of them to the station more or less as a unit. On the train I had time to check for messages. That unnatural spawn of an English father and Spanish mother, Alfredo Carson, hadn't sent any reply. I texted him again, *Am on train now. Pls collect.*

Gloomily I straightened my horns and tucked my tail in beside me. Purchasing manager Caroline had lost her ticket and was now negotiating with the ticket inspector just what she could do for him if he let her off buying another one. I looked out at the lights of Edgeley and pretended I was in Las Vegas - or anywhere else, in fact. If you know Edgeley you'll know what I mean.

So the caravan arrived at Macclesfield. The dogs barked and we moved on. Some to their loved ones. Some didn't have any loved ones. I was left standing on the pavement outside Macclesfield station thinking about my soon-to-be ex-boyfriend. The least he could have done would have been to send a polite, *no*. At that moment Freddie's beat-up old Fiesta rolled up the station approach, stopped and the boy himself hopped out with a cheery, 'Hello, have you been waiting long?'

'Long enough,' I said.

'I had to call at the supermarket. It's the only place open at this time of night.'

Then he produced a bouquet of red roses from the back seat of the car. The note in the bouquet said *Name the day*.

'Why didn't you text me back?'

'It didn't seem very romantic and, anyway, I wanted to surprise you.'

'Here's a surprise for you,' I said, as I punched him in the stomach - but not too hard or too low as to impair the family jewels.

'Ow!'

'Don't be a baby. You may now kiss me.'

Dave Risley - 2008

Flood

Spit, spat, spot, she starts.
Diamond drops descending.
Rich reward for ropey roots
of rose and rhododendron

Plish, plush, plosh, she pours
down grid and gritty gutter.
Silver soaks the scorching soil,
streaming without stutter.

Swish, swoosh, swash, she storms
in angry argument.
Terrible trickles toss about
and turn into a torrent.

Rush, rush, rush, she rages,
raising roaring rivers.
Brooks boil and banks are breached.
A quiet community quivers.

Crash, splash, crash, she causes
chaos and calamity.
Flooding floors and four by fours
with forceful, fast, ferocity.

Push, push, push, she presses
snaking through sandbag spaces.
Rivulets run over rugs
and into rooms she races.

Slush, slush, slush, she slows,
weathered, worn, washed out
while watercraft and wellingtons
wade and weave about.

A first taste of banana

'Bananas for them 'as 'aven't 'ad 'em,' came the cry from the greengrocer. I, as usual, was running ahead of Mum, who was pushing a large pram. I stood and stared at the stall outside the shop watching a dwindling queue handing over ration coupons for the yellowy, green fruit looking very exotic and foreign. As I got closer I could see only a few clusters left like monstrous yellow fingers poised ready to grab me as I stood with my nose against the edge of the stall.

I stretched out a hand to touch the strange fruit. 'Don't you 'andle them me duck, not if you ain't buying,' grumbled the greengrocer from inside the shop.

'Might be,' I replied, 'when Mummy gets here. I've never had 'nanas before.' Mum came into sight to be greeted by my pleading and whining for bananas.

'Only 'alf a pound ducks, they don't grow on trees you know.' A mere two bananas were handed over in exchange for a ration coupon and as we started to walk home I began to wonder where they did grow. I begged a ride on the pram with my brother and sister and Mum puffed and panted up the steep hill towards our home. I kept asking her how we were going to share the bananas. I didn't yet go to school but even I knew that two bananas could not easily be shared amongst five of us.

'Wait and see,' Mum smiled and touched her nose.

When at last we reached home and the shopping was put away I watched Mum as she made jelly, strawberry, and my favourite. Leaving it to set, she carefully peeled the skin from the banana revealing a fat pale yellow finger. I was desperate to taste just a tiny bit but Mum carefully sliced the precious fruit and placed the slices on top of the red jelly in a neat circle. There was just one sliver left over as the circle was complete, which Mum popped into my open mouth. I rolled it round and round on my tongue feeling the softness of the texture and tasting the sweetness of the pulp melting in my mouth.

Mum had magically eked out the two bananas and each of us had a slice or two. For me the taste and texture of banana was wonderful and enhanced by being embedded in another of my favourite foods, jelly.

HAIKU

Sayonara

Alone, now you have gone.
A shadow on the grey stones.
Sayonara love.

Spring

Confetti petals lie;
Under the cherry trees in bloom
Like joyous fecund brides.

Tadpoles

Small black wriggling commas,
What mysterious magic changes you
Into frogs with elfin hands.

Muriel England - 4th June 2008

HUMBUG

Is humanity having a humdinger?
No, humiliatingly humourless
and humdrum. A humid
humerus on a humpbacked humanoid.
A fork an' shovel full of humus.
A barrow of humph.

Ragbag and ragtag the fleabag.
Debag and handbag the windbag.
Postbag his nosebag,
mailbag the gasbag.
Zigzag around the rat bag,
out of the beanbag,
behind the sandbag
and sock him on the chinwag.

A dreg to beg,
skeg the dogleg.
A blackleg.
A bootleg.
Un peg the keg,
nutmeg his leg,
put egg on his teg,
and sink him in a muskeg.

Rig a shindig.
Re-jig the bigwig.
Don't give a fig,
Frig the prig.
Don't jig at his gig
or twig his cig.
Don't be a guinea pig at his whirligig
or earwig on his thingamajig

Unclog the underdog,
Don't be a hangdog.
Footslog, jog and leapfrog like a bulldog
out of the fog, smog and the bog like an old seadog.
Be a watchdog, goosegog, sheepdog and hotdog.
Be prickly like a hedgehog, avoid backlog
and don't flog nog, grog or eggnog.
Avoid a backlog or snog the disappearing golliwog.

So unplug the smug slug, and shrug out the snug bedbug,
pull the rug on the thug, firebug and litterbug.
Be a pug, shrug your mug
and clear the fug in your lughole.
Do a jitterbug,
tug your earplug,
trug the spittlebug,
and down the doodlebug.
Open your lug, fill your jug and take a slug to
HumBAG? HumBEG? HumBIG? HumBOG?

What a load of bloody HUMBUG!

Mike Pomfret □ *March 2008*

Fight

In 1939 we were all young, dying to prove we were more than a match for the Nazis. My friend was no exception. A twenty-one year old, devil-may-care madcap, up to all risks and saw no danger. He had joined the RAF Reserve and elected to train as a fighter pilot, the ideal specimen. Proud was the day when he got his wings. He would show those Germans what he was made of.

Soon the alarms all sounded. He was first to reach his Spitfire. The sky was full of small clouds, ideal for concealing our planes. My friend took advantage of these conditions until, emerging from a particularly large cloud, there in front of him, in a direct line, was a German bomber. The surprise and excitement were great. The adrenalin began to flow. In his mind's eye he was already doing the victory roll on his way back to base. He shifted his position slightly to ensure an accurate hit. Never again would he be afforded such an easy target, of this he was certain. This was his big moment. His fingers curled on the trigger and he fired - and nothing happened - he fired again - and nothing happened. His guns were jammed. One very crest-fallen pilot returned to base.

There had been thirty-three aircrew at his wedding earlier that year and only he survived the war. So perhaps we can say he won his fight.

Eileen Williams - 2008

The Seduction of Thocelaco (anagram)

Her shape is slightly domed and her colour it is bright.
Her arms at either side are twisted tight.
Underneath the shine of purple can be seen a silver shimmer.
Such a rich and heady mix for one so slight.

Her outer garb is stripped. It is held up to the light
where the sky outside takes on a vivid stain.
Her underskirt is taken then balled up between the fingers
to be flicked at someone's head with blithe disdain.

She is longed for; lusted after, by the one who strips her naked,
as her skin is polished brown and smooth to touch.
The feel of her perfection heightens all the human senses
and her inner promise proves to be too much.

Though her shape is yet intact, it will not remain for long.
The desire of tongue outweighs the mind's disquiet.
Oh, to taste her silken innards is by far too much temptation
and the ruination of another diet!

Gay Horton - 2008

We were on our way to Tesco's

'Must I go? Do you really need me?' complained a reluctant Dave.

'It will only take an hour,' I assured him, 'you'll be back in time for the match.'

As we turned out of our gate next door's black cat shot across in front of the car in true kamikaze style. Delilah is not my favourite animal as it stalks and terrorises the birds and the dog, but I didn't want it squashed beneath the car wheels.

'Stupid cat, it must have a death wish.'

Dave slammed on the brakes, the cat shot into the hedge and we narrowly missed the ice-cream van that we failed to see, turning the corner into our road. The cat was unscathed and free to live another of its multiple lives and pursue our feathered friends.

'A black cat is supposed to bring good luck,' I said.

I did not quite catch Dave's reply but I gathered that the cat was not his favourite creature either.

Turning down the road towards the canal we noticed a small gathering of people on the bridge, pointing over the wall. Curiosity got the better of us and in spite of the pressure of time we stopped and peered over the bridge. A narrow boat was across the canal, its bow wedged into the towpath side and its stern on the other bank. A frantic sailor was attempting to manoeuvre the boat, revving his engine and moving the rudder first one way and then the other, to no avail. His long suffering partner was attempting to push the bow of the boat off the bank, but it remained stubbornly stuck.

The gathered watchers, including us, offered advice and encouragement and several young men eager to show their fitness went to try and free the boat. Their efforts were beginning to pay off as at last the bow started to move slowly backwards. Unfortunately the hapless guys had not taken into account Newton's law of motion and as the boat continued to slip away into the canal, they too passed the point of no return and followed it. The knights in shining armour were in the drink, splashing, cursing and spluttering.

This nautical cock-up had been an amusing diversion, for me anyway. Now the red-faced boater and his partner were free to go, and we had an appointment with a shopping trolley.

'That's half an hour wasted,' muttered Dave.

'Entertaining though,' I chuckled.

On Wellington Road there were traffic lights AGAIN!

On red of course.

Dave's hands drummed irritably on the wheel, he was not a happy bunny.

At the junction of Albert Road the traffic was at a complete standstill.

Getting out of the car I saw a Co-op lorry slewed across the road. It had hit a lamp post and narrowly avoided a parked car whose driver was turning a funny shade of puce. An impasse seemed likely!

'Knickers to this,' said Dave as he gingerly turned the car round and stopped once again at the traffic lights on red! Dave drove back up the road and as we approached our house we squealed to a halt and he made to get out of the car.

'Oh no you don't,' I yelled. 'We'll go the other way. It's your family coming up tomorrow, they'll need feeding.'

Glowering and muttering, he slunk back in the car.

Kerridge is a slalom course of parked cars, bad at the best of times. This was not the best of times! A caravan approached from the opposite direction.

'What silly sod would bring a caravan up this road,' Dave spluttered as he did the slalom in reverse.

'You, you twerp. You did the same thing last week when Wellington Road was closed, and watch out for those horses,' I yelled as we came up close behind two riding abreast.

Dave braked sharply, but not before we'd spooked the horses. One took a distinct dislike to our Frelander and free-landed a good kick on it. Fortunately it hit the front tyre and did no harm.

'I don't believe it! They should stick to the fields!' shouted Dave.

As we reached the roundabout on the Silk Road a banner proclaimed to the world that Jimmy Smith was 50 today, and another sign declared that he would not reach 51 if he didn't stop his liaisons with his neighbour's wife! Turning at last on to the Silk Road, I said hopefully that we would now have a smooth journey.

Passing under the wooden footbridge we saw a young woman with a small child sitting by a car.

'Stop!' I shouted, 'that's Sally and little Tom. They may need help.'

'Too late to stop now. I'll just go round the roundabout and back again.'

By the time we had retraced our route and we had reached our neighbour once again we saw that she was now being helped by a very nice AA man and she assured us that all was well. We continued.

After what seemed an interminable time since we had set off from home we pulled into Tesco's car park.

As we were about to get out of the car we saw an elderly man reversing towards us. He was close and coming closer. A horrible crunch told us that he had come too close.

'I don't believe it.' groaned Dave.

I made sure the elderly man was OK. He was shaken and unnerved. With a little reassurance he brightened up a little. Not too much damage had been done.

'I've had enough of this,' fumed Dave. 'I'm going home. We'll order on line.'

Back home, switching on the computer, I got the message, 'Site unavailable, cannot connect to server.'

'Dave, fancy a trip to Sainsbury's???'

Sandy Milsom - July 2008

Exercises in writing Haiku Poetry

Fascination

Beauty, like diamonds,
Shines in the beholder's eye,
Dazzling the senses.

At a friend's funeral

Once a cricketer,
On field he bowled strong and true,
The game is over.

Nostalgia and Regret

Echoes your voice now
into the depths of my soul,
Sorrow, sweet sorrow.

The chill of winter
Encloses my heart with yours,
Tears fall like snowflakes.

Bollington Sunset

Dark hills at evening,
Devouring the sun of gold,
Swallowed in blackness.

Depression

Black melancholy
Sits on my shoulder like sin
Waiting its moment.

Ann Clowes - 2008

The Letter

'LOOS ARE US'
Bottomley Drive,
Turdsley SH11 1TS

1st April 1975

Dear Mr Smith,

As you will be aware Bottocks & Sons have been taken over by 'Loos are us' the current leaders in toilet furnishings. As part of the takeover agreement Bottocks have to lose 50% of their staff. This would suggest that the company was sold 'Down the Pan' and we were 'Around the Bend' to accept such a lousy offer. However the management were the first to suffer from piles of aggravation and we have been obliged to accept a modest pay-off. We have had little option but to accept the motion and take it sitting down.

We regretfully write to advise that you have been selected for redundancy. The bottom line is there is no longer a need for a stool maker in today's modern toiletry.

In lieu of your long service we have pleasure in enclosing a cheque for £3100 to cover for the thirty years you have been engaged plus one week's notice.

The factory will close as of today and my family and I will be leaving to start a new life in our new chateau in the South of France.

May I take this final opportunity to thank you for your loyal services. Good luck and ☐ ..

George did not read any further as tears filled his eyes. People on the bus stared as he snivelled and blew his nose loudly before stuffing the letter into his anorak pocket. As he did so he fingered the cheque that lay at the bottom becoming creased and soiled. This brought on a further bout of sobs. 'Are you O.K. mate?' an acned youth at his side was doing his best to

show concern whilst making it obvious he was not with George. George nodded and stared through the dirty bus window at the passing traffic, moving slowly in the driving rain.

The bell rang. *'Town Centre, Library and Tesco's,'* sang out the large bottomed Nigerian bus conductress. I think our extra large wooden round would just about accommodate her, thought George as he stepped off the bus and very smartly stepped into the warmth of the town library.

Sat at one of the reading tables he stared blankly at the Daily Mail. Why had he selected the paper his wife read when really he detested it. Why? George, for the hundredth time tried to evaluate his life.

Married for 30 years to Mildred. Working for Bottocks - 'You must get a steady job, with prospects.' - for the same miserable period of time, when all he wanted to do was carry on with his beloved farming. Indoor life left him bereft and depressed. Same monotonous routine made financially strangled when Mildred developed arthritis and gave up work. A small disability payment did little to help since Mildred kept it to herself. Thirty years making 'constipation stools' whilst his life constipated. And now? George had been too afraid to tell Mildred that he no longer had a job. Three weeks had passed and he kept to his normal routine of leaving home at 7.30 and returning at six to look after his complaining wife. At 55 he was unlikely ever to work again. His life would be hell when she discovered the truth. What was the answer? George contemplated life again.

An advert in the newspaper caught his eye, "3 GLORIOUS WEEKS TOURING THE CANADIAN LAKES AND ROCKS - SEE THE SPLENDOUR OF NIAGRA." Canada - his lifetime's dream. George closed his eyes and was aboard the giant locomotive - out in the wilderness - back to the fresh, open air - his idea of heaven.
'Wake up sir. We shall be closing soon.'

He awoke startled and stumbled into the dark damp street. The bright lights of a shop front attracted his attention. "COOK'S TRAVEL - THE WORLD IS YOUR OYSTER" He didn't really understand the meaning but the picture of mountains and steam locomotive flooded his mind and he stumbled in through the door, into the warm, bright interior.

Mildred stretched, yawned and peered closely at the bedside clock - 9.30. Good heavens, George had left his usual time and she must have dozed off after the tea in bed. She hoped he would press for a rise today. She had pestered him enough times. Her wardrobe was due for a fresh look.

She hopped out of bed, pushing aside the walking frame. It served its useful purpose when George was around. Saved her the burden of domestic chores and allowed her a little to spend without exerting herself.

The bath was warm and relaxing - all that would change in an hour when Nobby the window cleaner arrived on his weekly round. Young, virile, passionate - everything that George wasn't. She allowed herself an indulgent smile as she caressed her breasts with lavender bubbles.

The bowl of fresh fruit sat on the kitchen table, courtesy of George, one of the many essentials for treating her 'chronic arthritis'. Mildred allowed another satisfied smile as she picked up an envelope marked for her attention.

Dear Mildred,

As you will see from the attached letters I was made redundant. I could not stand the thoughts of your nagging reaction so kept quiet and maintained my usual routine. After a little thought I have decided to do what I have been thinking of for a long time. That is to leave you. You will not see me again. I have taken the redundancy money and the £900 from the Building Society - you can keep the house.

I overheard two fellows talking in the library and hope you and Nobby will be very happy. Good luck to you both - he's obviously helping to cure your 'terrible arthritis'.

Good-bye and riddance, George

Mildred slammed the letter onto the kitchen table and screamed, 'You can't do that, half of the money is mine!'

Mike Pomfret - July 2008

Spellbound by Cats

Cats are like Marmite: you either love them or hate them. And don't be fooled: they know exactly which side you are on. Let me tell you of my two great loves.

I had always had a cat throughout my childhood. My brother and I were brought up with animals and although we shared all of them, when it came to the domestic ones, somehow he gravitated to the dogs and I to the cats. Then I left home and it was no longer possible for me to have a cat - for many years.

Eventually I arrived at Canterbury where I lived for some twenty years and had an antique shop. I'd been there for about five years when a customer came in to buy some item that had caught his eye. We talked and found we were both mad about cats. He said he had found some feral cats that had recently had kittens and he wanted to find homes for them and yes, you've guessed correctly, I was talked into having not one, but two cats which were to be black, or black and white, and it was essential they were toms as I did not relish the patter of tiny paws. As I lived in Canterbury I planned to call them Thomas and Becket - how original! I was to collect them in three weeks' time. I planned for their arrival as a mother expecting her first-born. The day arrived. My excitement was intense as I arrived at the given address. Then, oh dear, my customer greeted me with, "I'm so sorry, there's been a mix-up. Your black tom is fine, but my wife inadvertently gave away the black and white kitten. I do have another black and white one, but..." "That's OK," I said. "I didn't see the other one, so don't worry." "Yes," said the man, "but it's a female."

"No, I can't have a female. Do you have another colour then?"

"I do have a tabby, or a ginger tom."

"I'll have the tabby," I said.

He opened the door to go and fetch the tabby, and a tiny black triangular face above a white bib peered over the edge of a basket. It was love at first sight. "Don't bother with the tabby! I'll take this one and have her spayed."

My black tom was so handsome, large, beautiful, loving and oh, so stupid, but we loved each other. My girl was unbelievably pretty, tiny and so intelligent we could talk to each other ☐ and I adored her. I could hardly call her Becket, so they became Tom and Becky.

Then calamity struck. After a week they both developed cat flu. Carefully cradling two very sick kittens I rushed to the vet. He gave them injections and then warned me they would be dead by the following day. "Is there nothing I can do?" I asked. "Don't bother with food, just give them plenty of water because they'll dehydrate."

I returned home with my poor sick babies and suddenly I decided they were going to live. With the water, I added milk, which I fed to them every twenty minutes until two o'clock in the morning. They both had temperatures so they slept with me. I set the alarm for six o'clock and when I woke up, there were two pairs of eyes peering into mine!

I took them back to the vet - he had made the appointment but said he realised I wouldn't be keeping it - his surprise was immense! Unfortunately they had both developed a chronic nasal infection and for the next six months I went weekly to the vet with them. The fees were enormous. I needed a new winter coat - I didn't get it! I had planned an exotic holiday ☐ I didn't get that either! But eventually both cats were cured and the devotion between the three of us was heart-warming.

And, talking of holidays, I was fortunate to always have someone to care for them whilst I was away - but on my return, that was another story! They would both rush towards me. Tom would wind himself round my legs purring his welcome. Becky would stop a yard from me, make sure I was looking at her and then turn her back on me. If I touched her, she would pull away from me and vigorously clean the spot I had touched. This would go on for anything up to two hours, then she would stretch elegantly and casually walk over to me, jump on my lap and place her front two paws round my neck. I was forgiven and once more was enfolded in her love.

Eileen Williams - February 2008

The Spectacle of Stones

Great stones standing up in ranks were set up in place for devotion. Such were the writings of a native islander in 1680. And here I was in the Hebrides, on the Isle of Lewis, a month and a boat ride later, making my way up the sunny hill along the well worn path to view the spectacle of stones.

The information board reads;

Dating from approximately 2000BC the Callanish Stones are situated near the village of the same name. On this site, the thirteen primary stones form a circle with a long approach avenue of stones to the north and shorter rows to the east, south and west. The overall layout of the monument resembles a distorted Celtic cross.

I reached the top, looking across to the grassy knoll. Long fascinated by creations such as these, I was thrilled. Magical, mysterious and majestic. Such were my thoughts at that first sight.

Surrounded by the mists of myth and foggy folklore, the tall megaliths struck a silent pose, eerily frozen in time like a quirky chess game awaiting players, each form unique, singular and throwing angular shadows in the afternoon sun. I stood in the circle and was rewarded with the same shuddery emotion I experience when inside a huge cathedral. It was a strange and humbling feeling that something as big and as old as God had a connection here.

Gouged and worn by more than a million storms and warmed by more than a million dawns, I felt compelled to touch their humanesque shapes; to link their isolated rigidity with my own living, breathing flesh, now tracing a forefinger over the rough pinks, greys and purples of cool surfaces.

I walked the stones in and out, touching palms on each, weaving the circle like a maypole dancer with a ribbon. I paused only to wonder which ancient race had built this monument and walked here before me to view with awe and touch with devotion these kings of granite. Did they come as primal elders, reaping the magnetic energy from within the stones to regenerate and renew themselves in readiness for harvest? Did they come as priests, robed and revered, to worship and adore? Perhaps they came in synchronised stealth to sacrifice some chosen creature, spilling its lifeblood over this sacred spot, to appease or feed an angry earth god. Still they come at summer solstice, to meet and celebrate the magic dawn in druid ritual.

Perhaps through past eons, any or all of these have taken place on this hallowed ground. From Callanish many theories are crafted and just as many critics are quick to discredit them. It is by far, the cleverest way of keeping the secrets of the standing stones.

Gay Horton - 4th July 2007

Bats

The garden at twilight on a warm July evening buzzes with insect life, attracted by the sweet scent of honeysuckle and night scented stocks. It is a time to sit, ruminate over the day's events, sip a glass of merlot and watch and listen to the night sounds. It would be bliss were it not for the hordes of biting insects that seem to be attracted to me with the accuracy of a heat seeking missile and an insatiable blood lust.

With citronella candle burning, hopefully to ward off the little biters and wine glass in hand I look forward to the late evening arrival of the bats, partly because the biting insect so partial to my flesh are also on the menu of the bat brigade, but mainly because I love bats, In fact I am bats about bats and realise how lucky we are to have these seasonal evening visitors. At this time of year on warm evenings there is enough of a promise of rich pickings to lure the bats from their roosts under the canal bridge in our road into the gardens of those of us lucky enough to grow the insect friendly plants. Intoxicated by the scent of honeysuckle the insects are lured in and the bats follow.

They are exciting to watch. Hanging about all day upside down does not stop them from being such wonderful aerial acrobats. They dart and twist, expertly manoeuvring in mid air and are lethal killers in mid flight. They weave and swerve at high speed and my eye finds it difficult to keep up with their dizzying flight. I am amazed by the supersonic sense that steers their swift, silent movements and prevents high altitude collisions. A brief turn around the chimney pot and a sashay over to the honey suckle entwined hedge provides a bounty of delectable delights for the bat, a varied menu of insect kind garnered in a feeding frenzy.

Exciting and beautiful to watch, this creature of the night has long been an object of fear. It has inspired dark tales of foreboding and loathing, blood sucking, blood curdling, black as night, a creature straight out of hell. Perhaps the bad press is also its attraction; we may all have a touch of the night about us.

Sandy Milson - 2008

'Clock-gazing'

The neon light bore into my eyeballs. I blinked rapidly to moisten the drying skin and lowered my gaze to look at the wall clock. 10.40 and Newsnight was interviewing the Home Secretary about the government's inability to control teenage violence, aggression against N.H.S. staff, terrorism and mindless drunken rage in today's society. I muttered at the screen, having been woken from a deep post dinner nap. 'Pardon?' A nurse gazed at me as she, and two others, busied themselves turning me over. The four hour ritual. I pretended to be asleep. Maybe, just maybe, I would fall back into blissful oblivion. The long nights were a nightmare of broken sleep - patients calling out, transfusion equipment bleeping, nurses moving around and chattering at their communal desk. Come morning I would be stir crazy and desperate for the land of nod.

The nurses spent ages at the next bed. Some young coloured lad, in rather poor shape, had been brought in during the early hours of that morning. 'Serious accident,' whispered the nurses as policemen came and went, and he cried softly behind closed curtains. 'T.V. off now. Get some sleep.' The sister pressed the off switch.

I squinted at the neon night light that shone directly into my eyes, cursed silently and allowed my gaze to wander to the clock. 11.05 and the red second finger moved jerkily and inexorably towards 11.06. I lay transfixed as the faint ticking of the seconds, only audible at night, started me humming, 'Tic-toc, tic-toc, tic-toc.' I was counting seconds - not sheep....

There was a movement. Stealthy footsteps. A dark figure came between the two beds and hushed tones followed, that became more and more agitated. I craned my neck to listen, compensating for my one ear deafness. What followed was scary. The hairs on my arms and neck prickled with tension. I was on red alert, straining to hear the hissed whispers.

'I must have.'
'Leave me alone --- Religion --- you infidel ---'
'Give to me --- you will suffer.'

My senses of fear heightened.
'Never --- Allah will ---'
'This is life or death.'
'Never --- I will die --- honour.'
'Now --- swiftly --- sharp ---'

The figure raised his hand, a metallic glint caught in the neon night light. A knife!
In mortal terror, a silent scream lodged in my throat. Unable to reach across to intervene, I sought a weapon. The water jug, full to the brim and lid firmly clipped on, came immediately to hand. I hurled it across the short gap. He, for it was surely a male, seeing a movement in the corner of his eye, half turned and the jug smashed into his forehead sending water and ice hurling, like shrapnel, in all directions. He staggered and half fell onto the bed before slumping to the floor.

All hell broke loose. The neon light spat into life. I squinted, through slitted eyes, at the clock. 4.22. The 'night turning' squad. They would sort it out. As tension drained every ounce of strength from my body, I was flipped over and sank exhausted into a nightmarish sleep.

The neon light was giving me a serious headache. I glanced at the wall clock. 9.59. 'The court will rise.'
A very regal figure entered, sat in splendour, eyed me over his pinz-nez and intoned, 'The defendant will arise to receive the verdict of the jury.' Much tittering. 'Err,' sorry. You may remain seated.' Some laughter while he turned to the jury.
'Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury. The defendant is accused of causing grievous bodily harm to Doctor Safan Narwat on the night of the 5th August 2008.

This is a matter of truth and who you choose to believe. The defendant claims he mistook the doctor for a terrorist or was witnessing a case of gang warfare i.e. the body in the bed was in danger. He mistook the needle for a knife. The doctor claims that he was verbally abused by the defendant when taking his blood earlier the previous day, and further reacted by hurling the jug of water at his head.

Forewoman of the Jury. If you believe the former you will bring a verdict of 'Not Guilty'. If, on the other hand, you consider the Doctor was assaulted both verbally and physically whilst carrying out his normal duties for the N.H.S. you will find for the prosecution and a verdict of 'Guilty'. HOW DO YOU FIND?'

I tried to focus tired, exhausted eyes on this woman who would determine my future life. I forced a smile through gritted teeth. The neon lights blinded my senses.

'Tea or coffee Michael? Baked beans, toast or cereal?'

Reality was slow to kick in. The neon lights bore holes in my retina. The clock was showing 8.02. Breakfast.

'Usual, please.' I croaked with dry, baked throat.

I slumped back onto my pillow. More night starvation. My tired droopy eyes fell on the notice cello-taped to the corridor window.

WARNING

Any patient using Verbal or Physical aggression towards a member of staff will be evicted and it may lead to prosecution.

Mike Pomfret - July 2008