

Wigtown Verse

Unit3 Poetry Group

In memory of Jan

An anthology of poetry
published by
Unit3 Poetry Group

First Published as an A5 book in 2006.
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Design & layout by Les Dunford, Whithorn.
Printed by DGF Print Ltd., Dumfries.
Reconstituted into digital form in 2023 by Ian Wood.

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Home Thoughts To Abroad

The poet surely says it better
Than I can, even in a letter;
I don't know how to tell you quite
How much I miss you; you're the light
Of my existence - all my cares
Are for you, all my thoughts and prayers
Concern your welfare and your safe return.
To where? To whom? Whoever shares
Your life is privileged: I yearn
To have you know I love and care about you,
I'm only half a man without you.

Tony Brotherton

Epitaph for an Addict

Beneath this slab an addict lies
By name of Thomas Tuckett;
He found he couldn't kick his habit -
And so he kicked the bucket.

Tony Brotherton

Tony Brotherton *took early retirement three years ago to move to Glorious Galloway. He lives in Newton Stewart and his main leisure activity is walking. Over a hundred of his walks may be found on the Walking World web site. As well as the Unit3 Poetry Group, he is a member of the Wigtown Scribblers Writing Group. He has recently published his first book, 'From Galloway to Galicia - a love story'.*

LOOKING FOR FATHER

"Ma, where's ma Da - is he oot at his wark?"

"He's still oot in the fields plooing, son,
And it's nearly dark.

It's heavy work ahin the ploo
And there's the milking as weel
I often think that farm workers
Should get a better deal.

It's way past yer bedtime Billy -
Nae bath the nicht,
Hand me the cloot please
And we'll gie yer face and hands a dicht
Then it's upstairs tae bed

And we'll see yer Da in the morning."

Jessie Hepworth

Jessie Hepworth *- Born in the Rhinns of Galloway.*

MEN AND MOTORS

(with apologies to Shakespeare)

All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.

They have their exits and their TRANSPORTATION.
And one man in his time uses many of them.

His movements being in Seven Ages

At first the Infant, mewling and puking in its BABY BUGGY

And then the hapless schoolboy, with his lunchbox
And shining morning face,
PEDDLING like mad so as not to be late for school.

And then the Lover, sighing like a furnace, 'cos his MOTORBIKE Won't start for that important trip to his mistress.

Then a soldier, full of strange oaths, and kitted to the hilt,
Jealous in honour, less his JEEP fails the test,
Seeking the sergeant's approbation, even in the cannon's mouth.

And then the Justice, in fair round belly a sign of all his wealth,
With eyes severe, and appearance as should be,
Full of his status symbol, that emblem, ... A ROLLS ROYCE.
And so he drives through Life

The sixth stage shifts into the lean and slippered old man,
With spectacles on nose, WHEELCHAIR in sight.
His youthful clothes, well saved, well out of fashion
For his shrunk frame
And his big manly voice turning again towards childish treble,
Pipes to demand a ride in his Chair

Last scene of all that ends this strange eventful TRANSPORT tale
Is second childishness, then mere Oblivion

SANS TEETH, SANS EYES, SANS TASTE
SANS TRANSPORTATION

Joyce Adkin



On Learning 'WIGTONESE'

The day I came to Wigtown was the day I became aware
Of the difference in the language spoken between our Nations fair.

It began with an initial greeting, "*It's yourself, the lady then*"
Instead of the usual Nottingham quip, "*Ay-up me duck, It's yersen!*"

So I sat down to pause and think of other words I'd met,
Which did confuse me somewhat, when in a sentence set!.

Now, I was told I would be met "Just at the back of Two"
Two what I thought, People or things, My mind was in a stew!

When to a picnic I did go, A piece was told to bring.
A piece of What, cloth, cake or soap or even pottery, MING?

Next to the Doctors I did go. INJECTION, (such a drag)
But my heart leapt, was a car in store, (when told I'd have a "JAG")

Next, when asked to call in at the shop (a neighbourly thing to do)
To collect a message "But take a big bag" For such a small note
WOULD YOU !

When talking over olden times spoke of a POKE of sweets,
But fingers in jar, prodding around, seemed an unlikely treat

To be "out - with" in England means perhaps an amorous date
In WIGTOWN, somewhat differently, could be left "outwith" if late!

And as for 'dykes' in England, they are a ditch you see.
So a 'stane dyke' to clamber o'er seemed upside down to me!

Strange, sexes too became a puzzle, especially with a lassie,
Confused with one at THE PICTURE SHOP,
"Ye ken that HE'S A JESSIE?"

Yet as for 'bonnie' I admit that the Wigtown way is best.
My daughter says "Too bonnie you, that weight must go, no less."

So, all in all, I much prefer the Wigtown way of chatter.
Apologies though, if I get confused, when stopping to have a 'blether'

So that's the end of my 'tale of words,' but it made me think a while.
Am I 'just after' writing down my list,
Or 'finishing' English style?

Joyce Adkin

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A NURSERY TEACHER

Good heavens, was it really so late,
I must be at school for twenty past eight!
So much to see to, so much to do,
Could I really be ready? - the time just flew.
But at last at the door of the nursery I waited,
A deep breath I took, not feeling elated
For the thought of the day that ahead of me lay,
For today was the day of the NATIVITY Play.
Now where was I to start, what must I get ready
Put the chairs out, sort the costumes,
Check the platform is steady,
Since the eight little angels, all dressed in white
Last year one fell off, in full parental sight,
But back on she clambered, her halo askew,
Took it off, scratched her head, then went "Atishoo!!!"
Fingers crossed, please let the shepherds stay calm,

Not race their wee lambs and pretend it's a farm,
Nor wave them aloft when the camels appear,
Then beam at their mothers who say, "LITTLE DEARS"!
And Mary, so calm in her stable was seen
to rock BABY JESUS, as if in a dream;
Said her part, said the words with meaning so deep;
Held him out; dropped him down, said, "He won't go to sleep!"
Yet, when someone asked why he was wrapped in a shawl,
And laid in the manger, right there in the stall,
Her little voice muttered, "Swaggling clothes, what he gets.
Didn't you know nappy pins weren't invented yet!"
Oh! Now I've remembered just what one King said,
(which brought such a smile, but turned my face red).
There appeared at the door to witness the play,
Our headmistress, accompanying visitors that day.
The whisper, so loud, it would have aroused the dead,
"That's the lady who puts our teachers to bed!"
So another deep breath as the handle I took,
But's what this, all is done; shook my head, had a look.
For my treasures, my assistants, who worked tirelessly each day
Had transformed the room ready, the stage set for the play
Costumes sorted, chairs in place, just await the children you say.
Then it struck me - I remembered, tomorrow's - "PARTY DAY"

Joyce Adkin

Joyce Adkin *- Teacher in charge of a nursery unit attached to a primary school in Nottingham. Knows the area well from summer holidays on the Bladnoch - returned to Wigtown in 2000, an accomplished painter. Her work is sold for 'Save The Children'.*

CASTLE HILL

Not a field exactly, but a green space,
And a pond I remember
Edged with bright marsh marigolds
Flamboyant out of heart shaped leaves.
There were minnows to be caught -
Or were they sticklebacks? - no matter
I remember jam jars, string and grey
green water
Soaking socks in brown Clarks' sandals
But most of all I remember
Those golden yolky dazzling flowers
Small suns vying with the other sun.
I'd never gone so far before
Miles from home, a half hour's walking
Trailed along with other kids
The only faces I remember are the kingcups
Still familiar, treasured, known,
Only marigolds and secret pleasure
Feeling happy, giddy, free.
There were boys there I remember
And I wonder now what's in my memory
Did I fall in love aged eight?

Maggie Stuart

Maggie Stuart *- After a career in education, retired to Wigtown from Linlithgow - started with husband Bill the very successful 'Walks & Talks programme. Throughout the summer, her garden is open at weekends in aid of 'Save The Children'.*

TRAVELLER

At the last moment, as the train leaves,
She arrives - plumps down,
Breathless from some southern sun,
A smiling, warm and weathered brown.

Her smile is inward, knowing.
Old ropes of hair are lashed with
Luminous green, yellow, purple;
A rucksack bound in rags and string,
Bulges with bundled memories and desert sands.
I'd like to hear her tales.

And then she turns her smile to me,
Breathes as a question.
Transfixed, I can't translate
Her tongue; cannot translate her life.
I live in another country.

David Sumner

GETTING THERE

(a colloquy for voices)

(Wo)man: A sullen winter's day at Wigtown Bay.
A trouser patch of sky.
Oyster catchers sort the cockles,
Peck silt along the shore.
A flight of geese seek a distant constellation.

Goose1: Barnacled by name...
Goose2: A name we do not know...
Goose1: But softly feathered..
Goose2: Comfortable in flight....

Goose1: Not the swollen thickly livered sort
Goose2: But creatures of the firmament....

Passenger: Before the flight, I pace the concrete
bridging past and future.
Embedded in the faded tartan, a walled aquarium.
The caption says: 'Respect these living creatures,
do not touch or tap the tank.'

Goose1: We can't be said to seek at all.
For us the future and the past
Are both contained within the present.
Goose2: To fly, to feed, to copulate and die..
We only do what we have to do.

(Wo)man: A parting of the clouds reveals
A vapour trail that's threaded through the patches....

Passenger: We're trapped now in a tank five thousand metres high, cased in steel and wrapped in plastic...

Stewardess: For your comfort we advise
Remaining seated with your belts in place...

Passenger: We're getting there....
And here we have the best of weather...

Stewardess: Please read the safety card without delay...

Goose2: To fly, to feed, to copulate and die..
We only do what we have to do.

Passenger: The wings are silver sharp against the cloud...

Stewardess: And note the brace position for emergencies...

Goose2: To fly, to feed, to copulate and die..
We only do what we have to do.

Stewardess: We are not signalling, but showing
the shortest way to exits...

Wildfowler: I am a fowler, wild, and out today...

Stewardess: And do not smoke while in the toilet...

Wildfowler: Slowly I ease my body on the mud,
And crane my sight to beating wings...

Stewardess: Or use your mobile phones...

(Wo)man: He kills for fun....
One for the pot, then four and twenty more...
It is his way of passing time...

Stewardess: And now we're flying over Wigtown Bay....
In eighty minutes we'll be on the ground..

Passenger: We're getting there....
I won't be late for my appointment...

Goose1: Time we do not understand
Goose2: Present suffering repeated times we cannot count...
Remains the same....

Wildfowler: The arching necks are in my sights
I ease the trigger shut ....

Passenger: Snatches of Scotland far below...
A puff of smoke, a soft report....

Goose1: To fly, to feed, to copulate and die..
We only do what we have to do.

Wildfowler: One more....I'm getting there..
I've heard they only count to one or two
So they can't be conscious of a missing brother...

Stewardess: And should the pressure fail
Which is of course unlikely..
Masks will descend, just put them on
Be sure to fit your own before a child's....

Passenger: Respect these living creatures,
do not touch or tap the tank.

Goose1: To fly, to feed, to copulate and die..
We only do what we have to do.

Stewardess: The seat belt sign is now extinguished
Enjoy the flight and luncheon will be served
Smoked salmon and a light goose pate....

David Sumner

ANN CESTORS

This is the story of my friend Ann Cestors
Who looked like an English rose;
She said that her family came from Chesters
Which explained her Roman nose.

Anne wanted to know who she really was,
Research her ancestral roots;
Was she crossed with some foreign exotic flower,
Or English down to her boots?

After months in assorted libraries
And payment of many a fee
She'd mapped out hordes of relatives
And drawn a family tree.

Her great great grandparents were Irish;
That was an asset, she felt -
Her love of mystical poetry
Obviously came from the Celt.

One branch of her family lived in Shetland;
The connection struck Ann with great force -
'My fierce fighting nature can only be due to
The fact I'm undoubtedly Norse!'

Except that they'd come from the Borders....
Said Ann 'I'm really licked..
Now I don't know if I'm a Viking,
Or simply a common Pict...'

'I've got an uncle in Stirling,
I've been there and like it a lot
I thrill to the sound of the bagpipes
Does that mean I'm really a Scot ?'

Then suddenly one day came a 'phone call
Completely out of the blue.
A distant cousin in Trinidad
That nobody really knew.

He claimed descent from Anne's grandma;
Her hair was suspiciously wavy -
Her mother'd been laid by a Captain in braid
Gone AWOL from the United States Navy.

On hearing this, Ann Cestors gave a deep sigh
And said what can this all mean ?
Her biologist son said - 'chill out, Mum
You're simply a bunch of genes.....'

David Sumner

David Sumner *- A long-time supporter of the group. Founder, with wife Jill, of the Swallow Theatre, bringing music and drama to the Machars.*
The group has given several poetry readings there.

RIME

She hated prison; the smell, the noise, the cold
and it was poetry class
subject matter - frost
Bleedin' frost !

What has frost to do with poetry?
cold, shivering, hard, white, frigid, icy, bleak
like bloody prison - like bloody life!
Unthawed shite.

But wasn't there a Robert Frost
they'd done him at school - and didn't frost rime?
there's a clever thought - lost, tossed, count the cost,
cold as a stone
cold as marble, cold as a frog,
as charity and as Christmas.
Frosted glass, misted mirrors,
frosted icing on birthday cakes,
frosty silence, frosty looks
like the cow on the landing outside, swinging keys and tits.

Frosty mornings, frozen locks
mouth sticking to metal trying to unfreeze a car.
Frosty windows traced with patterns,
dressing under bedclothes,
steaming breath, frozen fingers,
crying with the cold
four years old and no warm socks,
running nose, running to school
with Brenda Frost
her mam standing in the kitchen in her underskirt
saucer of water on the table
sticking transfers on all the kids.

Ladybirds and butterflies,
smudgy leaves and snowflakes,
nothing to make a poem about.
Bloody frost!

Jacquie Swift

Early One Morning

It came sudden,
death,
no warning,
silent, without ceremony
and complete.
Setting, sealing, ending
his voice.

No more gossip and laughter
never agin that shambling walk
or gesture or wave.
No scurrilous word
or mischievous plot.

But with the never and the no more, the what if and if only,
begins recollection.

Of baggy trousers,
paint speckled sandals,
no socks:
shopping trolley, books,
food, fun and fine singing.

Countless memories sedimented
and sifted like sea shore sand,
layered and entangled in life
at once human and humane.

Remembered.
Storied.
Told.

Jacquie Swift



NOT EVEN HALLOWS

It's the time when Autumn re-signs the year
to impending winter, when witches speed
on their missions of mischief.
An awesome and mysterious night
for fairies and hobgoblins to roam freely.
When sparks and revels cleave the whispering dark
and need-fires, wild fires, Samhnagen flames
purify and thwart calamities
of storm and blight, mildew, vermin and sterility.
Stir dying embers with a new found breath.

Never an arcane prelude to a feast for souls,
but the old New Year, the point of change
when the herds were brought from pasture.
And when the souls of the departed turned
for comfort to the halls and kitchens,
byres and stables of their loved and living kin.
Cold hungry ghosts driven from bare fields
and leafless woods to shelter.
Welcomed like the beasts, with food and warmth
in familiar dwellings of a cherished past.

No equinox or solstice marks this time,
sung in old Manx tongue as Hoggunna
a strange shaped brooding for the soul's winter.
Neither Spring sowing nor Autumn reaping
are the source of this great urging,
nor the four great hinges which revolve the solar year.
But in the fair land's end of Europe,
where isles and rocky bones
reach deep into the cold Atlantic sea,
this Celtic halving of the year prevails.

A thin and flimsy Christian cloak conceals
a brave and ancient festival of dead,
once known in Ireland as old Samhain E'en,
but now a loose-laid mantle cast by Boniface
to honour saints and sacred martyrs.
All those smugly smiling holy relics
far outnumbered by the people's dead
who jostle them in shared dark
spaces of the world's own memories and instincts
which frozen winter holds in silent thrall.

Merely a cracking earth-crust reins
this shadowed nether-world of slumbering forces.
Magic, mystery and mayhem waiting;
remnants of a constant old belief
removed entirely from the endless shifts
and shifting ends of doctrines and religions
dreamed by men some say to have the wisdom
to know better than to twist
and torment those who yearn to creatures
that bump and batter every lonely night

Jacquie Swift

Jacquie Swift *- Moved to the Machars in 2001 entranced by its literature, rich social and poetical history and quality of light. She has a studio and gallery in Garlieston - her postcards evocative of the Galloway landscape. Exhibited and published internationally.*

Hallowe'en

I feel a weird tune coming on.
A hell of a dirge coming on
The finale of summer
The prelude of fall,
When the fern's going bronze,
And the seed heads stand tall.
An imperative tune lingering on.
It is mellow and minor,
A lamentable sound.
To a drum and a fiddle
Wraiths seep from the ground
It's the vigil of All Saints,
All Hallowed and holy
But now is the night time
And the saints' day dawns slowly.
I give a brief shiver,
The atmosphere's ghostly
And the moon seems to quiver.
But the old standing stone
Has another refrain.
It has stood there for aeons,
In sun-shine and rain.
Did it see dancing
Or did it see death
Was sacrifice made here
Or a baby's last breath?
The gallows stood here in this very same field.
Many stories to tell,
Many secrets to yield.
My cottage stands near.
It is haunted, some say.
I return to its warmth
And will greet the new day.

Kathie Roberts

Beginnings

A new day dawns
Sky lights up in gold and ruby bronze.
Fields show their shapes
Cattle and sheep come into visible existence,
mist around their legs.
Birds sing their dawn calls.
Another day beckons here
As the sun begins it's journey
Across the lightening sky
Rays gently radiating from sun source to perimeter
Shadows fade and all becomes visible
And alive and awake
With this new day a new year begins
Re-commencing its journey through the seasons
Times of cold and snow, rain and drought,
Sleet and hale and sun.
That blessed, glorious sun kissing the earth and its occupants
To new life, to bud to blossom,
To leaf, to bud,
To flower, to fruit,
And so to Harvest
The zenith of the new dawn's beginning
Rotating new life from root and seed
Now dormant, awaiting sun's slow round
And next year's new beginning.

Kathie Roberts.

Swans in Deep Winter

Across the valley, two snow-white swans

Fly over frozen, frosty fields.

The winter sun brightening their wings

Strongly beating in complete synchronicity.

Two necks in perfect symmetry.

The overlooking snow-topped hills

Are gently lit by a setting winter sun

That colours the hemisphere of Galloway sky

In violet and blushing rose madder

The fading light flashes diamond sparks

From isolated windows in distant homes.

The pair of swans now lost to view

Signal the year's beginning.

Kathie Roberts.

Kathie Roberts *- taught creative writing at secondary level in the 60's when it was a new approach in the teaching of English - well travelled, taught in Portugal and Brazil, also worked on a magazine in India where she wrote a series of English Language Programmes broadcast over FEBA, the Far Eastern Broadcasting Association - now retired, finds time to pursue her lifelong love of reading and writing.*

The Winter Artist

I loved the winter, as a child
When, waking as the sun arose,
I'd turn my eyes to window pane
Then knew, that while I slept,
Jack Frost had come
And painted pictures
Just for me.

Great fronds of grass and mighty trees,
Fluted ferns in fairy glens.
Oh, how I wished that I could be
In this white and sparkling wonderland
Jack Frost and me.

Helen R. Macdonald

Helen Macdonald *- Moved here from Glasgow area in 1997 with husband Ian; owners of Gleniffer Press. Their miniature books are sold to collectors all over the world.*

BARRHILL TAE GIRVAN

The wintry sun hauled its self, elated,
Heaving up like Atlas with a golden coin upon his back.
Between the blue black hills of Galloway.

A blackbird sang melodiously, celebrating dawn,
Amongst the top twigs of a stunted sycamore tree,
It was stilled as the train trundled around the track bend.

In the distance the rolling green Ayrshire hills
Were hummocks draped with a green baize cloth,
The tussocks tipped heavily by a hoar frost.

Colmonell, a volcanic pimple glimpsed between the hills,
Nearer, the valley slashed through by the Stinchar,
Shadowy dense vegetation lay along its banks.

Hump backed pack-horse bridge over to Barr,
Camouflaged chapel hid amongst the tall trees
Frozen fish pond, circular, with overhanging jetty.

Sinuous snake of viaduct double crossing the road,
Strain of train engine as it ascends the incline,
Telegraph poles traipsing across the horizon.

Pinmore, Pinwherry, confusion of names, which comes first ?
Outward bound or homeward, both come last,
Like siblings squabbling seeking a parent's attention.

Crisscross of early morning flights of fantasy?
Streaked across the sharp, clear, sunrise tinted sky
Exposing upland dereliction of barn, byre and cottage.

Hidden heart of the hills as it slides through the tunnel,
Reflecting inwards a myriad of human emotions,
Before emerging in a rush to begin the descent.

Round the incline sun tipped hill tops to the west,
A glimpse of Ailsa Craig mirrored upon a flat calm ocean,
Far away faint Arran's clouded mountains.

A last gathering of speed as the town comes into view,
Church spire, flats, factories, harbour filled with fishing boats,
The final descent, smell of brake rubber, as Girvan is reached.

Jenny Gustafson

Bladnoch

The wind shimmering through the sedges,
Rippling the seedheads,
Burnt brown at their edges.

Stooked-up reeds sloughed
Beside the salt marsh,
Curlew beneath the wind cowed.

Branch and trunk of ash,
Hollow in the middle,
Seemed so solid but was trash.

Martello tower and embankment,
Sea defences stark against the sky,
Denoted work well spent.

Three flustered fat-pelted sheep
Bobbed in haste down the incline,
Then turned to gaze deep.

Gaunt silhouette of ruined railway,
Sturdy arches once supported
Train-track now in decay.

A breeze ruffled the river in spate,
A dusk crept from the west
The lone wanderer climbed the last gate.

Jenny Gustafson

Jenny Gustafson *- Trained as a teacher, now a professional gardener.*

NEIGHBOURS

Next door but one was forty-three
And there resided Welsh Mrs B.
She'd been there for less time than we
But knew all our neighbours to a T.

She'd 'pop' to borrow this or that,
Wouldn't sit, drink tea - no time to chat !
But stand she would for one hour flat
Chuntering on and a-chewing the fat.

(With arms folded tightly across an ample bust
She'd shift her feet occasionally and thus her weight adjust.)
So! Mrs Bloggs has popped her clogs -
Wonder what'll happen to the dogs?

Just seen Bailey's daughter Susie
Who's a lot to show for being such a floosie.
The son's a caution to say the least -
He'll slide through this world with his arse well-greased.

An' those two musicians aren't brothers, that's clear.
The way they behave, it's obvious they're queer!
But not as queer as number five
Who's convinced her old man's still alive.

Some weird goings-on at number twenty,
Despite the fact that its's supposed to be empty
Where that Greek chap with a name as long as your arm
Murdered his wife and caused considerable alarm.

Oh it's kids I reckon, themselves undaunted
Want us to think the place is haunted.

So..... Walter Fry has left his wife?
Well she did try to stab him with a knife.
She's having an affair so she won't care
But Postman Pat had better beware!

It's true, I'm telling you, hadn't you heard?
Well not from me then - Mum's the word.
She holds a finger against pursed lips.
Now it's knuckles firmly placed on those broad hips.

Miss Farrel the barrel is a good sort, I find.
She's got a heart to match that big behind.
Eh? Did you see Glynis Johns the other day
Visiting her uncle across the way?

Mervyn Johns, that's his name - he's a film star too
Tho' to look at him you'd never think him well to do.
His neighbour, the major, is always togged up smart,
But that woman he's living with looks a right tart.

Unlike the posh-tosh on the ground floor
With her red open sports car - must have money galore.
Oh, I wouldn't say those luxury flats have all the elite!
We just happen to be living on the wrong side of the street.

Hang on - did I tell you who I saw on Abbey Road?
I was just about to cross when this big black limousine slowed
And there in the window this familiar face I seen.
I waved, she waved, and smiled. it was only the bloody Queen.

Oh, there goes Mrs O' Neil - a staunch Catholic I feel.
Must be pushing forty-five if she's a day -
Seven kids already and another on the way!

Now she's rambling on about people we know,
But you daren't, can't, interrupt when she's in full flow.

The clock's ticking on - it's way past the hour.
At last she winds down - we ask about the flour
Plain or self-raising? You're welcome, we say
Don't mention it. 'Bye now! She's at last on her way
Until another day!

Jan Ashley

Jan Ashley *- a much missed friend of the poetry group whose readings of poetry, especially Shakespeare will linger with us.*

The Patchwork Quilt

The colours, they're now fading fast
though vivid memories will last.
Family history sewn with care;
each person represented there.
Squares from a favourite lilac skirt
and from an old tan gardening shirt.
Patterns remind us of times now past
The old and the young, now growing up fast
Clothes for holidays, working and sleeping
all ended up in squares for safe-keeping.
parts of our lives, measured and square
organized, stitched, we're all lying there.

Anne Dunford.

Walk the Path

Today I walk the path that we so often walked
I see the trees that shed their autumn leaves
I hear the birds and smell the burning peat
But you're not here.

Today I walk the path that we so often walked
I see fungi on the fallen log
I hear the lowing of the distant cattle
But you're not here.

Today I walk the path that we so often walked
I see your face in every loch and stream
I hear your voice and feel your touch
But you're not here.

Anne Dunford.

***Anne Dunford** - Living in the Machars - formerly a teacher, now working locally in adult literacy, has had several poems published, and read with Jackie Kay in 'Poetry Doubles', sponsored by Dumfries & Galloway Arts Association.*

The Killing Times 1685

Put the snib on the door,
And put oot the licht.
The Troopers are oot in the Moss the nicht.
The Troopers are oot in the Moss.

The Minister's awa'
An' you're no tae tell
That he's been here
An his freens as well,
That we sang the Psalms
An' prayed tae the Lord
The Troopers are oot in the Moss.

My guid man was oot at Drumclog.
His faith in the Covenant strong
Now they're hunting him doon lak' a dog.
I'm feart that they'll catch him ere lang
Lag's Troopers oot there in the Moss.

When we worshipped the Lord
In the bonny, green glen
We were safe from the World
And the cruelty of men.
Now there's few of us left
An we're feart of arrest
But we'll bide by the Covenant
An' no take the Test.

If the jingle of harness
Is heard doon the brae
We'll tak' tae the hills
An' just slip away.

Tho' Clavers' Moss Troopers
Are scouring the glen
There are ways through the heather
That only we ken
We'll be safe in the arms of the Lord.

The Lord is our Shepherd
His praises we sing
We'll bow tae nae other
Nae Bishop. Nae King!

Barbara Holland

TORHOUSEKIE

From within the stone circle
Could be seen
A vast territory of stars
The shrouded moon
Hung blankly
Its light dimmed
But the brilliant planets
Diamond hard
Unseeing - uncaring
Shone brilliantly.

The Bronze Age people
Chose this site carefully
Opening to them
The vast arc of the night sky
In all its majesty
Building the circle of stones
As a hymn of praise
To their gods.

But not to our gods
For we have reached the moon
And gone beyond.

Barbara Holland



ACROSS THE BAY

A high tide tonight,
And from my window
The Bay
Silvered over by the full moon
Lies calm and still.

Pinpricks of light on the hillside
Flicker like fireflies
Whilst higher still
From some lonely hill farm
A shepherd sees to his flock
By moonlight.

Far below
The laden lorries
Creep and crawl
On their way to the ferry.

But long before the Earl improved his acres,
Before he altered the course of the river,
Built dykes - drained the moss,
The tide surged up the bay
Probed the valleys
Pushed higher and higher
Into the uplands
Mingling salt water
With the peat brown water
of the moors.

One high tide moonlight night
Bright stars for guidance
The long ships came, serpent headed
Rounding the headland silently
With muffled oars.

And the twinkling lights
Went out - one by one
Only the moon still shone
Cold - uncaring.

And the tides slid back
Bearing the sea-snakes
Laden with plunder
Rich relics from monastery
And church;
With slaves and wool and hides
Easing them out of the bay.

Smooth and sleek - they rowed as one
Their way north
A shining path of moonlight
Leaving the bay silent

Barbara Holland

Landscape

The wintry flight fromGlasgow
(Vapour trail pink from the rising sun)
Looks down on Wigtown Bay.

At the string-like dykes
Holding fast the hills.
Like fishes caught in a net.

Looks down on shoals of playful drumlins
Tails pointing
Towards the last ice-sheet
That abandoned them.

And Cairnsmore, the great hill of the Celts.
Brooding like some beached whale
From across the estuary.
As Wigtown's towers of Church and State.
To the broad square
Where once the rooks caused such havoc
And controversy.

Then on across the Machars
Where the soil is thin
And the graywackes
Struggle to the surface.
Where sheep, gorse tangled,
Browsing
Leave great clots of wool
On golden spines.

But now the sun is over Cairnsmore
Flooding the bay with light
River and sea meet in mutual accord
And the day begins.

Barbara Holland

Farming the Wind

In the cool upland air
The wind farms reach to the sky
Searching the four winds
Seeking out the Northerlies
The bitter cold Easterlies
Farming the wind
Clean in line and form,
Arresting and beautiful.

The factories still stand,
Relics of an industrial age
An infamous past.
In the dank river valleys below
Nightmares of heat and noise and steam
Of roaring furnaces and clattering mills.

The short lives of the acolytes
who tended them
Their epitaphs in crumbling chuchyards
Deep cut on blackened stone
Stand neighbourly in death.
As they did in life.

Do some poor ghosts
Stray up there in the evening?
Marvelling at the brave new world
They never knew.

Barbara Holland

HEARTBREAK

I have moved on from heartbreak.
From the grey days and sleepless nights.
From the crying and anguish.

I saw him with his love yesterday
I'll not wear black, or tear my hair.
But make him pay.

I melted the sad remains of candle-lit suppers
I'm glad I kept them.
His hairs were still on my pillow.
His nail pairings I couldn't find.
He was fastidious in that at least.

I'll mould a little manikin in his image
Stick pins where his heart should be
but never was.

I saw him out walking again today
His new love on his arm.
He looked diminished.

Barbara Holland

***Barbara Holland** - Born in Ayr - moved to Galloway in 1980 - proud of the fact that her father played for Scotland.*

VOLCANO

Steep the volcano slopes
Sliding up pointedly to the azure sky
Silent, lying steamingly motionless
Under the relentless heat of sun
Dusty crunching underfoot rock
More hot than day rimming the crater
Sulphur striped, deep dropping
Carved from long forgotten violence.
Vineyards cling to kinder slopes
Scented with heavy, juicy fruit,
Voices call while tending the vines
Under the sultry heat of day
Sweating toil midst the dry green cool
Of the lanes, deep shading
Bearing the coming harvest

Rumble
Rumble again
Shake, tremble, crack
The earth swings and reels around
Winds grow hot and cold, screaming wildly
Rumbling turns to thunder, to intolerable goans
Explosion throws out billowing black-grey clouds of dust
Red hot rocks shoot up spraying deadly fire as the deepest of
Noise heralds spurting out of liquid fire
High through the dust into the sky.
New slopes growing out of the old
Instant searing of withered fruit
Death-stilled voices drowned in the noise
Under dust-blackened, sunless skies
Earth running red with molten lava
Charring,
Destroying all
In its path.
Gone earth,
Green shade,
Carving today's
Memorable violence.

Di Sorrill

Wigtown Bay

To awake to the red light
Of the emerging sun
Reflected off the still sea
Onto the snow-scattered hills, Pink sugar covered, slashed
With a sparkling sword of gold,
A line echoed back to the sea in tinsel glitter
Till the sunrise bursts into dazzling power,
And the clouds smoke and burn crimson above
or
To awake to the grey light
Of the hidden dawn
Reflected off the still sea
From rain-washed hills
White mist covered, furred
With an ermine coat of cloud
A haze like a sullen volcano lying heavy above
Hiding the green hills with leaden shadow
As the clouds swirl and smoke black above
or
To wake to the green light
Of the rushing wind
Reflecting in the broken sea
Up to the waiting hills
Water running, tumbling
With an urgent surge of power
Spray like a pitch of diamonds thrown away
Wetting the short brown grass in tangling fall
As the clouds leap with shadowed blue above.

The same scene, but different every day,
Coloured with every hue.

Di Sorrill

The Wigtown Martyrs

Margaret Maclauchlan and Margaret Wilson
Were drowned when they kept to their faith
Tied to stakes in Wigtown Bay,
When they wouldn't change their plea.

Old Margaret sang as the waters rose
'Remember not the sins of my youth
Nor my transgressions -' as the sea
Covered her head and she died.
Margaret Wilson was nearer the shore,
She'd seen her companion die.
Her tormentors hoped that the terror that wrought
Would make her go back on her faith.

'Pray for the King,' they urged her
'I pray for all men,' she replied
'Dear Margaret, say God Save the King,' she was urged
She answered with steadfast voice,

'God save him, I say, that is, if he will,
His salvation is what I desire!'
They tried to make her revoke her oath
Deliberately she refused.

'I'm a child of Christ. Just let me go!'
As they thrust down beneath the waves,
She died with calm dignity
And finished her course with joy.

What horrors are done in thy name O Lord,
Now as then, when we turn away
From our Brothers in Christ, in a different Church
As we don't like the way they sing or pray.
Grant us O Lord, a kind, loving heart,
That we share in Thy shining way.

Di Sorrill

Green

Caught in the stillness of the Green Calm Dream
I float motionless
Drifting in the sliding current of the gliding stream.
Care flicks away as the bubbles rise
The world turns to blurs 'neath my languid eyes.
Escape from the troubles of harsh sunlight,
And the ghastly terrors of the night.
The dreams of unfathomable crowded lands,
With seething, grasping, hostile hands.

And now I am trapped in the stillness of the Green Calm Dream
And cannot escape the sliding current of the gliding stream
Time runs away like the ebbing sea,
Drifting and tugging all care from me.

But then I am gripped by the power of the tide,
Swept into the bay of life, rocky and wide.
My body is wracked and torn into pain,
Forcing me, waking, to surface again.
Struggling and splashing through rough, salty brine.
I must swim 'gainst the tide and win back to mine.

But now as I sit by the gliding stream,
Yet I long for the still of the Green Calm Dream.

Di Sorrill

High Pressure

The sun this morning
Shone untrammelled across the bay,
Golden, Just Golden,
No cloud in the sky,
No mist on the water,
No ripple in the air,
And there was snow on the top of Cairnsmore.

Di Sorrill

Long Distance

That awful flight in steerage class
You've never, ever seen-a
More demonstrative proof Of Deus-ex-Machina!

Di Sorrill

From Where, Though:

If food we eat
Is veg and meat,
Can food for thought
Also be bought?

Di Sorrill

Di Sorrill *- With husband David, staunch supporter of the poetry group from the beginning - a prolific writer of both prose and poetry - designs and makes costumes for the Swallow Theatre - just one of her many talents.*

Boat Noosts

How sad you look
You broken boats
Nestling still, in what once was
A revered place.
Happier days when loving hands
Would drag you down to the lapping wavers,
And full of hope, would row away,
To see what bounty the sea would yield.
Hard days they were, but laughter too
Was not amiss, and helped to ease
The worrisome times.
Now gone forever, the loving hands.
And you are left,
To crumble.

Doreen G. Saunders

Maalie

Soft as down you float,
Dreaming,Drifting on caressing woinds
Like a silver white shadow,
You beautiful Maalie.
Silently through shafts
Of sunlight
You glide to sit with mate,
A perfect pair of lovers.
Home is just a rocky ledge,
With sea pinks for a garden.
Sweet words you whisper
All the time,
But sometimes laughter too,
Resounds!
How sad the day -
Should we cease to hear your call.

Doreen G. Saunders

Shags

Like sentinels they guard the rocks,
Watching and waiting,
Golden eyes gleam
In sunlight playing with clouds,
Silent they stand
Seeming not to heed the heaving sea,
As with mighty strength it rides
To crash and pause,
Then reluctantly retreat,
Leaving clouds of dazzled jewels,
To bathe the rock, and then return.
Now, one by one in gathering form
They lift and croak, and wheel around
Resentful of their broken peace
As man, unthinking, passes by
Disturbing all, and caring not.

Doreen G. Saunders

Mist

Silent, grey deadened, the world
Outside the snug room.
Mist creeping, covering moor and hill.
Stones darkened,
Birds quieted,
Flowers drooping,
Leaves heavy -
Endless clinging, dripping moisture
Making eerie noises in the gloom.
Peat fire blazing,
Kettle singing,
Cheerful chatter,
Busy hands.
Two worlds -
But a world apart.

Doreen G. Saunders

Croft House

Silent now, what thoughts have you?
Of days gone by.
When folk would work and laugh and play
At tasks that needed to be done.
Fetch the peat and feed the fire
And not forget to kye to milk
Make the butter and make the cheese
And fill the mugs of hungry bairns.
Hens too would need their feed
And caddie lambswith their insatiable greed.
When outdoor tasks were over and done
Then gather indoors and rest awhile.
Spinning-wheel and quick deft hands
Carded wool would turn into yarn.
Fiddle out and tunes come forth
Laughter and song would fill the roof.
All gone now, and only the stones
Stand still and remember.

Doreen G. Saunders

Doreen Saunders *- An Essex girl - a lover of islands and has lived for some years in the Shetlands - Foula and St. Kilda being special favourites - has had poems published in 'Shetland Life'. An accomplished spinner and weaver.*

Car Crash

From where I am I can hear the crash of waves,
Soft foam flirts with coastline
Tickling the sand.
Gulls circle, too far up for me to see,
Screech like sirens, dancing shadows.

I reach up and clutch at a shard of broken fence,
Fallen far, hanging limp,
Dead wood.

Nothing but rockpools below
And yellowed grass,
Washed by sand and salt and sea.
Wind whispers secrets in my ear,
Clever secrets
Clever wind
That floats.

My arms and legs feel heavy, like flotsam,
Clinging to a battered hull,
They dangle, empty, as I am rocked to and fro
From the limbs of a tree.
My head feels light as air,
Everything spins, beach wraps round itself,
Again and again.

I want to sing, I want to fly...
Can't let go. Too tired to do anything but cling,
To weathered bark and watch.

Water ripples, I look down,
A thousand tiny crevices - a home
To roam
For tiny creatures tiny world.
I watch the colours heightened by the water,
Something hits the surface,
Glass shatters, creatures scattered,
I see colours fade to red.

I feel the sting.
A bloody flower submerged,
Calling to me.

I hurt.
My body's broken,
Creaking metal above screams to me; my time is short!
I can't look up, I won't.
Sand drifts into my eye, my mouth.
I cough, I choke,
I am no cave with everlasting bones
An empty hole in which to hide
Or place inside the treasure of a thousand sins.
I am a much weaker vessel
Of thoughts and longings,
Without a voice.

Time ticks on as waves wrestle
For supremacy
Over an ever-changing thing
The beach.
Sands shift beneath a pleasant breeze
And so with grip exhausted
I fall.

Ruth Wood

Go Between

Being the go-between
In an endless game of hide-the-truth
Is like playing ping-pong
Without a bat.
You try and keep the score
As you pass the ball from side to side
Teeth gritted,
Head confused,
It was never fair for them to ask
For me to play
Two-one right to serve
I'm not an honest judge

The case snaps back at me,
A third player
But no-one seems to notice...
Scraped the corner,
Lucky point.

I scrabble about trying to fix the net,
Catch them up,
like red-herrings.
If she serves he'll lose the lead
And then where will we be?

Ruth Wood

Dance Of The Whispers

She knows.
And he knows she knows.
But he doesn't say. She doesn't say.
Tongue-tied,
Confused.

They say there's another
Who might get hurt,
Friendships weakened,
Snap!
A heart-string broken.

What are his feelings that they should shatter others?
She turned her back.
She doesn't want to answer.
She hides. He hides.
Music plays on.
How can she know for sure?
She can never know.
Never be sure.
Is it worth losing everything on a hope?
Comfortable neutrality.
Don't get involved.
Doesn't matter if it's you he's after.
Don't get involved.

She scribbles down the words. She scores them out.
She scribbles more.
She curses.
Foul words, foul word...
Take the weight off your shoulders.

We're inseparable.
So how could he make a distinction?
Same minds, same thoughts.
He only loves the shell.
Which one?
Doesn't matter.
He'll never see inside.
We dance.
Without him.
She, he, she, he....
Just she and she.
Eyes closed, dance moves on.

Ruth Wood

Lost Sap

I stumble
On the twisted roots beneath my feet,
The holes in the broken concrete,
And the trench still unfilled,
Where the water pipes run.

I curse
This is my place, my jungle,
I don't get lost
That's for other people, people who don't understand,
Clumsy people
With harsh words.

I sit
On the grassy hill next to the bird-table,
Surrounded by the scent of raspberries
And crushed dandelions
Their sap sticking to my fingers

As I fumble in the grass for my broken glasses,
I never liked them anyway.

I breathe deeply
You don't need glasses to see this,
The fragrances, the sounds,
Birds squabbling in the trees
As the light breeze tangles my hair
And brings in the clouds.

I cry
It's another garden far away
And it's raining
The water mingling with my tears.
There's nothing here but grey and brown
Without any memories,
Without any solitude,
From anything.

The walls here are concrete,
The plants are all plastic,
Neatly arranged in bowls,
For the owner's convenience,
And a water feature in the middle.

I stare
The only water feature I want is the rain
Washing over the ruins of a broken wall,
As the nettles force their way through
Near the trees, my trees, my apple trees,
Filled with blossom,
Their branches forming knots,
Handles for me to grasp as I clamber
onto the neighbour's shed roof,
And look out across a jungle,
And know that I'm safe
Far, far away.
In a garden of my own.

Ruth Wood

Shadows On The Heath

It was dark
When the witches came.
Their faces white marble,
Their limbs like smoke.

They danced,
Entranced
I watched from behind the trees,
And wondered at their skill.

What soul
Upon this cold, black night
Would brave the wind and ice
To dance around the moon?

They slip
Shape on shape
Between the stones,
Free as darkness.

The hills ring out with their voices,
Sweet howling of harpies,
Trapped in our skin,
Dancing.

They empty out their souls
To an empty sky,
Expecting nothing,
But the silence of the stars.

I walk away,
Their song entangled in my throat,
Their white skin mine,
With shadows in my head.

Ruth Wood

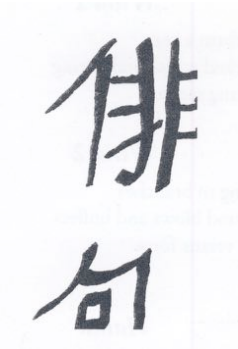
Ruth Wood *- a recent addition to the membership and the youngest. Born in Halifax but brought up in Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire.*

The Weather

Talk about the weather
We do that every day, don't we
And me on my holidays
Reduced to this
- Writing a postcard
This picture
Is the image of the town
Without the rain.
The weather
Which is what pcs are about
Was initially kind
Became appalling
But now seems
To be picking up
Rather like a relationship,
The weather, don't you think?
Wish you were here.

Ina Munro

Ina Munro *- A Glaswegian, owner of Cauldron Book Shop. The first bookshop to be opened in Scotland's National Book Town.*



Haiku

A Japanese verse form originating in the Japanese Royal Court (794 - 1392),
of three unrhymed lines of 5-7-5 syllables respectively, usually of some subjects in nature.

Colour 1

The world of the blind
No colour just shape and form
No light, just darkness

Colour 2

Vibrant or pastel
Calming or energizing
Powers of colour

Colour 3

Warm, cool, fresh? Decide!
Decorating decisions -
Safe magnolia?

Colour 4

Sunrise - pink and gold
Mid-day - the heat haze shimmers
Sun sets on pearl seas

Wind 1

Grasses form a sea
Land locked waves undulating
Whispering secrets

Wind 2

Birds cling to branches
As the wind blows and buffets
Feathers versus force

Anne Dunford

Haiku

Was it a beautiful blossom?
Or an apple to feed the soul?
Leaving Adam outside the gates.

Di Sorrill

Haiku On The Theme Of Writing

Pen trembles in hand
Empty sheets turn brain to mush
Line by line torture

Black lines overused
Lead scores a way through white sea
In endless jotter

Sudden lack of words
Thoughts run dry when asked to write
Paper makes heart numb

I can't open up
Fill the inkwell in my head
Before it's too late

Ruth Wood

Unit 3 Poetry Group

A Celebration of 8 Years of Friendship, Fun & Poetry.

In 1998 Lor & Irene Wakeman, with Steve Dowling's encouragement and support, created a small Arts Centre in what had been the Co-op Creamery in Bladnoch. The large factory had been broken up into units, and we met in Unit 3, hence the name.

The Wakemans, single-handedly transformed one of the large stockrooms into an exhibition area where all kinds of art & craft could be displayed, including both a poetry and an arts group. With exhibitions changing every month, it was a lively place. With the departure of the Wakemans, the centre closed down and the group were homeless. Luckily Bjorn Dirks of No. 1 High Street (the old Chemist's Shop) came to our rescue and we met there for three years. Readinglasses was our next 'port of call' and then Café Rendezvous for several months. We now meet at 451F in South Main Street, courtesy of Ian Wood. We are fortunate that not one of the owners of these premises charged us any rent, and so enabled us to publish this booklet using our 'coffee money' – we hope they like it.

So our grateful thanks go to – Steve Dowling, Bjorn Dirks, Angela Everett, Christine McGarvie and Ian Wood. We would also like to thank Kate Barclay for the photographs, Tony Brotherton for the cover photographs and Haven Sherwood-Lane for information on Haiku. The illustration is also by her. Last but not least, - to Les Dunford who 'created order out of chaos' – a thousand thanks.

Barbara Holland

