

WRITE ON 14

STORIES, POEMS, LIFE AND LAUGHS.



MANCHESTER'S OWN MAGAZINE

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INTRODUCTION

From tiny acorns grow massive oaks. The worker writer movement began some ten years ago in the form of isolated groups of writers and occasional small magazines. Now there are writers' workshops and publishing projects all over Britain, 25 of which are linked through the Federation of Worker Writers. Like the Federation, Commonword is constantly looking to growth.

At the beginning of 1977 we were a group of four writers. By the summer there were enough of us to publish our first book. And since then the workshop has grown to the extent that last year we decided to start new workshops in other parts of the city. One of these was HOME TRUTHS, a writers' group for women, based in Stretford. For many women a weekly trek into a city centre backstreet is daunting. Because much of their work is very personal, many women feel more at ease in an all-women's group. HOME TRUTHS was designed to meet these needs. It now has a regular membership of around ten and is planning to produce a book of its work next spring. In the meantime we have to settle for a ten page selection of their work in WRITE ON 14.

Workshops are always producing new ideas. Members of the workshop recently started the COMMONWORD ROADSHOW, performing poems and sketches in pubs, clubs, libraries - anywhere that'll have them! Other members have been editing a book of short stories. And WRITE ON 14 was edited by two workshop members, Joan Batchelor and Dave Prestbury.

WRITE ON 14 contains work by several unpublished writers including a story by Peter Clayfield, work by two students at Langley Community School, and two poems by Mark Woodward who was inspired by WRITE ON 11 to start a writers group in Cannock.

But as well as gains there are losses. Wendy Whitfield who has worked at Commonword for 18 months helping to produce CLOUT and start HOME TRUTHS is leaving for Nottingham where she hopes to join a workshop, "Your Own Stuff", and even start another women's workshop. In her place there will be two new workers, Joan Batchelor and Ailsa Cox who will be carrying on where Wendy left off. Best wishes to Wendy. Congratulations to Ailsa and Joan.

Phil Boyd

Seasons in a Pennine Village

Pennine village, silent in mid-winter,
Snow, virgin white, drifts deep and cold
Against strong, sturdy granite
Walls of cottages, centuries old.

Pennine village, gay with birdsong,
Stern stone walls bordered bright
With first flowers, and the quavering
Bleat of lambs, newborn on distant height.

Pennine village, in mid-age of the year,
Whispering Ash trees shade sun-dappled walls,
Bees, pollen-laden, drone from flower to flower.
Far down in the dale the dream-voiced cuckoo calls.

Pennine village, folded in granite hills,
Stone houses, grey, cool against moorland
Warm-gold with autumn bracken,
Pennine village, my childhood home, my land.



My Bill

"If he smacks my bottom agen
I'll crack him ont yed wi me clog,
I can't abide such saucy men
Treating a lass like a dog".

That's what I first thowt about Bill,
Loom tackler in t'big weavin' shed,
I gave him a look that could kill,
Ne'er dreaming we'd end up bein' wed.

We'd been courtin' just short of a year
When I found mesel' i't family way,
Though happy, I fair shamed, for fear
What mother and feither would say.

I cried a bit when I told Bill,
But he said, "Nay lass don't tek on,
We'll just take a day off fra t'mill
An' get wed as quick as we can."

So we wed, an' I had me first child.
Years passed an' we had two or three.
Bill was allus a bit fey en wild,
But a good loving husband to me.

Now t' childer have grown up and gone,
My Bill died just five years today,
Can't get used to living alone,
Life's cruel takin' my Bill away.

Hard an wearisome wer t' years in t'mill
But I'm fain for them days to come back.
Me, a proud, stupid lass agen, cross wi' my Bill
For givin' me bottom a smack.

Nick Ripley

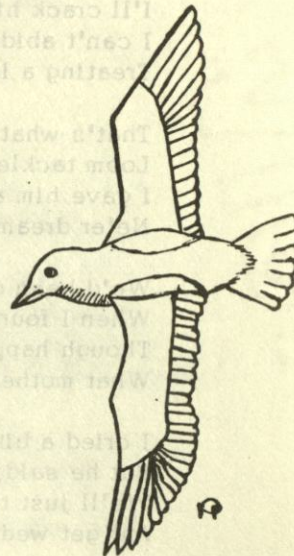
The Cry and the Poem

A bird crosses the morning sky,
Sea-gull, gliding effortless.
Perfection, contoured to the high
Winds of heaven through countless

Eons of evolution's sculpting.
Man also evolved, to pad the earth
On pedestrian feet, except he cling
Parasite to machines that girth

This globe faster than bird can,
Faster, yet clumsy, gross.
Labouring with hurricane
Of sound and fury across

Silent, cloud-pastured sky.
Tranquil the gull, wheeling, soaring.
Flying machine? A hoarse, strident cry.
Sea-gull? A poem on silent wing.



Elizabeth Spencer

Elizabeth Spencer lives in Rochdale. She is a skilled artist as well as a writer.

Poacher

Crouched among the shadowed thicket.
Poacher's seen by glint of eye, but
Shirking seige with feline stealth his
Snares are set and all paths baited.

Peoples' blindness falls first victim
Snapped up quickly hung and salted,
Wild emotions also captured,
Bloody remnants typed and printed.

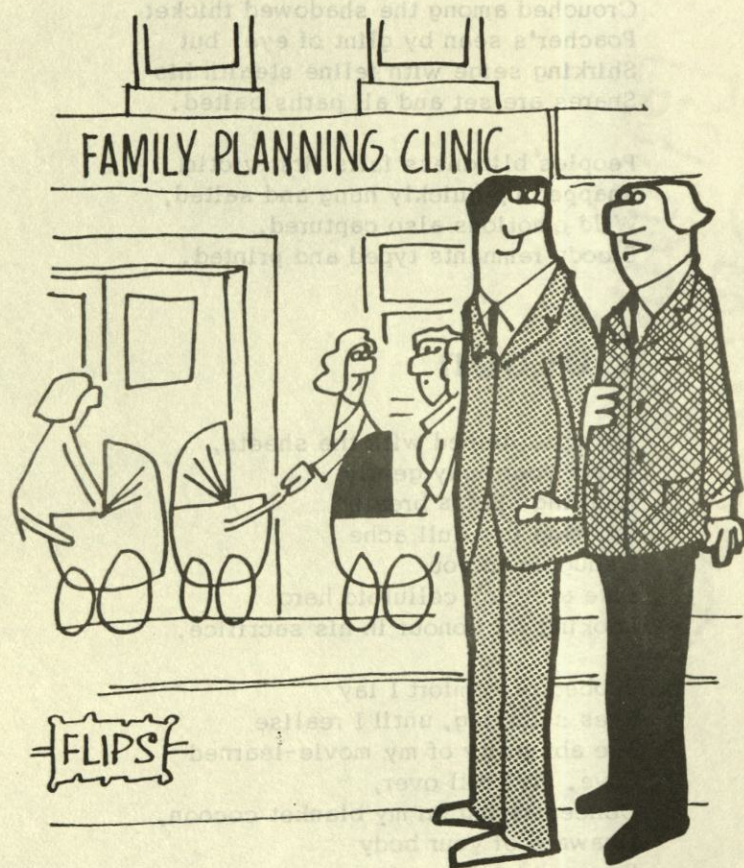
Cocoon

My arm, draped with the sheets,
Feels your body gently
Intaking sleeps breath
Ignoring it's dull ache
I snuggle to you
Like a stoic, celluloid hero
Looking for honour in his sacrifice.

Robbed of comfort I lay
Eyes scanning, until I realise
The absurdity of my movie-learned
Love. So I roll over,
Concentrating on my blanket cocoon,
Unaware of your body
Exposed to the night.

I wake, finding you
Separated, restfully sleeping.
Immediately I think of joining you,
Regardless of individual discomforts,
But I submit
Leaving two people together
In complete quiescence.

Nick Ripley



"I SEE IT'S COMPLAINTS DAY AGAIN."

A Way of Life - part 4

Where was I? Oh yes, I'd won the war, well me and one or two others! But lost mum. So what comes next? I gave up my job to take over hers. Now, that was my first mistake. I had not got a clue how to run a home. For example, I went to the grocer and asked for a pound of pepper! The grocer was very helpful and told me the amounts mum usually bought, otherwise I would have made an even bigger fool of myself. Losing one's mum is like losing a guide through the maze of life, we were completely lost..

The first thing we quarrelled about was money. Isn't it always? Giving up my job meant there was less money coming in, and being a learner did not help! My brother John had a bright idea, "Let's all pay for our own food". What happened about the rent gas, coal ect? His next idea was a beauty. Seeing that all mum had to leave us was pawn tickets and debts, why not let Mary have the piano, Fred the three piece suite and the rest of us various items? That was crazy and I said so.. where would we live? This went on until I threw the towel in, (very apt!) and went back to work. This went on for six months, in the meantime Fred was demobbed, but Jimmy got called up, so we were back to square one.

By this time I was heartily sick of it, so when I heard that a flat was coming vacant nearby, my young man (doesn't that sound dated?) suggested that I take it and we should get married. Having been in the army from start to finish meant he felt a stranger in his own home. Six years of his life made him feel that he did not belong anywhere. That blasted war had caused more than fighting and bombs, many families never felt the same again. I got the flat and that caused more trouble. I had to divide my time between that and my home, so I asked Mary if she would take over the home. The reaction to that? My brother said I was a rat deserting a sinking ship! Since my father had died in thirty nine and it was now forty eight I reckon I'd done more than my share in keeping that particular ship afloat, what do you think?

Doug and I were married in April. Just the two of us and the two witnesses followed by a wedding breakfast that consisted of - wait for it - half a pork pie and a cup of tea! Then back to the flat. I'll tell you something, if you do not have a reception you do not get any wedding presents!

About six weeks after the marriage I had a terrible cough. In fact it used to make me sick, so off I went to the doctor's.. " You will be pleased to know you are pregnant". Pregnant? With a cough? I thought it was the cigarettes! how green can one get? How unlucky can one get? We needed both our wages to manage, so what happens? I am packed off to the local hospital and the ante-natal ask am I working? .. then you must give it up. O.K. so I stay at home, poverty stricken. My kid brother Arnold used to come straight from school, to keep me company. He was only fourteen and already he had lost his father, mother. and his favourite brother Jim had gone.. so there was only me able to give him some feeling of security. Poor kid, I guess loneliness is.....?

Jim was also kind to me. He had ten shillings of his army pay sent home to me, to help make up for my lost wages... There are not many people like Jim, he took after my mother, kind to everyone.

Let's get on with having this baby shall we? Do not work, do not get the coal in, do not climb the stairs. I didn't know there were so many 'don'ts' to having a baby. Eventually the day arrived. Arnold was nervous but insisted on walking down with me to the hospital. At every newsagents we came to I sent him in for cigarettes, no luck. They were all under the counter, just at the time when I was about to experience 'the most beautiful moment in my life', that is how the books I had been given described it! Well, here's how I found it. We arrived at the hospital, all three of us.. well you have to count 'miss wonderful' don't you? Now what happened next is not typical of childbirth so do not be put off, all you 'mums to be'. It's me that's not normal (I don't think I like that..)

I explained to the sister that I thought my child was coming. "Not here, you cannot have your baby her!" the sister was adamant. After a quick examination by a doctor he said some

thing had to be done as the baby would not wait any longer. Have you ever felt like a carrier bag? I did. Not like a human being at all. "She is booked in for Prestbury and that is where she will have to go!" Sister won. Mind you, my infant was putting up quite a fight! I was wheeled back to the entrance and put into a car along with a young nurse who looked extremely worried. Now any other day I would have enjoyed that trip, but not in the situation I was in at that moment. It was a nightmare, yes I know I said it was day, but have you ever heard of a daymare? Three inches of snow were on the ground and we seemed to have travelled miles when the car broke down. " Oh God, grip my hand hard", said the frightened nurse, to the very frightened patient.. me! I don't think my little one liked it either. The driver, using language I can't repeat, in fact I couldn't spell it, was on his back in the snow trying to fix the car. He succeeded and off we set again... going through a beautiful Christmas card village. We finally stopped. Thank God we were there. No, it was not to be... "You've passed it, go back to the village!" Eventually, after everything that could go wrong, did go wrong.. I was given oxygen because I was exhausted, I mean my heart was. I carried on regardless, determined to find out what had developed from that cough. She arrived. To be fair to her she should have been christened 'Patience'. Instead I settled for Linda. It seems having a first child after thirty can be a bit tricky.

We came home for the new year, and a fresh start. It was that alright. We promptly got asked to move. No children allowed in the flat! Personally I think it was just my child not wanted in the flat. I didn't blame them. That infant just never stopped crying. Apart from gagging or drowning her there seemed no way of stopping her. Maybe she knew something we didn't.

We moved in with a bed, a cot and a table which had to be sawn in half to get it up the winding stairs then nailed together again. Then the shock.. there was already a family living there! Mice! dozens of them, Doug had to work nights so I was alone with them. I told the landlady (what land is there in an attic?) about the mice and she agreed to put the cat in at night. It was terrible. A squeak and a flurry as the cat pounced, then there was one dreadful scuffle and all went quiet. Thank God it was over. I lay, with a baby either side of me,

thankful that it was over at last, then in the darkness I saw two green lights coming towards my bed. They moved slowly, like twin green lamps suspended in space. I was petrified until they were almost up to my bed. They were the eyes of the cat. With the mouse, still alive, dangling from it's mouth. That did it. I must be due for some joy, life could not always be like this, so determined to have a bright new future I went around to the local councillor. Now, I know he was not God, but he was the next best thing. He got me my very own, very new home. Woodhouse Park the letter said. Was it a camping site? I was soon to find out.

Doris Sydenham

Doris Sydenham lives in Wythenshawe and is a member of the writers group there. She also writes poems.



Washday Lament

When it was washday, the old kitchen boiler
That stood in the corner, was filled with water
From the brass tap on the old brown slopstone.
The a fire would be lit, it crackled and spit;
When the water was hot, shredded soap would be added.
It bubbled and steamed.
The clothes had been scrubbed on the old kitchen table,
Or rubbed on the wash-board,
Then put in the boiler and boiled till they're clean.
I'd look around at the flagged scullery floor -
I'd have to scrub that before
I could go out to play.
I hated Wash Day.

The clothes would be lifted from the old boiler
All steaming and smelly and hot,
And plunged with a splash and a plop
Into the Dolly tub full of cold water,
And pnched and ponched until they're rinsed clean.
I'd gaze at the monster with the big wooden rollers
Standingnthere menacing in the far corner.
The mangle - how the name fit.
The clothes owuld be folded and put through the mangle,
Clang, clang, clang - I'd turn the handle.
How my back ached.
I hated Wash Day.

The water came flowing from out of the mangle,
Just like a small water-fall,
Into the tin bath, that stood underneath.
Splosh! Some spills and makes a round pool
On the flagged scullery floor
That I'd have to clean.
I wanted to scream -
Can't get away to go out and play.
I hated Wash Day.

Mary's Garden's Gone To Pot

Mary, Mary, quite contrary
How does your garden grow,
With lots of weeds
And poppy seeds
And cannabis all in a row.



The Unemployed

Come an' stand by me lad -
join me in the queue.
An' while we're waitin' 'ere
you can give your point of view.
For you are very young lad
an' must 'ave 'opes an' dreams.
Mine were lost some years ago
fightin' this 'ere war -
To make a better world for you -
a waste of time it seems.

I know it must be 'ard lad
after all your learnin'
Standin' 'ere beside me
when it's for a job you're yearnin'.
You are young an' bright
an' still 'ave lots of time,
While I am gettin' on a bit
an' near the end of mine.

There's such a lot of us lad
an' jobs are very few.
But you've nowt to fear from me
'cos there ain't much I can do.
I never 'ad no schoolin' see -
well, not the same as you.

It's bin nice to 'ave a chat lad -
though you ain't got much to say,
Suppose I 'ave bin goin' on a bit,
thanks for listenin' anyway.
Ta'ra an' best of luck
'ope you find the job you seek.
But the way that things are goin' lad -
I'll see you 'ere next week.

Frances Higson

This BOB STARRETT cartoon was in VOICES 18 - AUTUMN 1978.

Spot the difference in 1980.

CAN YOU AFFORD THIS ANY LONGER ?



What Makes Colin Tick

On the stage of the Moulin Rouge a scantily clad girl was juggling with five yellow tennis balls, to the frantic accompaniment of the sabre dance, provided by a trio of drums, guitar and piano.

Colin raised the pint pot to his lips, consigning the contents to his already bloated belly. Then waiting until I lifted my drink to my mouth, he said in a mock-serious voice, "Y'know Pete, I'd give my right arm to be ambidextrous." Explosion of lager followed by near terminal bout of coughing from yours truly. "You mad.....", I spluttered, "Now look what you've made me do." He just grinned. "Come on, let's float," he said, "I've had a sufficiency of enoughness." "Yeah, me too," and looking squint-eyed at my watch; "Christ it's almost one, the wife will do her bloody nut." "Stuff the wife," he slurred. "Listen pal, in my present condition I couldn't stuff a chicken." "Aha!" he cried, "So that's your forte eh, bestiality." "You know something Colin Taylor, I sometimes think getting sense out of you is like trying to get shit out of a rocking-horse." "Aha!" he crowed, "Your sexual deviations also include interferin' with inan... inan... hic! Lifeless objects." "Come on, loon." I shouldered open the door, and we both spilled out into the steaming Nairobi night.

The oppressive heat clung to our faces like hot, damp towels in a turkish bath. "Phew! I'll be glad to get back to Newcastle," he said. "What time's your plane?" "11am; you comin' to the airport?" "No, I hate goodbyes." "Fair enough." We walked along in silence. As we walked I reflected on our friendship over the last three months. I was working at the Nairobi Holiday Inn as an electrician; Colin had applied for and got the vacant comperes job; he was a natural comedian, and as I am somewhat serious by nature I suppose I was a perfect foil for him; anyway we hit it off right away and became firm friends, even though I could never fathom out what made him tick.

He was an incurable practical joker (the cause of his eventual downfall) and often used me as a kind of straight-man

to set someone up. I didn't mind this, in fact I was often close to bursting with suppressed laughter. Fortunately most of Colin's victims could take a joke and no harm was done. Not so Mr Grindle, the hotel manager. Short, thin, fifty-five, pencil moustache, crown topper, gin and tonic, potted portait of mediocrity with connections; in short, a natural target for Colin's barbs.

I remember one day in particular, we had a Swedish girl singer to of the bill, she called herself Pussy Galore, (can you believe it?). She was no great warbler, but believe me, she was ultra easy on the eye. She was opening on Thursday night, so on the Wednesday afternoon she was running through her numbers with the band. Colin was there to work out her intro and cues; I was there to sort out the spot lighting for her, Grindle was there to oggle.

He stood the devouring her with his little piggy eyes, all the time stroking his little waxy tash, looking for all the world like a silent movie villain. Well, the rehearsal went ok and Miss Pussy retired to her dressing room to change. Grindle followed. The rest of us exchanged knowing glances. Suddenly there was a hell of a commotion followed by Pussy in full voice: "Get out you dirty old bastard, get out!" The door sprang open and a very ruffled looking Romeo came tumbling out, gingerly fingering a pair of angry red claw marks on his left cheek. As he turned to storm out, Colin, who was standing close to the dressing room door, tapped him on the back. Grindle spun round, scarlet with rage and embarrassment. Colin placed his right hand on Cassanova's shoulder, looked him in the eye and sang.... "Pardon me boy, was that the cat that clawed and chewed ya?"

Well I swear I saw steam come out of the old boy's ears, and his crown topper jump six inches off his head. He made a little strangled sound in the back of his throat and stamped out, leaving half a dozen grown men rolling about on the floor pissing themselves with laughter. Colin had made an enemy.

The weeks rolled on. Colin was a great success, takings were up; the great God money soothed the old man's feelings.

Then came Delilah and her python Fred. She was billed as an exotic dancer, a description that hardly did her justice... lucky old Fred.

She used to feed him on live mice, not a pretty sight. Now old Fred was ok I suppose, but he did have one bad habit.

He was not house trained. This fact came to light after Colin had lent Delilah a leather travelling bag to keep Fred in. Fred's usual abode was on its last legs and he had caused a minor panic by escaping through a split seam one Friday evening. Fortunately Delilah had spotted him, and after a temporary repair job, put him back into captivity.

Colin, the gallant nipped home to his flat and returned with a leather bag which he told Delilah to keep till Monday when she could buy a new one.

The weekend passed without further mishap; and on Monday Delilah duly returned Colin's bag. Later that evening as Delilah was going through her act, Colin, who was stood next to me, started muttering something about "Dirty arsed snakes" When I asked him what he was rattling on about, he told me that Fred had left some deposits in the bottom of the bag. I left him muttering that he, "Would sort the slimey bastard out."

I thought no more about the matter, until a week later, Delilah was nearing the end of her two week stint, and was just closing her act; she was performing a particularly erotic little number, Fred was coiled around one of her thighs; now normally old Fred was a gentle soul, but for some reason he took it into his head to sink his sharp little fangs into Delilah's kneecap. Delilah yelled and kicked out (a nervous reaction I suppose). Well old Fred performed a graceful arc through the air and landed with a thud on one of the stage-side tables. Picture the scene: Women screaming, tables and chairs crashing, Delilah hopping up and down on one leg, effing and jeffing. As the band in true Titanic fashion, played on.

Eventually order was restored; Delilah retrieved the erring Fred, we brought the curtain down and stood milling around on the stage, myself, Colin, old Grindle, the band, all of us talking at once. "I can't understand it," said Delilah, "he's never done that before. He's been a bit out of sorts the last couple of days but I never thought he'd bite me." As she was talking she was caressing Fred slowly along his length with long sensuous strokes, suddenly she stopped, a puzzled look on her face; my eyes were drawn down to her hand which was just above Fred's tail, there beneath her fingers was a one inch square of green insulation tape. Delilah roared, "No wonder he's been so bloody ratty, some bastard has taped

his arse up." It was then that I remembered Colin's dark mutterings. I looked around, and was not surprised to find that he had made a discreet exit, stage left.

Well nobody could prove anything, but Colin got some wry looks and smiles for a couple of days. Of course he just looked back, all wide eyed and innocent.

For a week or so everything went smoothly, Colin was on his best behaviour, even speaking to the old man with a trace of respect in his voice. The lull before the storm.....

"Have you ever noticed," Colin remarked to me one night, "how Grindle always goes to the toilet at nine o'clock?" "Yeah, I know he's always on about a healthy body being a regular body." "H'mm," said Colin stroking his chin. "Oh - oh," I thought, "his evil little brain is plotting something."

The next evening, just after nine, I spotted Grindle coming out of the toilet after one of his regular visits; he didn't look too well, his usually ruddy features seemed decidedly pale. Colin, who just happened to be passing, stopped, and I heard him say; "You don't look too well Mister Grindle, are you okay?" "Just a little stomach upset, Taylor, nothing to worry about," was Grindle's gruff reply. Colin shrugged and walked off.

The next evening, same again; Grindle emerged looking even worse, his face grey and filmed with sweat. Colin, who again just happened to be passing, said, "Here Mister Grindle, sit down a minute." He pulled up a chair. "You know you really don't look at all well." Grindle flopped down. "Thank you, Taylor," he said. "You're right, I feel rotten." "Perhaps you should go see your doctor?" "Yes, you're right Colin, I think I will." Grindle's eyes narrowed. You seem very concerned as to the state of my health, Taylor, why?" "Look Mister Grindle," said Colin, "I know we have had our little differences in the past, but I really do hate to see anyone ill." Grindle looked at the apparent genuine concern on Colin's face and said, "You know, Colin, you're not such a bad lad, thanks." "That's all right Mister Grindle, if there is anything I can do, just ask." "God", I thought, I'm going to be sick. Three more nights passed, Grindle got greyer, Colin got more concerned, I couldn't stand any more, they were on first name terms now.

I collared Colin at the bar. "Come on Col, what's going on?" At first he acted dumb. "What do you mean, what's going on?" "You know what I mean, you mad bastard, what are you doing to old grumble guts?" Colin laughed; "Grumble guts," he giggled,

I like it." "Come on, Colin." "Okay, you remember the other night when we were talking about him, and how he always went for a crap at nine o'clock?" "What of it?" "Well I've been nipping in five minutes earlier." "And...?" I said. "Well I wrap a stink bomb in some cotton wool and stick it to the underside of the bog seat with some black sticky tape; the old man comes in, drops his strides, sit down, and thirty seconds later the smell seeps through." "Oh my God!" I gasped, clutching my sides as great shudders of laughter threatened to split me in half. "You loon, you bloody mad loon." "Thank you," beamed Colin, "I take it you approve?" "Yes, yes, yes," I gasped wiping the tears from my eyes with the back of my hand. Then a sudden sobering thought struck me; "Col, if he finds out, you've really shit it." This solemn statement sends us both into a bout of giggling hysterics. We didn't know it then, but my fears were soon to be realized.

I have often thought about it since; thought who could have shopped him, and I'm sure it was Carol. She was serving behind the bar at the time, and she could just have been in earshot. And it was strongly rumoured the she and old Grindle were having it off; it must have been her.

Anyway next evening Colin took up his usual position outside the staff toilet, ready to bump into the old man. Out comes Grindle, only this time his face is not grey, it is bright crimson; he makes a beeline for Colin. "You, you, fucking mad bastard!" he screamed, jumping up and down under Colin's nose. "Six x-rays, three enemas, and fifty fucking quid doctors' fees." "Does this mean our engagement is off?" asked Colin innocently. "Out! Out! You mental cripple, get out of my hotel, get out of my bastard life!" "Can I have my ring back?" asked Colin. Grindle gasped and choked, turned a deeper shade of purple, if that was possible; he sobbed once, and then, (here I must give the man credit) with a terrific struggle he gained some sort of self control, drew himself up to his full five feet four inches and said; "Taylor, you will never again work in this part of the world, and if I have my way you will never work for any holiday inn again, not even as a shit house attendant." "All right, if that's the way you feel about it, you can keep the ring", said Colin aloofly as he strolled majestically away.

Colin phoned me at home the day after to tell me that he was moving on, and suggested we meet to have a farewell drink at the Moulin Rouge on Kenyatta Street. I said okay. So here we

are, full circle. My thoughts, as we tripped along, were interrupted by Colin, he had said something; "What you say," I slurred. "I said, you remember tonight, you called me a loon?" "Yeah," I said, "what about it?" "Well I wasn't always, you know." Even though I was far from sober I could sense that he was struggling to tell me something important; this was so unlike Colin that it sobered me up. "Yeah, go on," I said helpfully. "I've never told anyone about this before, Pete, but we're mates, and anyway I'm off tomorrow and we probably won't meet again." I was stone sober now.

We walked along for a few more paces. I didn't rush him, I could see he was fighting a battle with some heavy emotions. With a shock I saw a tear roll down his cheek, embarrassed for him I looked away; for the first time that night I looked up at the stars; fat diamonds dripping from a blue black velvet sky. "My mother, my father, my little sister were killed in a plane crash fifteen years ago." He said it calmly, but I knew he was screaming inside. "Christ Col, what can I say?" "It was a long time ago, I didn't go on holiday with them, I was into football at the time and we had a big cup tie coming up, so I stayed at my gran's. At the time I wished I'd gone with them." "Christ Col, that's rotten." "Yeah, well, I wore my heart on my sleeve for a while, then as I grew older I changed, I was determined that no-one would hurt me again, or if they did I would never show it; so I became a loon." "Jesus Col, I didn't mean it in a bad way, you know." "Of course not, mate." He threw an arm round my neck, and I knew that telling me had been good for him.

"Well here we are then," he indicated the corner where our paths parted. "Yeah ... well then...." Christ, I hated goodbyes. I held my right hand out, as he grasped it a huge lump rose in the back of my throat, causing my eyes to water. "Well mate, I'll see you again sometime," he muttered. I nodded, not trusting my voice. He saw my pain and broke the handshake, turned on his heel and was gone; swallowed by the clinging blackness. I listened to his fading footsteps; and when they were gone I smiled a wry smile, for at least I now knew what made Colin tick.

My Ancoats

I watched the day they killed my little piece of Ancoats.

Their metal monsters, impatient for the carnage, roared and panted, stinking blue black breath filled the air, Stung my lungs.

The terraced row sat forlorn, neglected, dejected, grimy windows - dead mens' eyes.

The steel ball thick, heavy, uncaring hovered above the head of number one.

I winced as it came crashing down.

The metal monster coughed and wheezed as it retrieved its bludgeon for another blow.

I half expected to see a gout of warm red blood spurt from the savage wound,

Instead, just broken, splintered ribs, and a tired, weary groan.

The house was dead.

The monster pounced again and again, chuckling with each crushing blow.

The victims' insides were now laid bare for all to see.

Obscene, unnatural, for it was not meant to be.

Faded flowered wallpaper, layers thick, torn and flapping in the breeze.

Nervous twitch of something just dead.

I watched all day the metal army biting, crushing, tearing, Gobbling up a hundred years of life.

I watched the crown topped chimney pots tumble with slow dignity beneath the new Elizabethan hammer.

I watched all day until it came the turn of number thirty three, The last and most important to me.

There I spent my early years - my old Nana's house.

Always ringing to the shouts of many cousins, grown now and scattered like dandelion seeds in the wind.

I shut my eyes and see again the patterned cracks upon my bedroom ceiling, dancing in the gaslight's flickering glow.

I hear the heavy, official knocking in the dead of night.

My father's calm voice, muted from below, accepting the news From Ancoats hospital, my Mam is gone, crushing, even though half expected.

I heard the ball chain rattle, I heard the deadly thud.
I started up my car, and not looking back, I left part of me
bleeding in the dust.
That evening, sitting in my smart unscarred semi
staring at the idiot box, I heard my wife say:
"What's up love? You seem very quiet."
"Oh," I said, "it's just that someone I once knew
passed away today."

Ancoats Revisited

I went back the other day, out of curiosity I suppose.
I felt strangely uneasy, awkward, perhaps I should not
have waited so long to pay respects.
What I saw came as a shock.
I nothing, no trace of the past, not a cobble,
not a slate, not a brick, not a nail.
A grassy field, uneven, bumpy, was all that remained.
Surely all those rows of houses never fitted into such a
confined space.
The cinder groft, legacy of a German bomb,
where we used to play football, hours on end,
until dusk descended round our sweating heads ... gone....
The ramrod lamposts, one on each corner, green clad
to attention, arms outstretched, warding off the night,
and night time fears.
All gone.....
It's as if ten generations of life have sunk beneath
the coarse green grass, and now lies dreaming for all eternity
beneath a blanket of indifference.
"God!" I thought how temporary are all things of man;

buildings rise and fall; concrete cracks and crumbles;
steel rusts and turns to dust.
Eventually everything returns to nature; which I suppose is
how it should be.
I turn around and walk away; a little sadder, yes, but then
perhaps a little wiser.....

Peter Clayfield

Peter Clayfield is a maintenance electrician and lives in Clayton. He has travelled extensively.

No Waiting

Me and my brother had to meet my mum
at Twickenham Junction.
We were hanging around the street corner,
when suddenly he grabbed my arm.
"Look - up there!" he said.
I looked where he was pointing,
but I couldn't see anything.
"Up there - the sign!"
He was really worried by now,
and kept trying to pull me along the pavement.
So I looked again, and on the wall
there was this sign -
NO WAITING.
"We can't stay here, we'll have to go and stand
somewhere else. A policeman might come and..."
"Don't be stupid," I said,
"That means cars and things, not people."
At least, I thought that was what it meant.
But we moved along a bit, anyway,
just to be on the safe side.

Owning Up

It was the end of the afternoon, and we were all sitting in our places waiting for the story to begin, when I walked Miss O'Connell. I was scared of Miss O'Connell - she had red hair, pointed glasses, and a voice that was so sharp it made me shiver. She went up to our teacher, and they started whispering together. I was getting impatient, and shifting around in my chair. I liked listening to stories, and wanted our teacher to get on with it. But she didn't.. Instead, both she and Miss O'Connell turned and looked at me, and then she called me out to the front. I felt nervous as I walked out there - everyone was watching me, as if I'd done something wrong.

"Miss O'Connell has to go out for a few minutes, and she wants someone to go and read to her class. You wouldn't mind would you?"

I did mind. I minded a lot. I didn't want to go and sit with a bunch of boring little kids, and have to read to them, while everyone else was listening to our story. But they were all looking at me, and Miss O'Connell was standing next to me, and our teacher had asked me specially.

"No miss."

"I'm sorry, what was that?"

"No miss, I don't mind."

So Miss O'Connell gave me a book, and I walked out of the classroom. The others were still watching as I left. They knew I'd been chosen for something special, and they felt envious of me.

It was bright outside, and I could smell the sun on the grass and flowers. I thought how nice it would be to lie on the lawn and do nothing. But I just walked slowly instead.

When I got to the classroom, the little kids were all copying something from the blackboard. they looked up as I came in, and I waited until they were all looking at me, then told them to put their things away. Then I started reading to them from this book Miss O'Connell had given me - some stupid story about rabbits or frogs or something. I did all the things that teachers usually do, because I'd studied teachers

and I knew how they worked. I told them when to laugh and when not to laugh, when to speak and when to shut up, what to say and what not to say, and all kinds of things like that. As time went on, I was quite beginning to enjoy myself. People never usually did what I said, not even the little kids. Anyway, everything was going fine until suddenly, in the middle of the story, someone made a noise - that popping noise you can make by putting a finger in your mouth, and then taking it out again quickly. And then, of course, they all started doing it. So I let them all make silly noises for a bit. Let them get it out of their systems, I thought, and maybe then they'll shut up. In any case, there was nothing I could do about it. Then.. when they were fed up with silly noises and just about to stop anyway, I told them to. Like I said, I'd studied teachers. I'd just started reading the story again, when someone at the back of the classroom put his finger in his mouth and popped it, really loud. For a moment, I didn't know what to do. I couldn't ignore it. It had made the other kids laugh when they weren't supposed to, and if I didn't do something quickly they'd never do what I said again. I stopped reading, put the book down, and I looked hard at them. They'd made me miss our story, and now one of them was messing me about. They should've been grateful, I was only doing it for them. "Who did that?" I said, as fiercely as I could. No-one said a word, they all just sat there staring at their desk tops. "Unless whoever did that owns up, I'm not going to finish the story. And you'll sit at your desks in silence for the rest of the afternoon."

I knew exactly how that would make them feel - I'd felt it often enough myself. Anyway, I'd missed my story, so why shouldn't they miss theirs? This time it worked, and a little kid in the back row put his hand up.

"Come and stand at the front," I said, and he did.

"Turn around and face the blackboard," I said, and he turned and faced the blackboard. I carried on reading, and they were all as quiet as mice.

I was only going to keep him there for a bit, just to warn the rest of them, and then send him back to his seat. Really, I was. I only wanted to show them who was boss, that's all. I didn't mean anything else to happen. But a few minutes later, just as I was going to tell him to sit down again, Miss O'Connell walked in. She looked around the class. Then at the little kid

facing the blackboard, and finally at me.

"Has he been misbehaving?" she said. She sounded much fiercer then I had done, my mouth went dry, and my legs felt as if they were shaking.

"Yes Miss."

There was a lump in my throat, and it was stopping me from saying all the things I wanted to say. I wanted to tell her that I hadn't meant her to find out, I'd only done it to make the other's shut up, he hadn't done much anyway, and I didn't want him to be punished.... but the words just wouldn't come. So I kept quiet.

"All right, I'll deal with you in a minute," she said to the little kid, and I felt my stomach turn.

"Thank you. You can go back to your own class now."

"Yes miss."

I walked out of the room and back to my own class. This time, the smell of the grass and flowers only made me feel sick.

I got back just in time to catch the end of our story. They all looked at me as I came in, still clutching the book Miss O'Connell had given me. It was like the time I came in late from play, because I'd cut my knee and had to have it bandaged. The bandage then and the book now were both signs of the special thing I'd been doing, the thing they envied me for, the reason they were looking at me. Only then my knee hurt, and now the lump was still in my throat. They watched me, but I couldn't look at them in case they saw from my face what really happened. I sat down, and pretended to listen to the rest of the story. I couldn't let them know I was a traitor.

Mark Woodward

Mark Woodward got in touch with Commonword after reading Write On 10 in London. He now lives in Cannock, Staffs and has started a writers group there.

In July this year Commonword held a creative writing day at Langley Community School, Middleton. Dominic Claydon and Jonathan Goulding wrote the following pieces.

Changing School

When I was in Junior School,
I dreaded the thought
Of moving to Grange.
The stories that people told
Set my mind on edge
Like shoving your head down the
The toilet, and
Flushing the chain
Or having an inter-school scrap
Against Stanney or Mill Lane
Walking home with a broken nose,
Two black eyes, and a
Puffed up lip.

September came.
Mum showed me how to
Tie a tie.
I walked through
The nearest door
A teacher bawled
"Get out, lad"
I ran around and
Around like a frightened rabbit,
Nowhere to run,
Nowhere to hide,
Trapped like a rat,
Till half past three
Then I was free!

Paul Batchelor

The Forgotten Windmill

The sun sets behind the decrepit windmill.
Birds fly through
The fallen tiles
To make their nests
In the rotten rafters.

The crumbling cogs
House thousands of multiplying rats
Who live on the scattered corn.
Cobwebby corners are the home
Of spiders who live on other spiders
Who cannot catch flies.

A dead butterfly, crammed and crushed
Lies between the teeth of
The largest cog.

Bats hang from the shutters,
And an owl nests in the chimney.
A helpless swallow, who flew
Through a window pane
Is being gnawed at by hungry rats.
It will not live to see the light of
Another day.
Not unlike the windmill.



Dominic Claydon

The Cricket Match

At last, the cricket match was under way. John opened the bowling for the third formers, but Trevor gave it a smash hit. It sailed right over the shed and landed on the roof. Everybody groaned. Once something was on the roof, it stayed on. Trevor ran over to see if it had come off. It hadn't, but there against the wall was a ladder. Immediately, Trevor called John and they climbed up the ladder.

On the roof they saw loads of cricket balls and tennis balls and footballs. They grabbed a few and threw them at their pals. They kept on doing this until they ran out of balls, they then went to the other side to climb down the ladder, but it had gone.

The truth was that 'Robo Robinson', as the kids called him, had left the ladder out of sight of the boys behind the school and then decided to hide it. So now Trevor and John were stranded on the roof. The headmaster would come and when he found them they would be punished. Their only chance would be to be able to get through the attic now and sneak in. They opened the skylight, got through it and tried the door. It was locked, so they decided to go back onto the roof; but the skylight caved in. But luckily John knew where the key was, so he unlocked the door and just managed to get into their room before the Head came.

Jonathan Goulding

Brats

"Take the kids out," said the wife,
"Try and lose them," said the wife,
"If only I could..." said I.

I thought I'd take them to the sea-side,
Buy them an ice-cream,
They might stay the day..

But, they wouldn't stay at all,
So I gave them a clout in the car,
They didn't care, they put their ice-cream over my head.

When I got home, the wife was in bed,
I woke her up and told her about the day.
Ooh! how I hate kids, they're all brats.

Paul Batchelor

Essay on Life in the Country

He sat in the classroom alone; he could hear the babble of the rest of the school in the playground. How many more times must he write, "I must behave in class". Miss Carr, his teacher had told him he must continue writing until she returned. Resting his pen on the desk, he walked over to the window; he could see his mates playing leapfrog. He was so engrossed, he was unaware of the classroom door opening. "Barrett what do you think you are doing. I distinctly told you to keep writing until I came back. Well what have you got to say for yourself!" He stood with his head slightly bowed, moving his weight from one foot to the other. She repeated, "I'm waiting". He mumbled, but his teacher could not hear. "Speak up boy". "Well Miss, I don't know why I'm being punished, you seem to always pick on me." "So Barrett, you don't know why you're being punished? Well, I'll inform you. When I sat on the desk reading to the class, you Barrett were looking up my skirt, and that is why I'm punishing you." He remembered how he had seen a flash of white thigh, but still he protested. "Not me, Miss; I wouldn't. I mean I never looked

Miss Carr was the best looking teacher in the school. He had told Spud Murphy how he had seen her knickers. Spud had called him a liar, so when she took their class for French, they both looked to see if they could see her knickers, and he was the one she must have spotted. Her voice broke in on his thoughts, "Well, Barrett, what am I to do with you?" He could feel a small trickle of urine running down his leg at the thought of her sending him to the Head; and he blurted out, "Please Miss, I won't look up your clothes anymore if you let me off this time." She half turned to hide the smile on her face. "Oh! Go on, get out." He shot out of the classroom. "Thanks Miss!" When he had gone, Miss Carr broke into gales of laughter. Mr Timmins, the young Physical Training teacher was passing the open classroom, and bobbed his head through the door. "What's the joke, Maggie?" Miss Carr, still laughing, told him. He too smiled, and said, "The cheeky young bugger! Mind you, I don't blame him. If I was in your class, I'd do the same." Miss Carr reached for the board duster, and he ducked as she threw it at him. "Bob Timmins, no wonder the kids are like they are, you're incorrigible!" He stood at the door of the room. "By the way, what colour are your knickers?" Miss Carr looked around for something else to throw. He shut the door, waving to her as he walked away.

The weeks went by, until the day of the school trip. Barrett and his mate Spud had stayed out of trouble so they could go. The Head had designated Mr Timmins and Miss Carr to take charge of the busload of children. All the children were told to bring their lunch. Barrett and Spud ate their lunch before the bus had left the school, so were scrounging off some of the others. The party went off on the bus to the country. When they arrived, Miss Carr gathered the children around her and asked what they would like to do. "Please Miss, can we go on our own," said one little girl. Another asked if they could visit an old church. Barrett and Spud wanted to go conkering. Miss Carr conferred with Mr Timmins, then holding up her hands for silence said, "You may go where you want until 2.30. I want everybody back here, and remember, behave yourselves!" The children split into groups, and happily walked away, while Barrett and Spud ran towards a clump of trees which was the start of a small forest. "Tell you what, Spud: I'll be a German, and you're after me." As he spoke, he picked a thick branch stripping the small twigs off it. "This is my gun," Spud looked around for a stick or branch for himself, wandering round in circles. Meantime, Barrett had sneaked off. Spud, who eventually found his imitation gun in the shape of a forked branch, crept as silently as possible through the undergrowth searching for Barrett the German. They played this game for an hour. Spud, who was bored, said he was going to look for conkers. Barrett shrugged his shoulders. "OK. Let's go into that part where those big trees are, we are bound to find some there." Once more, Spud became more cheerful, and followed Barrett.

They hadn't gone far, when they heard voices. Barrett turned to Spud putting his finger to his mouth. "Shh! Spud, it's Mr Timmins and Miss." He lay on his stomach, crawling forward on his elbows. Spud, mystified, followed suit. "Let's go, Barrett" he whispered; but Barrett had no intention of going back. He parted a bush. There, in a glade were the two teachers. Mr Timmins had his hand inside Miss Carr's blouse, and was kissing her. Barrett's eyes popped. "Did you see - they're kissing, Spud! Spud, who was decidedly uncomfortable, said, "Come on, Bar, let's go. They might see us." Barrett lay where he was, and watched the two lovers. It was not long before they were both undressed, and were deep in the middle of their intercourse. Barrett and Spud watched, each with a small lump forming in their trousers. Spud was very nervous. "Come on Bar, let's go!" Barrett just could not get enough. This was better than anything he had ever dreamed of; but the carping of Spud made him realise if they stayed, there would be a danger of being caught. Then his

eyes settled on the discarded clothing. "Stay here, Spud; I'm going round there." He pointed to a spot that would bring him nearer to where the teachers were lying. "What are you going to do?" asked Spud, nervously, but Barret had gone.

Spud was alone, his eyes fixed on Mr Timmin's bum which was between Miss Carr's open legs. Something strange was happening. He felt himself go all sticky in his trousers. Then his eyes wandered to where Barret had gone. Through the bushes came a long, thin branch. It hooked under an item of the pile of clothing which disappeared into the bush, then again and again until all that was left were two pair of shoes and Mr Timmin's jacket. Spud eased himself back, and when he was where he could stand without being seen, he made his way to where Barret was. Barret met him carrying the clothing, and the two conspirators silently chuckled.

Their reverie, and the silence of the forest was broken by Miss Carr's Oh! Oh! Ohh! The two boys ran, dropping the clothing along behind them. When they were far enough away, they began to walk, giggling and laughing. "Did you see Mr Timmin's big bum Spud exclaimed. Barret laughing, said, "I saw her tits, like Casey's they were." Once more, they both had lumps in their trousers. Barret opened his flies and taking hold of himself, began to masturbate. Seeing him, Spud followed suit until they were both sore and exhausted. Putting their arms around each others shoulders, they walked back to the assembly point. It was some time before the two teachers came, and the children were on the bus. Mr Timmins was the first to speak. "Did you all enjoy yourselves, children?" There was a chorus of, "Yes Sir", then Miss Carr spoke. "When we go back to school tomorrow, I want an essay on Your day in the Country." Barret looked at Spud and smiled, and from his trouser pocket he pulled a whisp of silk. Miss Carr's knickers.

Alf Ironmonger

Alf Ironmonger is an ex-steel erector and has written about many, very interesting experiences from his life.

All the Day to Dream

Look at him, sitting there
On the edgings without a care
Ragged-arsed little kid
His grubby little finger curling his hair..
Daydreaming and imagining
He was on a distant planet somewhere
Like Flash Gordon, Buck Rodgers and Dan Dare....
Floating through a time tunnel he'll go
Disappearing and reappearing in a Tardus like Dr. Who,
Marooned on a desert island like Robinson Crusoe....

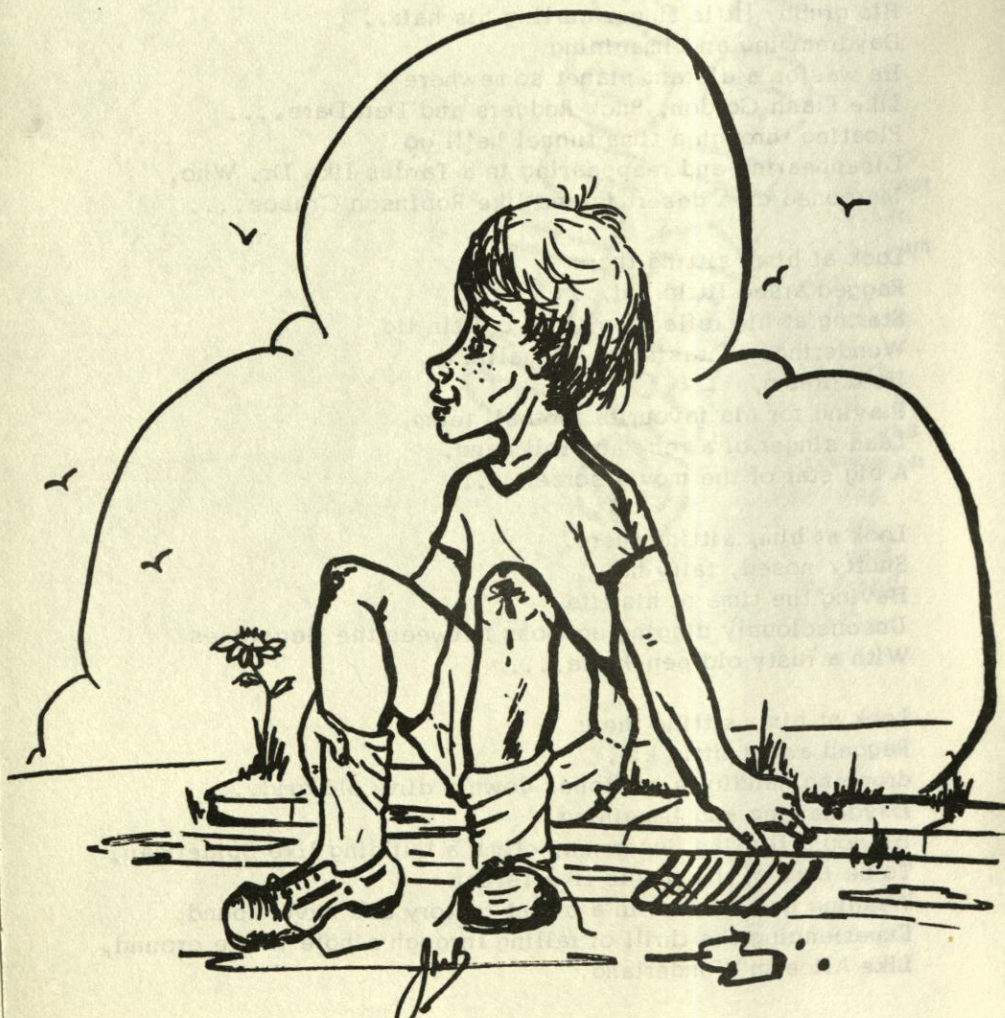
Look at him, sitting there
Ragged arsed little kid,
Staring at his reflection in an old tin lid,
Wondering, fantasising, visualizing.
He'd dream,
Playing for his favourite football team,
Lead singer of a rock and roll band,
A big star of the movie screen....

Look at him, sitting there,
Snotty-nosed, tatty hair,
Having the time of his life
Unconsciously digging up moss between the flagstones
With a rusty old pen-knife....

Look at him, sitting there
Ragged arsed little kid,
dropping handful's of stones down a dirty old grid....
Daydreaming and imagining
He could fly like Superman, climb a building like Spiderman,
To be Lord of the jungle like Tarzan
Wishing he was lost in a sweet factory and never found,
Experiencing the thrill of falling through a hole in the ground,
Like Alice in Wonderland,

A Peter Pan in Never-Never land,
Or a cartoon character in Disneyland.....

Look at him, sitting there, little boy lost
But without a care,
Lost in imagination,
Lost in a dream,
Lost in a stare.



When We Were Young (part 2)

WE MADE LOVE

In the Co-op superstore
In between the shopping trolleys
And the cut-priced conscious housewives
(Who didn't know the price of love)
We rolled and tumbled all over the floor.

WE MADE LOVE

On the backseat of the allnight bus
Overstating our destination
- To the terminus.

WE MADE LOVE

In the local cinema
To the 'Sound of Music'
The unzipping of zips
And the crackling of our Butterkist lips.

WE MADE LOVE

On the wet grass over the lea
Behind a disconcerted cow
And a slightly embarrassed tree.

WE MADE LOVE

Ever so quietly
In the reference section of the local library
Amidst the hushes, the shushes, the hot flushes
And the librarian's occa sional blushes.

WE MADE LOVE

In the Winter's snow
Four rosy cheeks
Tingling all aglow.

WE MADE LOVE

Anywhere and everywhere
We exploited every position in coition
We created and innovated
We even added new crazes, new rages
To the Karma Sutra's erotic pages

Until the day we got wed
And now we only make love
The proper way - in bed.

Dave Prestbury

Apart from making love, Dave Prestbury's interests include writing, drawing, painting and photography.



Snacks

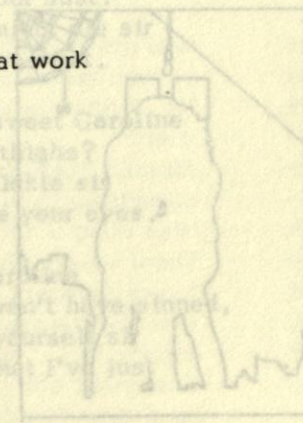
K-new from K-norr, The Dehydrated Man
In easy-open plastic tubs
In black, white or tan.

Choose from Hot Romantic Heathcliff
With the tangy taste of pine
Or Voltan The Viking
(For the girl who loves a swine)
New Musician Prestissimo who's crescendo is fortissimo
Or maybe Sweet N' Sour Labourer is more to your liking.

They're delicious
They're nutritious
They're cheap and
They're clean

Easily disposed of in a garbage machine
Or just chuck them in the waste
They don't leave an aftertaste
Fill up those empty moments in a busy day
When you K'need a man
K'need him in the K'new way -

Ready in a moment in the home or at work
Just pour on boiling water
And stir him with a fork.



Hobby Nobby

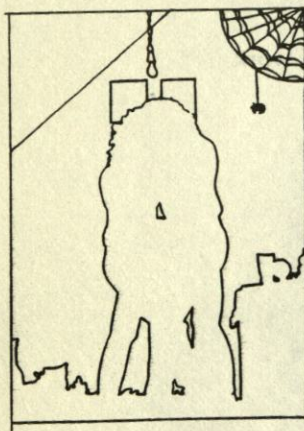
Leaping into bed with strangers
Is a practice many despise
Yet it's a hobby fraught with dangers
And can lead to an early demise
It's not so much the risk of catching the pox
Or being bludgeoned to pieces and fed to his cats
But the ominous smell of sweaty socks
And the perilous conditions in batchelor flats.

Booby traps of ingenious construction
Like doors with only one hinge
And string from the wardrobe to opposite shelving
Are hard to avoid if you've been on the binge
And they threaten Immediate Destruction.

A romantic garret seems so appealing
But it puts passion to the test
When you've cracked your skull on that jut in the ceiling
And found that the bed emits high pitched squealing
And smells strangely like a hamsters nest
Still despite all the dangers I've always said
You meet the nicest sort of people in bed.

Janice K. Taylor

Janice K Taylor lives in Accrington,
teaches English and is
involved in the Commonword Roadshow.



Oh! Miss Caroline

Oh! Miss Caroline, pretty Miss Caroline
How you've changed since I saw you last.
Well sir, yes sir, I suppose I have sir
But not forgetting, seven years have passed.

Tell me, Caroline, pretty little Caroline
Can I hold your hand like I used to do?
Well sir, yes sir, I suppose you can sir
I don't see any harm in that - do you?

There, there Caroline, pretty little Caroline
Can I put my arms around your waist?
Oh! sir, so sir, I don't know sir
If anyone sees us I would be disgraced.

That's nice Caroline, pretty Miss Caroline
Now may I kiss your lips so pink?
Oh! sir, good sir, I think you could sir
But what on earth will people think?

Darling Caroline, my pretty Caroline
Please I beg, may I stroke your bust?
Why sir, I'm shy sir, and I might die sir
But I suppose if you must, you must.

Scrumptious Caroline, ever sweet Caroline
Dare I ask can I stroke your thighs?
Oh! sir, fickle sir, I might tickle sir
But you can do it if you close your eyes.

Precious Caroline, lovely Caroline
If you let me go higher you won't have sinned,
Well sir, swell sir, please yourself sir
But I think I better tell you that I've just
Broke wind...

The Funeral

Bert Have you just come in?
 Arry Course I have!
 Bert It's three o'clock.
 Arry Aye!
 Bert Where've yer bin?
 Arry Tom Skelmerdine's funeral.
 Bert Oh! Aye-I forgot- course, you being the shop steward and all that. Did you give his missus that money we collected?
 Arry Course I did.

(Pause)

Bert -Hey-er, ow did she take it?
 Arry Nearly snatched me 'and off - ha ha.
 Bert No. I mean his death, y'know.
 Arry Oh, she's as well as can be expected.
 Bert Where was the funeral at?
 Arry St. Mary's, then at Moston Cemetary.

(Pause)

Bert 'Ow did it go down?
 Arry ...you takin' the piss?
 Bert No. I don'r mean the coffin, I mean the do..where was it at?
 Arry Moston Trades and Labour Club - he was on the committee there y'know.
 Bert Was there a lot there?
 Arry There was a lot in the boozar.
 Bert I hate funerals - everybody's crying and that.
 Arry Eric Cuthbertson was in tears.
 Bert Bloody 'ell - just shows yer - an 'e's as 'ard as nails.
 Arry Tom owed him seven quid. Cheeky bastard wanted me to deduct it from the collection money.
 Bert Was Mrs Skelmerdine cryin?

Arry She did when Eric asked her for 'is seven quid. Just as they were throwin' earth down the 'ole. Brought a bit of humour to a very moving occasion.
 Bert Well Tom was laughing in 'is box. Eric'll never get 'is seven quid now.
 Arry I don't know, he made 'er get the first round in - and she did that out o' collection. Six halves o' bitter and she was sat on Eric's knee.
 Bert Bloody 'ell - just shows yer. What's she like, is she alright?
 Arry Suits black.
 Bert I don't know why you came back. I'd 'ave had the full half day off.
 Arry I 'ad to. Got that union meeting. About that sacking.
 Bert But it was Tom who was sacked. An' he's dead.
 Arry I wanted him reinstated, an' everybody's out 'til we get satisfaction.
 Bert But 'e's six feet under.
 Arry Aye - I think we've a long do on our 'ands - come on.

Alan Butterworth

Alan Butterworth, a regular contributor to Write On, is a draughtsman and comes from Failsworth. He is also a Roadshow member.

My Mind is like the Sea

My mind
is like the sea,
chameleon in its colours.
Sometimes shimmering gold, painted
by the rising sun of hope,
sometimes peaceful blue,
more often grey
and shifting.
My mind is like the sea
is like the sea,
unpredictable in it's moods.
Sometimes crashing like the joyful surf
on crumbling shores of doubt,
sometimes lying still,
exploring it's own
horizons.
On grey
days the waves
of ideas rise, driven by the
wind of intuition and I, half longing
to throw myself from my little
boat of logic and swim
into the storm
cling on.
Fearing
the power of the
tempast I am thrown about by
squalls of frustration until the storm
exhausts it's fury and subsides
for a while, leaving me
exhausted but not
at rest.
My mind
is like the ocean,
boundless in it's possibilities,
conceiving ideas far beyond the frontiers

of experience. And somewhere in
the dark recesses parts of me
have disappeared into
my own
Bermuda Triangle.

Second Class Citizens

People who ride in white Rolls Royces
And talk in rather strident voices
Who only drink large, pink gins
Who's sons all have receding chins
And go to school some place like Eton
Where they get a taste for being beaten
By horse toothed girls in riding boots.
People who put on their suits
At tea time, but they call it dinner,
Who put a 'thisand pinds' on the Derby winner,
Who's only work is signing cheques
And dodging paying income tax..
Who's income comes from having shares
In factories where we do the chores
To produce the wealth that should be ours
But keeps them in their Ivory Towers,
These people are the ones
That call us second class citizens.

Ian Thorpe

*Ian Thorpe is from accrington, has contributed a story to
Write On 12, and is in the Commonword Roadshow.*

It Takes All Sorts

The bus stood outside the canteen waiting for the relief crew to take it into the city. The passengers were quite used to this waiting at this stage of their journey into Manchester, while the relief crew drank the last of the tea from the brew can and finished their smokes.

The canteen door opened and the guard came out helping a rather old-looking man who was bent over, this it seemed was the driver of the bus. It was while the guard was helping the driver to his cab he had to stop while the driver took in great big gulps of air. After his breathing had improved the guard helped him up into the high cab, where he seemed to have more trouble with his breathing.

"Will you be alright dad? I don't know why you keep working at your age and by the way, where's your teeth, 'ave yo' lost them again?"

"I've me teeth in me pocket, at least I think they're mine, unless I've picked up ol' Charlie's in mistake off the canteen table. He's like me yo' know, can't eat with them buggars in, good job they don't stop us both 'avin' a pint, c'mon, lets get goin' up the road".

The four elderly ladies, who were sat directly behind the driver and had heard the conversation, seen the driver step and fight for his breath, helped into the cab, where he could not be seen as the blind had been drawn down. They looked at each other in dismay.

The bus proceeded along the road for a couple of bus stops, then stopped altogether. The guard went around to the cab door and opened it.

"Wha's up now? are you alright? wha's that? yo' broke you' specs again? bloody 'ell, thats all we need. We will have to do what we did th'other week, two bells to turn left, three to turn right. I know you' as blind as a bloody bat without 'em. I wish you would retire you old buggar".

"Never mind that over me bein' put out to stud, this 'ere

steerin' wheel is loose agin, give us that bit o' string to fasten it down, it's come off twice already. Ta."

The four ladies had stopped talking about having coffee at the 5th Inn just off Deansgate and were listening to the conversation between the guard and driver... regarding the state of the bus, also the driver... 'Dearie, dearie me, did you hear what that man was saying? had we better get off and wait for another bus?' 'Of course not, they are only joking my dear, they must be joking after all'.

The bus slowly went on it's way along the main road.

The guard ran very quickly along the centre of the bus and knocked very hard on the window behind the driver shouting.

"The lights, the traffic lights... they're red, red yer silly ol' sod. Stop the bloody bus."

"Wot lights... where? Bloody 'ell, I'll 'ave to get me lamps seen to in the next few weeks, I will an' all...!" shouted back the driver turning his head to his mate.

The lady who was sat in the second seat nearest the window had had second thoughts over whether the bus crew were joking or not. She was sat talking about a dress she had seen in town a few days ago, when on looking out of the window on her right, she saw something again and still could not believe her eyes. She stopped talking, her mouth still open, then very quietly she said, "Do you see what I've just seen? Look... there it is again. Look, Oh my God, let's get off this bus right away and report this to the transport people."

The three other ladies were looking at the empty sleeve of the bus driver who was beckoning on the traffic at the rear of him to overtake. The empty sleeve came out again to indicate a slight right move. The ladies got off at the next stop. They had forgotten morning coffee at the 5th Inn.

The bus made it's way into the main street of Withington... which, as usual, was packed with traffic. Cars parked on both sides of the street. The cab of the bus was level with another bus cab, the driver doing his best to move forwards, after all he was on the so called toffee'- nosed run, Bramhall,

Woodford. The blind-as-a-bat driver opened his cab door to say something to the Bramhall driver, who at the same time opened his cab door saying, " 'ere, don't you start asking me 'ow my bleedin' piles are today. You showed me up the other week in Withington with a full load on. I didn't know where to put me face, you know what these Bramhall types are like."

" 'ang on a sec Ron, 'ang on, alright, I won't ask how you's piles are!"

"Righto" said the other driver, " But you know wot this lot's like. To 'ear 'em talk they all play golf on a Sunday wif the G.M. I bet the biggest part of 'em haven't got two 'alfpennys to scratch their arse wif."

"All I was goin' to ask you Ron was" said the blind-as-a-bat driver "How's you' bleedin' haemorrhoids today, that's all" The door shut with a loud thud at the same time the eye-brows of the Branhall and Woodford types went higher and higher at this last remark.

Driver Halliday, 'Doc' to his mates, the so called blind driver, looked into his offside mirror and saw the blue flashing lights of a police car. He pulled over to his left to give it a clear run. The police car swung across the front of Doc and stopped. Two policemen and two of the old ladies got out as the bus pulled in behind the police car. As the two rather excitable ladies ran towards Doc shouting remarks about his health condition, followed by the two policeman. A Panda car had stopped on the other side of the road and out stepped a police sergeant.

"What's all this about then?" asked the police sergeant to the two constables.

"Oh, good morning sarg'" replied one of them "It seems that these two ladies stopped us in Withington stating that this driver is unfit to drive and...."

"What's wrong with him?" asked the sergeant, "Is he drunk? is he a junky or what?"

"Well sarg'," the constable seemed at a loss as to what to say.

"They say he can hardly get his breath, and had to be helped into his cab. He can't see the traffic lights, the guard had to tell him when he came to a red one, and well...um... he's only got one arm and as he is driving a bus I thought we had best look into it."

"Bloody hell, I've heard it all now, get these two old dears into the police car, can't hear yourself think with these two

going on and on.."

Doc just sat there in the cab, his mate leaning on the front nearside mudguard at the same time having a smoke.

"Right, let's sort things out shall we?" said the sergeant... walking to the cab door and opening it wide. "First he's got two arms, unless he's got a tube of Bostick in his pocket. Right driver, tell me the number of my car.. by the way, do you wear glasses?"

Doc told him the car number also a few more car numbers as they went by. The sarg' looked at him for a while then turned to the two policemen, "Tell me, did the two old dears say anything about tying a bit of string 'round the steering wheel? Did they say anything about tapping the wheels to see if they were safe? you know.. like the railway blokes do. We have had something like this before, they tap the wheels with what looks like a small hammer, turns out it's his bloody pipe but he gets a lot of people rather worried and more so when he ties up the steering wheel and pretends not to see the lights. These barmy bus drivers and their mates are up to all sorts of tricks. They just take the micky out of the public now and again. Some time ago when they had a power strike, some of these blokes were running 'round with all the inside lights off. When someone on the bus asked why, as he could not read his paper, the guard said it was their turn for a power cut! One bloke I would like to get my hands on told two Irish blokes that they were running a bus service from Manchester to bloody Belfast! they had Air Lingus in uproar, had to send for the police to sort it out. Mind you, I had to laugh at the idea of it."

"Tell me sarg'," asked one of the constables, "How do you know all about these bus blokes and the tricks they get up to?" "How do I know? you might well ask, I'll tell yo', me sister married one and he's at Parrswood. Right, you take the old ladies back to Withington. After that, carry on with whatever you are doing. And by the way, nothing goes down on paper over this lot, think on.. I'll have a word with this here comedian, him and his one arm!"

A few minutes later Doc saw the flashing light of the police car in his mirror, just as it was about to pass him the empty sleeve came out waving the police driver on. The police driver gave a couple of notes on the siren as he speeded by, turned to his co-driver and said, "There must be some right rum buggers on

that job, they put the wind up those old dears. Fancy tapping the bus wheels with an old pipe and putting string on the steering wheel. C'mon.. let's do some work and nail someone."

Victor Irving

Victor Irving is an ex-bus driver and lives in Bramhall.

Royalty

The Queen had been to visit Stockport that day; an event of rarity which gave rise to feelings ranging from intense pride in some people, to abject boredom in others.

I can't recall much about what I was doing on that day, but I didn't see the Queen. I remember, in the evening, sitting on the long seat of the bus, next to an old man who was lolling, happily drunk in the corner, his smiling face was rocking to and fro as the bus picked it's way along Stockport's pitted roads. He lifted his head, made a valiant effort to get me in focus and said, "She spoke t'me y'know". I must have looked a bit baffled for he added forcefully, "Her Majesty!" whilst momentarily stiffening his back a little. Thinking that 'her majesty' had shared a few words with the old man while he stood in the crowd, I enquired what she had said to him. "She said, 'ow do sam, 'ow are thee lad?" and added confidentially, " She musta known me from somewhere".

His head then fell forward in drunken, daydreaming oblivion leaving me with a sense of having caught a glimpse of the place that Royalty holds in the hearts of the people.

Gordon Jackson

Gordon Jackson lives in Hyde and works in computers. He wrote a very funny poem for Write On 12 called "The Great Computer".

Wishful Thinking

2/5/'77

When I could no longer ignore our problems
they called me a castrating bitch.

When I tried to ignore them
and gathered rosebuds instead,
they called me an easy lay.

"Marry me, marry me,
make an honest woman of me.."

The only snag is -
you and I are already married.

Spring '77

I hope we grow old together.
I should be quite content
to end up beside you in the pub
with rarely a word spoken,
rarely a glance in any direction -
but always a full glass.

And between drinks
arms rigid, you rest your hands on knees.
And I might secure my bag
on a best-coat bound lap.

I should be well content
after all these years of talking,
to end up by your side still -
but silent.

Wendy Whitfield

Novel Extract

This is the beginning of a novel Ailsa Cox is writing. It's about girls at a Midlands grammar school in 1969.

She walks calmly through the busy street on long, languorous legs. A shock of vibrant hair, a smile that in more fortunate centuries would have sent ships sailing half way 'round the world - she notes your approach with cool appraisal. The face can be pert, even childish - and yet it is a mask of startling beauty.

Angela knew that face well, only too well. She watched the image glide across the rows of gleaming new cars, and out of sight again.

"It's time I got myself out of this habit," she thought to herself. "Everyone can see me admiring myself in shop windows. I'll be late if I don't sharpen up. I don't want to start getting detentions this term as well."

"If you had any sense," she preached silently to her reflection as it swam over the Midlands Electricity display, "You'd keep to the sensible side of the road, by the council offices". There was a good chance she'd be working there alongside her mother in a few months time, if she got her word in with her friend in personel.

Sometimes, Angela thought she caught a glimpse of beauty deep in the plate glass. There were real red lights in her hair when the sun shone on it, like today. If only it wasn't for the freckles, the snub nose, the eyes too far apart, the crooked teeth, the spots, the matchstick legs - if only she had tits - she could've been as lovely as Karen herself. Perhaps she was already changing, as her mother assured her she would, from a half-boy to a woman. But even if she was, would anyone notice? Lads always looked at her last. All they ever wanted from her was a smelly hotdog and a chance of talking to Karen. Good old Ang' never had a chance to try out all that sound advice about saying no gracefully and keeping a boy's respect.

Angela didn't believe in the future. She would always be as she was now. Her mom had talked about a worthwhile career-

- about making use of the opportunities she never had. But, if she was honest, she could really see in her own bright reflection any shadow of the office girl at her typewriter, nor could she see herself in her mother's likeness, married with a baby at seventeen. She couldn't imagine any man at her side whose shirt she would have to scour for gravy stains.

Make the best of it. Although the girl in the window wasn't, on close inspection, poised or slick or sophisticated, Angela wasn't discouraged today. There was a certain sprightliness in her walk. The sharp winter sun lit her untidy curls - if only her hair was straight! Angela walked on, humming a tune from the new Beatles L.P.

Ailsa Cox

Home Truths

Home Truths is a name given to meetings that are taking place for women who are interested in writing. The idea is that ordinary working women will be able to share their experiences and maybe put them into print and have them published.

**Tues. Evening. Fortnightly
at 7.30 p.m. Stretford Library.**

DATES: Oct. 28th; Nov. 11th & 25th; Dec. 9th etc.

For details contact

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*And if you can't come in person,
send some work.*



Dust

Dai sits with head low,
Drooped between his hopeless arms...
As he coughs up his dusty lungs,
Hard chunks of tissue
As black as old blood,
A little nostalgia in the cruel sun
From the now silenced pit,
Spat into the tarred road.

An old man of middle years,
Spent out, finished at forty,
Seams well dug into his leathered face
And finger-nails ridged and ruined.
A bowed and stunted body
Pensioned out to grass...
A lost soul in a machine world
That doesn't want to know.

Here he swills beer and sings songs,
Boring today's uncaring youth,
With ageless tales of the pit,
His whole lifetime of boyhood
Sacrificed to the pit-head,
And he hunches up on his bench
Wearing his blue scars with pride,
The only medals from his working years.

His tales are punctuated by the hacking cough
That spazms his whole, frail frame...
And, when it passes, he finds his audience fled
Leaving reality sat on a lonely bench...

The Dark Pulse

It beats with an incessant beat,
The machine pulse of the night shift,
Needing no sleep, nor bait,
No strain at what man cannot lift,
With one finger on a button...
Half the mountain moves along,
Beaten with the pulse to black gold,
Never hearing a collier's song...

All is soon sifted, all is sorted,
By a machine that needs no light,
Boring, shifting, lifting, conveying,
It can pulse non-stop this night.
Carrying black drams to the surface
Through the dust as thick as clay,
Pounding all that stands before it,
In its cold, machine-like way.

No wage needed, man is thwarted,
Machines they do not cough away,
Or wracked by pain and sadly ruined
Just that little more each day.
Free from rust, can live in gas...
Yawning miner's forget to live...
As the pit's pulse reaches out,
Taking all there is to give.

Joan Batchelor

Cornish Rhapsody

Strange companions
Jostle here,
But not uncomfortably -
Wesleyan chapel with
Bygone saint,
Lighthouse, shipwreck,
Thatched roof, quaint
Old village and town.
Lobster pot, fishing line
Stone-brick chimney of
Forsaken mine
And lunar-like
Mountains of china clay.
Pleasure craft lie
In cove and bay,
Peaceful beneath the
White gull's plaintive cry.
Sunlight, dappled in
Flowery, leafy lane,
Sparkles on
Dancing waves again.
Fishing tackle
To catch the shark,
Palm-encircled bandstand
In an English park!
Forgotten language,
Theatre cleft in rock,
Worthy of any Greek,
Strange-sounding
Celtic names -
Seal sanctuary at Gweek
And literary associations -
Charles Kingsley,
Frenchman's Creek.
Church buried deep
In shifting sand,
Once a proud presence
In this ancient land.

Older still, fogous,
Dolmens dot
The landscape
In secluded spot.
Buried treasure,
Saintly isle,
Floral dance
And slate tile.
Gorse, bracken, heather,
Yellow, purple hues,
Coastal road,
Breathtaking views!
Ruined castle
By the sea,
King Arthur, knight
And chivalry.
The surf pounds
On the craggy shore.
Cornish cream teas,
Smuggler's lore -
All for our benefit,
Tourists acquisitive
In search of souvenirs.
A dubious gypsy
Feeds on hopes and fears
As, workaday world,
Stress out of reach,
We write our postcards
On some sheltered beach:
" Having a lovely time.
Wish you were here.
The weather's fine,
The sky is clear.
True, we've had a little rain."
Yes, surely, one day
Wandering steps will take us
Westwards again!

Fogous: underground, stone-lined prehistoric chambers.

The Difference

"Wine, women and song"
- An old cliché.
"Poets like women,"
I heard a poet say.
Some poets ARE women!
But -
Subjectively and
Not surprisingly,
Some of them
Don't like men

Even objectively.

Ruth Allinson

RUTH ALLINSON'S collection of poems

TO MEN IN GENERAL AND ONE IN PARTICULAR

is available from Commonword price 50p.

Marathon Women

When you run swift
Feet are dancing
Fast and fleet
To the heady movement
Of our times.

Our bodies follow the
Pattern of liberation we
Enjoy while you swing
Through the out of doors.
A modern Atalanta in the sunshine
Breaking through new barriers for us
Fetching the golden apples home.

Diary Extract

Isn't this awful? Three days since I last made an entry in my diary. But I haven't had time you see. There was business to attend to in Barbados, and then I had to tear across to the Middle East to attend to my oil interests (and it's a long swim, the Atlantic...) And on top of this I had to help quell a rebellion in South America and all before breakfast on Monday!

Of course I've taken it easy since. Frank Sinatra called in at breakfast time and prolonged his stay to have coffee with Liza Minelli and me. He said he would have stopped over for a couple of days, but he couldn't put up with the council workmen knocking the old plaster off downstairs. Said he didn't know how I put up with the din, but I told him that although we are both filthy rich, I have the advantage of also being an eccentric!

After a delightful dinner (whoops - lunch) of beans on toast, Jam buttles and a mug of tea, Liza left too, and I felt a wild burst of energy coming on again, so I did the ironing. Wow!

The Council Dump

Us kids can have fun on our council tip,
Where a battered settee can as soon be a ship.
Oil drum for funnel, the flagpole's a pump.
Yes, us kids can have fun on the old council dump.

That broken down telly, a computer can be,
And that rusty old wash tub, a space ship you see.
Our telly computer says we're just passing Mars,
As our rusty old space ship flies on through the stars.

Dustbin lids with their handles make marvellous shields
And soon the old tip is a rare battlefield.
With some wood for a sword, tucked into our belts,
The battle begins, and it's Romans V. Celts.

Sometimes there's a mattress that's burst at the seams.
But we soon turn it into a fine trampoline.
We stand on a box and it's one, two, three, jump!
Yes, us kids can have fun on the old council dump.

Brenda Leather

Hiroshima

1980.
Light infuses life into the stone.

A single tone
Beats down dully
On the shadows.
The water flows
Bringing memory
A ritual twists
Whispering in the blossom.
The children come to drink
Where the lips once cracked.

This is the benediction ash.
The burnt out cinder of human flesh.
Half blessing for the half life
That rubs the bone yet will not be denied.

1945.
Death eases through the cracks in the wind.
Corpses melt like water in the rain.
Every seven minutes
The human orchids
Shed their yellow skin
Or open like a smile

When?
A scream a scream a scream a scream.
Earth seals silently our dementia.
Laughter
Drifts up
From the lead sealed chamber.

In The Egyptian Room

The green breeze cuts the blade.
A dialogue of light and shade
Binds the reed and bends the fluted leaf.

The slow clay takes flight
In the hawk's death-tinged wings that beat
On the limbs of the ochre-skinned boy.

Lapis lazuli sucks on the blue paps
Of a slack-breasted sky.
Time is turning turquoise into stone.

Green. Ochre. Blue...
Colours stripped from the tomb.

Here light plucks brittle notes on strings
Whose colours snap and twist in the wind.

The spiral centuries
Unwrap
Unbanding the dusty head
The soured grin.

Karen Sullivan



Working Class Writers - C. Allen Clarke

Reading 'Write On 13' made us realise that working class writing is very much a living tradition following in the footsteps of those who have tried to convey the reality of life since the early days of the industrial revolution.

One of the most successful of these writers was Allen Clarke, a Bolton author who was born in 1863 into a family of textile workers. His mother worked in the mill up to the time of his birth because his father, like most cotton workers in the 'cotton famine' days, was out of work. He was one of nine children and liked to claim that he had literary forbears because his grandfather, a shoemaker, wrote verses which had been printed in the Bolton Chronicle.

There were a number of formative influences which Allen Clarke used to good effect when he came to write. He lived near to the iron works where his uncle was employed and he watched through the iron bars of the gate as the half naked men worked the huge steam hammers and poured the molten metal from one ladle to another. His father was a member of the Spinners' Union and used to take the lad to meetings in Manchester. He remembered seeing his father speaking to striking operatives on a spare piece of land in Gilnow Lane in 1877. He also had a voluble and politically conscious aunt who became very excited and active at election times.

These experiences, together with his own, he wove into the stories and books that he wrote throughout his life. He was not a great writer, but he was an excellent journalist and his work carried a pronounced political message. His dialect work in particular reflects the richness and humour of Lancashire working class life.

Starting work as an errand boy, he progressed first to half-time in the mill and then at thirteen went to work full time. He then became an apprentice or pupil teacher and won several scholarships to gain his education. However, after teaching himself Pitman's Shorthand, when he was twenty one, he left the education world and decided to try his luck as a journalist.

He managed to keep himself and get married while he poured out both poetry and prose, most of it with a strong working class social content. When he was twenty five, The Bolton Social Democratic Federation invited Tom Mann, the pioneering socialist and trade unionist, to live in the town. Young Allen Clarke was strongly influenced by him and from that time he counted himself as a convinced socialist.

His first novel was set in Bolton and was about the 1644 civil war in Lancashire. It was published in 1885 as "The Lass At The Man And Scythe", but four years later he rewrote it and changed the title to "John O'God's Sending". He also wrote one of his most important novels at that time. It is called "The Knobstick" and contains the story of the engineers strike of 1887. He describes the bitter struggle that lasted from May until October and obviously drew on his Uncle's experiences in the forge.

Shortly after his marriage, after one of his children had drowned in a clay pit, the Clarkes moved to Blackpool. He wrote a number of books about Blackpool including "The Story of Blackpool", "Windmill Land" and "More Windmill Land".

He worked as a journalist on the Bolton Evening News, The Cotton Factory Times and as Editor of a number of dialect journals. His dialect writing was certainly some of his most successful. He wrote "Lancashire Ladds and Lassies" partly in dialect and largely autobiographical. Most of his work can be said to be autobiographical. Even his later work which is based on spiritualism is very much his life story. "The Eternal Question" and "When The Hurley Burley's Done" are two of them.

Perhaps the best of his novels was "Men Who Fought For Us". It is a story of the hungry forties and is by far his most significant political novel. "The Red Flag", another political novel was possibly the only one published by the Twentieth Century Press

and The Social Democratic Federation. He also wrote "The Effects Of The Factory System" a scathing indictment of the way that factory life dehumanises people. Another major book was called "Moorland and Memories".

Allen Clarke had three strong and interlinked strands in his life. He loved the open air and especially the moorlands and the sea. His work is rich in descriptions of the Lancashire scenery. He loved the spirit of Lancashire and he incorporated its humour and sound common sense in his dialect sketches and stories and he loved his fellow men. That is the theme that runs through all his writing and that is what makes it worthwhile trying to obtain his work from your local library. It should be there.

Ruth & Edmund Frow

Ruth and Edmund Frow are the curators of the Labour History Library in Stretford and have an extensive collection of working class fiction and poetry.

L. Aksiuk is a member of the literacy class at North Hulme College.

Summertime

Two o'clock in the afternoon
what a sight
just to be here is really something
the sun keeping an eye on everyone
keeping you and me in good spirits
what a lovely gesture.

From Lancs to Yorks

Remember how it was
not so long ago
in Bradford Yorkshire
everything was all roses
but a face like your brother's
from the other side of the Pennines
can turn everybody off.

L. Aksiuk

VOICES 23



VOICES is the national magazine of the worker writer movement.

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TUESDAYS 7.15pm. HOME TRUTHS, a women's writers' group meets in the children's room of Stretford Library on alternate Tuesdays. Phone Wendy at Commonword for more details.

TUESDAYS Hulme Writers' Group meets every other Tuesday at Hulme Library. Phone 226 1005 for more information.

WEDNESDAYS 7.30pm. Balderstone Writers' Group meets at the Balderstone Community School, Queen Victoria Street, Rochdale. Contact the community tutor or steward, or Ray Mort at Commonword.

ILLUSTRATIONS:

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We hold regular workshop meetings, at which writers and would-be writers get together to read and discuss their own work. We publish books and booklets of this work, and we organise live readings.

For details of writers' groups, see the inside back cover. New members are always welcome. There are people in the office during the day to talk about your writing, arrange a reading for your group, or help you start a writers' group.

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