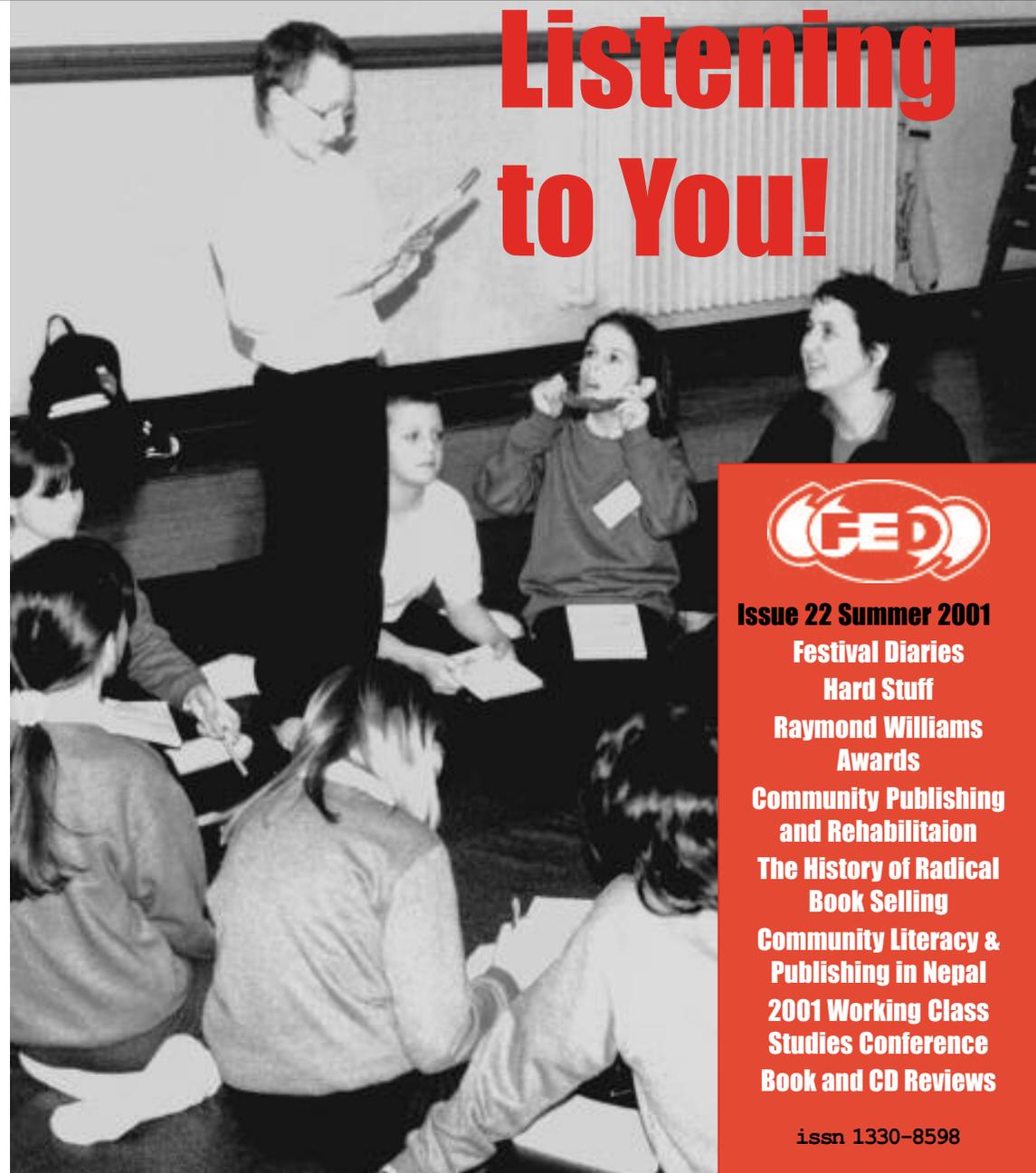


Federation Magazine

The magazine of The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers £1.00

Listening to You!



Issue 22 Summer 2001

Festival Diaries

Hard Stuff

**Raymond Williams
Awards**

**Community Publishing
and Rehabilitation**

**The History of Radical
Book Selling**

**Community Literacy &
Publishing in Nepal**

**2001 Working Class
Studies Conference**

Book and CD Reviews

issn 1330-8598

C o n t e n t s

The 2001 Raymond Williams Prize 3
 2001 Celebration 4
 What's in the Mix? 7
 New Executive Committee Elected 7
 A Huge Comrade Called Boris, or a short history of radical bookselling 8
 Community Literacy and Community Publishing in Nepal 11
 Community Publishing and Rehabilitation 12
 Writers Placements 16
 Here Today and Here Tomorrow Too 17
 2001 Working Class Studies Conference 18
 Hard Stuff 19
 Book and CD Reviews 10 and 20
 Fed News! 24

The Federation of Worker Writers & Community Publishers

The FWWCP was formed in 1976, and now has a Membership of nearly sixty independently organised writers' workshops, community publishers and organisations in Britain, and around the World. It is an umbrella organisation for those who wish to share their skills and work with their communities.

The FWWCP aims to further working class writing and community publishing, and the Membership share a belief that writing and publishing should be made accessible to all.

The FWWCP publish this magazine and a Broadsheet of writing; we run an annual Festival of Writing; organise training; develop networks; encourage people to express themselves; offer advice, and much more!

To become a Member of the FWWCP contact the address below. Membership is for groups only. Individuals can take a valuable role by becoming a Friend of the Fed, and get involved in all our activities. We would like to hear from you. By post:

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 Stoke-on-Trent ST6 6BD
 By e-mail: fwwcp@cwcom.net

This magazine, previous issues and a wealth of useful information is available on our Website: www.fwwcp.mcmail.com

E d i t o r a l

My First Fed Fest

Light years ago, when all my poetry was writ in pencil
 When I never dared to say I write
 I went to a Fed weekend, another dimension
 Given understanding support and permission.

Now I can say, I'm a writer and not be afraid.
 It is O.K to be a working class writer,
 I share links and heritages with peoples
 All over the labouring globe.

They write about their human condition
 How it was for them, and is for their children
 I am a federation person allied to thousands
 Worker Writers and community publishers united
 Can, and they do, make the difference.

Jan Holliday
 Pecket Well College

The 2001 Raymond Williams Prize

The 2001 Raymond Williams Prize for Community Publishing took place at the Art Workers Guild in London on July 10th. First prize went to *Keeping the Faith - The Polish Community in Britain*, published by Bradford Heritage Recording Unit and edited by Tim Smith and Michelle Winslow. A book which drew on personal stories from recorded interviews and archive and contemporary photographs. The runner up prize went to *The Redbeck Anthology of British South Asian Poetry*, edited by Debjani Chatterjee and published by The redbeck Press in Bradford.

Special mention was given to Fed members Commonword for their collection of poetry in Braille and text A Crocus Selection.

For details of the 2002 Award contact the Literature department at the Arts Council of England on 0207 333 0100.



2001 Raymond Williams Prize Winner Tim Smith (sitting) with judging panel (standing l-r) Stuart Hood, Bernadine Evaristo and Steve Daarden

2001 Festival

Pages from the 2001 Celebration Diary

This year the Festival of Writing saw 17 workshops, talks and discussions, 2 bookstall sessions with 15 or more publishers, the Annual General Meeting, a retrospective presentation of twenty five years of the Federation, the Celebratory Reading, Nandralone Highjumper (aka Alvin Culzac) live, party till 4.30 Sunday morning, the whole attended by around 100 people. What was it like? We asked everyone attending to keep a diary. Photographs are by participants who were given 'throw away' cameras to record the weekend.

Friday April 20th

Arrived at 4.30. Met one or two old friends! (and many new ones). Comfortable and exhilarating at the same time - I enjoyed the "Nostalgia" Evening, that was a good relaxing time ready for a busy Saturday.

Audrey Bradley, Heeley Writers



The welcome for new attendees was quite an eye opener, as I had no idea how diverse the FWWCP was.

Peggy Sands, Shorelink

How nice to be greeted with my dinner, despite being held up and arriving late. Everyone talking about the history of the event - wish I'd made it in time. Good to see old friends.

Rebecca O' Rourke

I travelled from Yorkshire, enjoying the sun/Got the Fed, then started the fun Jan Holliday, Pecket Well

Met members from the Prescott Writers Group, Alvin Culzac (at the bar); Nick Pollard and discussed tomorrow's workshops with Paul King.. Initial registration was well

organised and a tribute to those concerned! My personal thanks to Timothy Diggles for his assistance/information!!

James Clinch, Towpath

On the celebration of 25 years of the Fed

Friday evening.. People at the front to be told to stand up, face audience and SHOUT.

Eric Davidson, Dumfries and Galloway Survivors



As a relative newcomer to the Fed it was interesting to hear the beginning of the story.

Maria Garner, Grimsby Writers

Alvin Culzac - presence and performance very powerful.

Frances Grant, Dumfries and Galloway Survivors

Saturday April 21st

Saturday was a day of learning, meeting people and making new friends. It is satisfying to see people from

different backgrounds get together, some not met before, yet all speak the same language through the words.



Fitz Lewis, Gatehouse/Commonword

Awoke at 4am but didn't have a good sleep, went for breakfast, then to Pat Smart's workshop. After evening meal went to the performance and listened to some good readings. Retired to bed at 11pm and woke up every hour.

Doreen Ravenscroft, Gatehouse

Roger Mills' 'Crime Film' workshop

would have been fantastic if the video machines had been working

Roger Mills, Eastside

The bookstalls gave me the opportunity to see what others have produced and also what we can learn from each other.

Gloria Williams, ECOHP



2001 Festival

I attended the workshop given by Eric Davidson, 'Illustration with Puppets'. It was a pity only 4 people attended, but it was good. He showed us how he made the puppets and we had to draw one upside down, which was fun. Then I went to the AGM where we elected a new chairperson and committee. In the evening we had the Celebratory Reading with such a variety of poems. We started at 8pm and finished at 11pm. A good time was had by all I think.

Shirley-Patricia Cowan, Shorelink Bought some books from the bookstalls. Everyone is very chatty and friendly. Went out to Botanical Gardens - not much there.

Found Oadby Swimming Pool. Tristram enjoyed the splash session.. Saturday night was a brilliant insight into the sort of work people at the Fed do and it gave me encouragement and confidence in my own work. More workshops perhaps for Saturday would be good.

Cheryl Winspear, Shorelink Watched the full Saturday performance, which was excellent

Betty Legg, Pecket Well



I'm late, I'm late! Jumping up and down like a demented rabbit, bombing down the A1 trying to figure out when I'll arrive

and juggle the map. Missing lunch at this rate. Arriving 2.30 and straight away relaxed. Meeting old familiar faces (not that people are old!) Found a workshop a) that has space and b) sounds great, really glad I went - wished I'd been more organised to come on Friday. Next year definitely more organised!

Alison Smith

The Saturday evening performance was very good - the highlight of the weekend. Maybe there could be more performance spaces/slots during the weekend, e.g. a lunchtime reading or extended solisist.

Stuart Jones, Academii All events good especially the evening performance. The only thing I missed was during the



intermission some nice music could be played. Who wants to dance? Not everyone wants to drink.

Vie Lawrence, ECOHP

Spent a great post reading party session with no end of people - Robbie, Dave Chambers et al till 4.00. Then I think a party of them carried on in the room next to mine.

Nick Pollard, Heeley Writers

Sunday April 22nd

Editing with lady from Heeley Writers. Everybody a bit subdued, which was a pity - some interesting points made and I enjoyed the opportunity to sit and work on a piece of writing.

Nan McCubbin, Shorelink

Well on Sunday sometimes it can be a bit upsetting because all the people that you've made friends with, you've got to say goodbye.

Billy Cryer, Pecket Well

The computer workshop was really good, but rather too much info for Sunday morning

Rebecca O' Rourke

Quick breakfast. Dance Foundation Workshop. I found this experience very liberating. It gave me a good opportunity as a first timer to relax with strangers and just be myself. This I feel would have been a good first workshop.

Cheryl Winspear, Shorelink

Writing for the Media - excellent. Alan gave some good tips

Louise Glasscoe, Commonword

What you liked

I've really enjoyed the weekend on many different levels. I've found friendship, inspiration and artistic expression. Most of all I'm amazed at the talent and commitment of all members. I met old friends, new friends. I remembered those whose spirit lives on in our memories.

Maria Garner

Meeting friends whom I met from the year before and exchanging ideas. Also meeting new people.

Gloria Williams, ECOHP

Friendly, inclusive atmosphere.. the weekend has put me back in touch with the Fed and give me some useful contacts.

Stuart Jones, Academii

2001 Festival



I was reminded of the tolerance, inclusiveness and downright goodness that characterises the Fed.

Rebecca O'Rourke

I met Dave from Newham Writers. Nice cheerful person

Amer Salam, Gatehouse

I feel like Topsy - I've groved!

Audrey Bradley, Heeley Writers

I didn't really know what the Fed was about before - do now and am impressed

S Marshall, Survivors Poetry Scotland

What you didn't like

The only problem I found was keeping my eight-year-old son amused. It was a shame no other children were around and my son Tristan who is eight complained that there were NO workshops for children.

Cheryl Winspear, Shorelink

Having to go home

Peter Grant, Dumfries and Galloway Survivors



worked. AND celebratory readings whereby the phrase "follow that" (after each performer) and everyone DID. Yet another SOIR DE SUPERBO!-YA-BEAUTIES...

So... even tho' Railtrack did all in its power to stop us coming and going and laid on a park in Stafford for Irene Leeke to get lost in.. 25th and my 4th, and 26th and 5th next year. (By the way, I'm bringing more DGSPeers next year... OK? You too, bring more) and without a doubt FWWCP is best FED organisation I've ever been allowed into before they realised that lunatics can actually do quite a good job taking over your asylum - AND! (with thanks to a RIGHTER-HEELEY who's not WRTE-IN-THE-HEAD for giving me permission to use one of his bigger words) - apologies for no Social Interaction in our bedroom this year between midnight and 0600 but the security did tell us that "SLEEP" ticked in a box was actually an option when it is a backward PEELS and that was we were doing with the ring tops - I rest my case, your honour.

So - what did you do...? RITE AND TELL FEDMAG or BROADSHEET... or... ach, tell me anyway or write to DGSP people and we as a group will respond (once we've all passed our 11plus).

AND - FINALE-MEANT - I did perchance observe here and there once or twice (well all the time actually) lots of smiles, lots of "how good to see you again eh'm...", lots of lots. - AND! - Thanks, LOTS. MINE.

EDDAVIDSON, DGSP, LWG, VC (& scar)
¹ *Apparently Dumfries and Galloway members (ed)*



Après le déluge!

AND! Thou voteth moi - CHAIR de VICE ("ish") - And I am honoured. Very. And Chuffed, verier. The new DGSP-ers¹ and Lockerbie Riter Groupee all had AE ball... Thank yous ones and all.

ET! Memoires de Leicester? Alvin Culzac sticking his hand up the rear end of a puppet whilst trying to - the rest of us weren't sure. Probably a "conspiracy". Tony Guest actually buying a round of drinks (and not crying over beer he didn't spill). Pat Smart NOT kicking someone else this year, thinking it was me. An AGM that actually



New Executive Committee Elected

The 2001 FWWCP AGM at Leicester elected the following people for the Executive Committee:

Richard McKeever - Working Press - Chair

Eric Davidson - Dumfries and Galloway Survivors Poetry - Vice Chair

Louise Glasscoe - Commonword - Secretary

Arthur Thickett - QueenSpark Books - Treasurer

Nick Pollard - Heeley Writers - Magazine Editor

Alvin Culzac - Shorelink Writers

Maria Garner - Grimsby Writers

Roy Holland - Survivors Poetry

Vive Lawrence - Ethnic Communities Oral History Project

Fitz Lewis - Gatehouse Books

Pat Smart - Prescott Writers

Siobhan Harkin, Andrea Chell and Tony Guest stood down, and were thanked for their contribution over the past year (s).

What's in the Mix?

As you study the faces and listen to the voices of those around you in your writing group, have you ever wondered what other hidden talents lie there? Have you really explored the creative potential of your group members?

At the recent Fed executive meeting in Brighton, preliminaries to the weekend of planning included the following exercises: A Film, A Book, and A Song, and a skills survey. There were quite a few surprises.

For the first of these everyone present had to name a film, book, and song that they liked, and say what it was they liked about them. This began a discussion which ranged from the Lord of the Rings to The Colour Purple, and revealed a couple of Czech film fans. But the skills survey was to prove a greater revelation.

We teamed up into pairs. Rather than shouting about your own talents, your partner had to interview you, talking about interests. They would then tell the rest of the group once all the interviews (each person having about 15 minutes) were finished.

The executive, we found, contains several musicians. Roy Holland is a multi-instrumentalist with an interest in classical, Thai and gamelan music. Alvin Culzac is on an opera course. Maria Garner composes her own songs. I'll just stand at the back and mime.

There were two multi-linguists - Roy again with reading knowledge of 11 languages, Louise with French, Russian, and Spanish. Maria's mum was Greek, and she has travelled extensively there.

The survey also produced an art historian and archivist (Roy), an accountant (Arthur Thickett), two ex-teachers of English (Arthur and me), an artist (Eric), a couple of professional drivers (Fitz Lewis, and Alvin, with references from Wet, Wet, Wet), an

administrator, librarian and secretary (Louise Glasscoe), occupational therapist and ex-radio journalist (me), three researchers (Richard McKeever, Roy, and me) and someone with marketing skills (Richard).

The areas relating more directly to the world of worker writing and community publishing were thoroughly covered. Pat, Richard, Roy and myself had desk top publishing skills, but Maria proves to be an information technology consultant. Alvin is a performer with skills in musical production. There are three people with fund raising skills (Richard, Pat, and Roy). Pat, Richard, Maria, Eric and myself continue with skills around running workshops, community education. Fitz revealed his interests in work with the elderly and enabling people - being an enabler was something shared by most of the others around the table with different degrees of emphasis.

However, with such an array of abilities there cannot be enough opportunities for us to exercise them all. It's a good job that Alvin is there to make the necessary cuts. He has a qualification in using a chain saw!

You might ask how the Fed can benefit from all this. One of Maria's interests is in combining writing with other art forms. Many of us, at some point, produce writing which is based in our everyday experience, the roles we perform, the other interests, or jobs we have. But ask yourself whether you can bring the writing and publishing into your job or other interests. What new networks of people may be able to benefit from the kind of activities we do as writers? Perhaps this is an exercise which can give new direction to your own group. Where can you take yourselves and your writing next? How far will you get without a driver?

A Huge Comrade Called Boris, or a short history of radical bookselling

The essay below formed part of a talk given by Ross Bradshaw at the 2001 FWWCP Festival/AGM in Leicester. Ross worked at Mushroom Bookshop from 1978-1995, since then - in his spare time - he runs the small press Five Leaves Publications.

Some years ago, MPs were asked to talk about their favourite book. Several of what would now be called Old Labour MPs said their favourite was *The Ragged Trousers Philanthropists* by Robert Tressell. The book is certainly a classic of working class writing. Towards the end of the book a group of socialists come by cycle and by van to the town of Mugsborough (in reality, Hastings) to build a local branch. This group is initially run out of town, but return throughout the summer to hold open air meetings where "several of the strangers had been going about amongst the crowd giving away leaflets, which many of the people gloomily refused to accept, and selling penny pamphlets, of which they managed to dispose of about three dozen."

These "Clarion" socialists were more welcomed elsewhere, which is just as well as this was the main way of selling socialist literature. There were bookshops, like The Advanced Bookstore in Liverpool which in 1906 advertised "socialistic, labour, trade union and freethought" books, but primarily sales were from hand to hand. The socialists believed in bringing books to a mass market. It is common knowledge that Allen Lane invented the popular paperback book in 1935. This common knowledge is wrong. Ernest Benn, a commercial publisher, started bringing out paperbacks in the 1920s. But the socialists were there even before him. I have in front of me Robert Blatchford's *Britain for the British* (which meant something different to the way the phrase might be used now). *Britain for the British* was published in 1902. Advertised inside the book include one for *The Clarion*, published weekly by Blatchford, from a shoemaker, a piano manufacturer and for "Rowntree's select Cocoa", popularly known as the "half-teaspoonful Cocoa" as that amount is "ample for a breakfast cup of strong, delicious, nourishing cocoa". Also advertised were paperbacks by Tolstoy.

Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century there were a handful of radical bookshops, of various political views. It was, however, the Communist Party (CP) which was the first to set up socialist shops in a big way. Indeed, it was the CP which started the idea of the chain bookstore, with their Modern Books, People's Bookshops,

Central Books, Thames Bookshops, Collets and the Workers Bookshops. These shops spread way beyond the big cities to small industrial towns like Kirkcaldy and to market towns like King's Lynn and Gloucester. The CP shops mirrored the life of the Party, peaking in the 1940s, though one shop - Clyde Books struggled on from 1943 until 1993. These shops sold a lot of material. In 1942 the CP in *How to Sell Literature* said that a mass pamphlet should have a national sale of 150,000. Key Books, in Birmingham, in 1946 said that in the previous five years they'd distributed over two million pamphlets and periodicals, with a sale of over £50,000 - then a huge sum of money. The Party were also responsible for the British Mobile Libraries Ltd., which took the view that books should circulate, like newspapers, in their millions and that the mobile van calling weekly to houses, would mean that "The borrowing of books...would give (the borrower) experience and guide them to the authors worthwhile to them."

The Pursuit of Love

Looking back now, these worthwhile authors were rather limited. Martin Lawrence, who was to form Lawrence and Wishart, published "sometime every month" a magazine called *The Eye*. Though the layout of the magazine was dramatic, that a sample issue to hand leads with a slavishness towards the big three of Marx, Engels, Lenin (and follows with an article by Karl Radek, "We Soviet Writers") is disappointing. Nancy Mitford, in *The Pursuit of Love*, mocks this neatly saying: "Twice a week Linda worked in a Red bookshop. It was run by a huge perfectly silent comrade called Boris... The books and tracts which mouldered there month after month, getting damper and damper until at last they had to be thrown away, were hurried into the background and their place taken by Linda's own few but well loved favourites. Thus for *Whither British Airways* was substituted *Round the world in 40 days*, *Karl Marx*, *the Formative Years* was replaced by *The Making of a Marchioness*... while *A challenge to the Coal Owners* made way for *King Solomon's Mines*." It seems absurd now to imagine that one shop - I think it was in Cambridge - boasted that it had sold 300 Stalin calendars. And yet this was the Party which sustained a lifetime of struggle against the factory owners,

whose young men (and some young women) ran to Spain to fight an unequal war against fascism, and whose cadre formed the backbone of tenants' associations, trade unions and CND.

Come the late 60s and early 70s the CP shops were in serious decline. Along came a new generation of radicals, setting up their own shops reflecting the politics of their generation. These politics were avant-garde, libertarian, utopian and while it might be hard to imagine shops like Beautiful Stranger surviving long in Rochdale, many of the shops did sustain - often against fierce physical pressure from the far right, and, from time to time, police raids. One should not underestimate the hostility from the far right. This reached its peak when one man stole a car, put the woman driver in the boot, drove it into the entrance to the Socialist Workers Party bookshop in Birmingham - and set the car on fire. Threatening phone calls were a daily occurrence, physical attacks not uncommon.

Many of the shops were run collectively and were influenced by new political movements like feminism and black liberation, and were influenced by personal growth movements. Notice boards were as likely to advertise a circle-dance group as a demonstration against the National Front.

Image

What did these shops sell? There were some which saw Henry Miller and his ilk as radical, or perhaps drew their inspiration from the City Lights bookshop in San Francisco but the influence of feminism by and large kept the boys in check. In 1982 The Other Branch in Leamington brought out a pamphlet on their first ten years. *Our Story*, describing the early days, said: "Gradually the hand knitted dolls got mixed up with Marx and Lenin, the waste paper in the cellar began to rot, the kids stole our takings, the odour of joss invaded the brown rice, while the jumble got jumblier every day. For several weeks the Communist Manifesto vied for pride of place in a tatty display rack, with handicrafts, places changed daily according to the ideology of the volunteer on the rota. Later additions to this confusion were live (and, on a hot summers' day, dead) newts for sale, and all the late 60s paraphernalia of king size cigarette papers, pipes, ginseng. The 'image' of the shop was completed by two dark, never cleaned windows full of legalise Cannabis stickers." Gradually the shops cleaned up their acts and became real bookshops. The top ten best-sellers over the first ten years of The Other Branch were: *The Herb Book*; *The Golden Notebook* (fiction by Doris Lessing); *The Bean Book* (vegetarian cooking); *The Massage Book*; *Protest and Survive* (anti-nuclear); *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*

(children's book by Eric Carle); *Woman on the Edge of Time* (fiction by Marge Piercy); *The Prophet* (by Kahil Gibran); *Guide to Growing Marijuana*; *Guide to British Psylocybin Mushrooms*. It is easy to be mocking about those idealist days but this - fairly representative - example of one bookshops sales indicates how they prefigured the interest in healthy living and "green" concerns, how major writers were spotted and promoted and how influential the shops were within the biggest protest movement since the 30s - the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Significantly, most of these books are still in print two decades later and are still widely read by more mainstream readers.

FRB to FAB

The Federation of Radical Booksellers (a significant change was made from its earlier name, The Federation of Alternative Booksellers) was confident enough to publish a book called *Starting a Bookshop: a handbook on radical and community publishing*. It never occurred to any of the editors to include a chapter on how to close down a bookshop. The cover - featuring the logos of many shops - is now an indicator of closures. York Community Bookshop; Freewheel (Norwich); First of May (Edinburgh); Oakleaf (Milton Keynes); Wedge (Coventry) and most of the others are long gone. Of those on the cover only three survive - News from Nowhere (Liverpool), Housmans (London) and Bookmarks (London) - which make up about a quarter of the remaining radical shops. What went wrong? Well, politics change. Some, like SisterWrite did not survive the waning of feminism. Roads change - Freewheel in Norwich closed when the traffic flow left them quite isolated. When Mushroom Bookshop opened in Nottingham in 1972 it was one of five radical bookshops in the City. When it closed in 1999 there was little chance of another opening. The biggest changes were in the competition and in town centre rents. At a crucial time for radical bookselling Waterstone's started stocking many core lines - authors who had cut their teeth in radical bookshops (Maya Angelou a major case in point) were now everywhere. The space Mushroom occupied could not now be afforded by a radical bookshop. As every City centre has been taken over by national chains independent shops of all descriptions have simply been priced out of the market. In 1991 I wrote an article in *Tribune* expressing concern that the number of radical bookshops had fallen to 114, never thinking that ten years later there would be less radical bookshops than any time in a hundred years. It is not simply that so many have closed, but few have started. Wordpower in Edinburgh and Libertas

Women's Bookshop in York are honourable exceptions. The young idealists who were once happy to work for little in radical bookshops are now working (but still for little) in Waterstone's and the anti-union Borders.

Bookmarks

This is not inevitable. Bookmarks moved to a site near the British Museum and does very well. The shop is well-stocked and hosts, on average, three events a week - promoting new books, hosting discussions. I am convinced that the day of radical bookshops will return - but I suspect this will depend on private inheritances rather than collective initiative to set up well-stocked bookshops able to pay high rents and to win customers back from the chains. The role of the internet and the changing patterns of general publishing and bookselling, which are now making openings for greater independence, will be covered in a later article.

Research

In 1976, one of the early Federation of Worker Writers authors, taxi driver Ron Barnes, writing in *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars* remarked that "It isn't easy to express one's feelings, when someone tells me they have seen my book in a shop miles from Hackney." Twenty-five years on the Ron Barnes of this time will not have those feelings unless he is published by HarperCollins! The decline of the radical booktrade has been a serious blow to all of us who believe in community publishing and in empowering our people. The openings, mentioned above, are sorely needed.

Together with Dave Cope, of Central Books (once a CP distributor, now the major distributor of small and independent presses) we are researching a history of radical bookselling. I would appreciate any leads people might have on their local bookshops, and references to radical bookshops in fiction and non-fiction. Please email me with information on fiveleaf01@surfaid.org.

Ross Bradshaw

- 1 Still in print, courtesy of Rupert Murdoch. The socialist press Lawrence and Wishart currently don't have the money to reprint their edition.
- 2 "Everything you do: every obstacle you meet and overcome: every pleasure you enjoy: every moment of indignation you feel - all these are not what you would have experienced had these men not lived to stamp themselves forever on the history of the human race." *The Eye*, Number 1, September 1935.

R e v i e w

Our Village

Memories Of The Durham Mining Communities
Edited by Keith Armstrong - £9.99, published by The people's History ISBN 1-902527-32-1

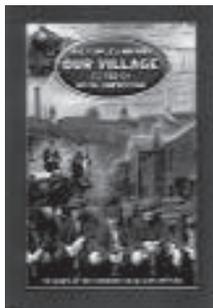
This is a rare collection of voices that has recorded events that was actually a way of life. They are the voices of grandfathers who have survived terrible conditions and disasters deep under ground and live to tell their stories. Others were the husbands, fathers and sons, three generation and conditions remained the same for the mineworkers of Durham and other coalfields. We cannot forget the accounts of the wives and daughters who coped at home on meagre budgets while the men folks toiled in the blackness of the earth's belly. How did these people cope, mentally and physically?

Anyone with an interest in working class England from eighteenth to the twentieth century is advised to have a go at this book; it is absolutely a riveting book. It is amazing to see the comparison in today's Britain with massive changes throughout industry, yet the working class remain at the bottom of the pile.

These extraordinary stories were told with a tinge of sadness and sometimes with humour in the form of stories and poetry. They wrote of family values, of how communities stuck together from day to day for the betterment of each other. Everyone played their part dutifully.

During the past forty years or so the coalfields have all disappeared except for a simple few, so the text documented in here may seem foreign to today's working class, but people who experienced it recorded it for our benefit. The book grabs the reader and brings the past straight to the senses. I read it as if I was thirsty and needed more because there is a lot more to be told. A big hand for People's Press and Northern Voices!

Fitz Lewis
Gatehouse Books



More book and CD Reviews on pages 20 to 24

Community Literacy and Community Publishing in Nepal

Jane Mace writes of a working visit to Nepal where adult literacy rates are (roughly): 55% of the male population is literate; just 25% of the female. Nepallise is the main language. There are a large number of others, not all of them written.

In March this year I spent eight days in Nepal. Not back-packing up the mountains or strolling round temples (though I did a little of that in the last couple of days). I was there to meet with community workers, teachers and journalists in order to make useful connections between the literacy and community publishing that I knew about in the UK and the programme of 'community literacy' which they were developing there.

(A background note. My first experience of community publishing was making classroom magazines with adult literacy students. Later (in 1974) came 'Write First Time', a 10-year project in editing and publishing writing by and with adult literacy students. It was during that time that I was a member of the FWWCP. It's been a while since I've attended one of the Federation's famed annual weekends. But I keep reading the magazine and every now and then I check out the website.)

Back to Nepal. Together with some thirty people in a village one hour's flight East from Kathmandu I ran a two-day workshop on 'writing in the community'. The people there were already doing community publishing - in the form of local magazines, wall newspapers and women's newsletters. I was there to help them think how the process of producing these publications could include those who could not read or write in the village; how these 'non-literates' could become active participants in choosing what might get put into the publications; and how - most important of all - they could become readers - and, eventually, writers - of their own texts.

The workshop went well. There was role play. There were brainstorming. People spoke of being excited by the event. One said:

We used to interview people and never used to read back what we wrote.

I learned that I should read it back to the author so that they could correct it.

Another said:

We have to listen carefully to the author and then write what they say.*

And a third:



The foreign visitor is honoured to stamp and 'launch' the 5th issue of 'Village Talk' in Bhadetar, Dhankuta, Nepal.

Helping them to read just one sentence of their own is making a change.

Two days later, at a seminar I gave in Kathmandu to another group of people about these ideas, I told them about the FWWCP. I wanted to make a connection. For the people I worked with were, as I have said, already doing community publishing. The thing I was helping them to do more of was community literacy.

So, just as I gave them that Friday in March the FWWCP website, I now give you, dear readers, the website address of a community literacy publishing programme in Nepal: www.eddev.org/hosted/clpn

I hope you enjoy meeting them, as I did.

Jane Mace

*I used the word 'author' in the sense of 'the source of the text' - even if the person themselves may not have written it, in a technical sense. I wrote more about this in my book *Talking about literacy: principles and practice of adult literacy education* which Routledge published in 1992.

Jane works part-time at South Bank University and is currently writing another book, to be published next year under the title: 'The give and take of writing: scribes, literacy and everyday life'.

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Community Publishing and Rehabilitation: Not just telling stories but working for changes

Nick Pollard writes about a major piece of research he has undertaken

Over the last year, I've been researching the rehabilitation potential of community publishing with members of Fed groups. I work as an occupational therapist (OT) with people who have long term mental health problems, and was interested in what therapists can draw from the Fed's experience of making writing and publishing "accessible to all".

The key factor in Federation membership is a commitment to community publishing and working class writing. Contact with health services occurs because of specific illnesses, not an interest, or a commitment.

Because I work in the community I was interested in finding out ways for people to make better connections to 'ordinary life'. OTs are concerned with getting people to do the things they used to do, whether for work, pleasure, or domestic jobs, before they became ill, on the principle that activity is good for health, but it is difficult to transfer to the community what has been learned in a health setting.

Productivity and "useful unemployment"

The mental health OT wants to enable a 'client' to resume "productive activity" after a period of illness. This term "productive" has difficult political resonances, suggesting the 'client' is a 'functionary': who benefits from the productivity and the value created. In OT the 'productivity' is useful to the mental health service user, not necessarily 'working' in the traditional sense of being productive.

Many people find their work stressful to the point that it provokes mental illness. At the same time people with mental health problems often want to return to work. Perhaps there is a problem about the meaning of work as productive labour, and Ivan Illich (1978) suggests 'useful unemployment' to define voluntary work which is valuable to others, making people's lives better without making profit.

Community publishing appears to be one of these activities. A few people have paid jobs in community publishing, but the Fed's strength is in the much greater numbers who work voluntarily. Around 23 million people in the UK do some form of voluntary work, many of them in the arts.

Writing is one of the most popular activities because it can be done without much equipment. You don't even need a pen and paper! People can tell stories, or make poems

in their heads for recital later.

Telling stories

In some earlier research I found that therapeutic writing was widely used in psychiatric hospitals. A number of people I interviewed didn't really know why they were using writing except that it was a creative outlet. These therapeutic group leaders lacked a theoretical basis for their work.

It is difficult to validate the therapeutic benefits of writing objectively. What people write about reflects their individual view of the world and their experience. Much of the material already produced about creative writing in mental health and related issues like bereavement has often been intermingled with psychoanalytic theory and spiritual ideas which are difficult to evidence, not that this makes writing less valuable an activity.

The kind of writing produced by us as worker writers is based in the practical activity of explaining what our lives are like. We aim not just to be creative and explore our feelings, but to educate and document as well. This writing, based in the community, is not something which is done sessionally, under the guidance of a therapist, but fitted in around our lives.

So should writing become therapy?

A lot of people might say writing is a personal therapy for them but they don't need another mediator to interpret for them what they've written. While I'm very interested in psychoanalytic ideas it is not always helpful to bring them into therapy, and a lot of therapists who use writing offer more of a sharing than an interpretative workshop. What many people need is something they can practically use here and now.

In health settings, the use of narrative techniques to explore personal feelings is being widely explored - not just in psychiatric areas but with long term physical illnesses, experiences of care, and experiences of carers. It's a growing field, which began with work on dementia and learning disability. Narratives are used by health service users to tell their story, that of the person, not the diagnosis, to those people involved in their care. People being enabled to tell the story of their own lives can need someone to tell them to "write it down for you own good" to do it.

So how does this link with the FWWCP and community publishing?

Links between therapists and community publishers are not extensive. However, FWWCP member groups, such as Eastside, QueenSpark, Gatehouse, Yorkshire Arts Circus, CREAMI, and other community arts groups outside the Fed like Shape and Age Exchange have been working with health service users for some years. Often this activity has been based around literacy and basic education.

We have also seen a recent growth in community publishing from survivors' groups, i.e. from service users or ex-users themselves. There has been little documented recognition of the value of community publication from the therapeutic community.

OTs are exhorted to appreciate "the life an individual has lived and might live in the future". Health services are about understanding the life of the client toward discharge into the community, or to another aspect of the health system. OT shares with many other mainly other health professions a tendency towards and 'oral culture', in which clinical experience is given to others through the sharing of stories, and anecdotes..

Many health service users' histories are presented as case studies between professionals, as we share with each other the story of our 'clients'' rehabilitation. While service users may contribute to these, because they attend their care reviews, they're different to what might emerge from the client's own telling.

Given this narrative thread in the professional arena, we may question why service users do not appear to be much involved in this process, and that the narratives produced by clients are not seen as extending from individual work in a therapy session to publications which reach beyond the hospital newsletters sometimes produced by services.

One argument against wider publication is the issue of confidentiality, but this is largely a red herring. It's up to the individual what they do with the story they've written. Someone may easily take the piece produced in a therapy group and decide they are going to publish it elsewhere. Case study examples are often, with permission, used in journals and text books to illustrate the course of treatments.

Community publications are about people telling their own story and being recognised by others. Health service users have many other roles (things that individuals do) that they play in the community, and these are part of the story too. The idea of the person having lots of roles is widely discussed in OT, but in community publishing you might be focusing on your local knowledge, past work or family roles

as well as or instead of talking about health concerns. It's you, not just your health.

Wilcock, an OT, appears to recognise this, "all people create themselves and shape the world they live in by what they do on a daily basis" (1999). This echoes the Survivor Poets' assertion that "the reduced situation of the survivor DOES NOT prevent us from being creative" (Smith and Burgieres 1996)."

Social participation

Community publication is social participation. There's a political dimension in encouraging people to form new relationships to reading and writing about the world and their own experience by telling about their own lives. If therapy aims to enable 'clients' to assert their identity, there remains a question as to how far health professionals can take this, once we have signified the 'p' word. Can therapists enable our 'clients' to be active in a political sense?

If so, what benefits might be obtained from involvement in community publishing, and what are the concerns which might be thrown up by suggesting that mental health clients do this kind of activity?

Focus groups

I contacted several community publishing groups and led focus group interviews with them to identify factors which might help therapists consider the benefits for mental health 'clients'.

Focus groups are intended to be time limited discussions with between 4-12 people around a particular issue. These are recorded on tape and compared with others to give overall ideas of what the people involved think.

One problem was that not everyone involved in 'community publication' shares the same understanding of the term. Some people were reluctant to participate because of this, or because their involvement in publishing was time limited and the focus group would detract from their aims. I ended up with a sample drawn from FWWCP groups. Two sessions were conducted with people attending Fed events, and two with members at their group meetings.

37 people participated, 19 women and 18 men. No group was selected on the basis of mental health issues. I did not ask for any categorising information, which I thought would conflict with Fed principles. Instead, people offered their own definitions of themselves in terms of ethnicity, disability, or mental health problems. We discussed these issues frankly, itself evidence of the kind of personal growth which appears to emerge through involvement in publishing and writing activities.

I also kept a reflective diary in which I wrote

up issues which occurred to me through the project, for example, ideas that I needed to draw out more in other focus groups, and any changing perceptions.

Discussions with the participants covered the following issues:

Personal Growth through Expression

Community publishing was described as "people reaching out to others using their own personal material". Participants described many gains: increased self confidence, performance skills, ability to accept criticism, increased social skills and awareness of multicultural issues, vocational development, negotiation skills, skill sharing connected to all aspects of print and performance. Some of these skills reach beyond community publishing - negotiation for funding, design skills, organisation skills, computer skills, applied numeracy and literacy skills, promotion and marketing, business communication.

Social Participation and Inclusion

Many people described social exclusion, and felt because of this, as one of them said, they had "a responsibility to get sommat down on paper". In effect they saw themselves as producing a manifesto for citizenship through telling their stories.

Most people described community publication as a co-operative enterprise with people developing their own resources in their leisure time, so requiring the sharing of skills and strengths to help everyone to the benefits of publication.

Education and self-actualisation

'Self-actualisation' means the ability to define and represent oneself in the world at large, and to be able to act according to your own interests. This is an aim from OT in rehabilitation. People described how educational objectives such as increasing literacy or developing awareness of community history are carried through into the production of publications as well as in their content. They are concerned not only with what should be published but how it should be presented. Making books teaches people about book production and marketing. The books themselves, whether Caribbean cookbooks, Asian poetry or anthologies of mental health experiences, are about developing local social and cultural awareness. This could be described as actually marketing your local culture and society - self actualisation writ very literally and very large.

While this may appear to be a potential stressor for people vulnerable to mental illnesses, the strong impression given was of people making an interesting experiment. Learning in community

publishing is more about free exploration than formal teaching, and more focused to participants' needs. This was very evident in the way people were able to discuss and ask about individual differences. People were there to hear each other and help each other to be heard, and were not afraid to be curious.

Group Structures

Group structures varied widely, according to the purpose of the group. Publishing groups are more formal as befits a businesslike structure which has to deal with funders. Many of them operate as a charitable trust, placing formal requirements upon them. Groups more concerned with writing tend to be less formal.

Although group structures were generally described as open, the openness produced occasional difficulties, particularly for the writing groups. Sometimes members have been harassed, or have experienced abuse. Participants described how the writing group's overriding interest could be used to point out to members whose behaviour was intentionally offensive that they needed to change or leave.

My own experience is that this is difficult for group members to come to terms with, and that because it is not a regular occurrence groups do not have the experience, or sometimes the resolve, to deal with these issues. Group members sometimes prefer to leave when faced with others' anti-social behaviour.

Publishing Aims

Can anything useful be derived from such a diverse set of practices?

Community publications are produced in all forms. Histories, novels, plays, anthologies and collections of poetry, recordings, song books, cartoons, music, and cassettes, CD, the internet and performance are being used as well as the most popular format, print. With such variety there seems to be a lot of experimentation, but many people suggested that they were unaware of the experiences of other community publishing groups.

If community publishing is presenting the social experiences of people who are already marginalized this might be a problem. Some publishing groups have a clearly established formula and market, others need to find a balance between their need to develop new publishing arenas and good marketing. People talked about sharing learning from their success and mistakes in their own groups, but said they needed to find out about other publishers' experiences.

Vocational and voluntary roles

Community publishing employment is mainly part time and temporary, for example earning a little

money through performances or parts of the production process or events co-ordination. Publishers find it difficult to obtain money for running costs and are funded on a project by project basis.

Continuity of experience is a problem, and some groups struggle from one year or project to the next. Most rely on volunteers, who get plenty of opportunities for obtaining useful vocational skills, but the intermittent nature of project-based funding makes it difficult to quantify this and use it to promote the process of community publishing or the projects it develops.

Although without shared information some groups appear to be 'reinventing the wheel', this gears their projects to local needs. Community publishing activity is about local individuals providing a service which enhances local experience, knowledge and communication through creativity. Community publishing can draw upon and use the experience of people on the periphery of the community. Publishers and writing groups often have structures which are loose enough to be accessible. Local people are thus enabled to bring themselves into focus. But often valuable time, creative potential and resources are spent working out what might have been helped on with learning from others.

Sharing

Despite this volunteers' 'working opportunities' don't appear to produce the same stresses as working environments, perhaps because much more than work is offered. All the focus groups emphasised sharing and shared experiences. Reticent people were encouraged by others to speak. One group had moved on from publishing to participating in other kinds of political activity around gaining a public voice for their members. People appeared to value each other as individuals. Community publishing volunteers are, after all, using their leisure time, and fitting their participation around other needs.

Conclusion: What does all this mean for users of the mental health system, or people wanting to support them in taking up community publishing activity?

Evidently community publishing 'membership' comes from every area of the community. There are people participating in and benefiting from community publishing activities with all kinds of health concerns, disabilities, and mental health issues. Although there are groups who focus on particular experiences, such as mental health survivors, this membership is not necessarily contained in specific groups.

As far as this study has determined, the practice, at least in Fed groups, is that everyone participates

on their own terms. There are caveats, in that groups have had problems with behaviours such as harassment of individuals, and develop their own strategies for dealing with them. Sometimes people with mental health problems may have insufficient insight to avoid creating offence, while other group members have not had the experience of learning how to cope with or understand these problems in others. The main concern, however, was about people who insist on expressing oppressive views in group meetings.

Writing activity is creative, drawing upon personal experience, and anyone can potentially find themselves confronting material which is difficult to deal with. Groups need, therefore, to develop sensitive and responsible strategies to their members. Survivor Poets recommend having two convenors, and make a number of suggestions about safety which may be useful for all groups to consider.

Overall, then, community publishing is something therapists should encourage mental health clients to do, and offers many benefits of social participation which can only arise *beyond* a therapeutic environment. Chief amongst these is the opportunity to use their own voice, have it valued by others, and to work with others in producing and promoting their own creative work.

It's fun, and it does you good.

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The study was prepared in part towards an MSc in Occupational Therapy at Sheffield Hallamshire University under the supervision of Melanie Bryer, course leader.

I would like to thank everyone who took part in the focus groups, and Fed workers and members who helped facilitate the meetings.

Nick Pollard

Writers Placements

The Writers Placements scheme is now well underway and we have some of the initial results and reports.

The Executive Committee assigned the last sums available for Writers' Placements for 2001. They will go to Grimsby Writers for a series of writers surgeries with Mandy Sutter; Gallery Poets, Solihull for workshops leading towards a publication; Prescott Writers for performance and poetry writing workshops; Forest Artworks (Gloucestershire) for workshops in script-writing; Towpath Community Co-operative Press (Wigan) for a weekend of writing workshops for their members and people in the local community.

Placements have already taken place at Lockerbie Writers, Pecket Well College (West Yorkshire), and Heeley Writers (Sheffield), with great success. Grimsby Writers have also begun their sessions.

Maria Garner of Grimsby Writers reports on their progress:

All participants are doing some exciting and challenging work. Though all very different they each have one thing in common: the writer feels that having the support of a tutor has enabled them to progress faster and way beyond their own expectations. As Grimsby Writers' need more funding to produce short book runs of the new work created by this project I have asked participants to describe what they are doing and what benefits the sessions with Mandy Sutter have provided. The following is an e-mail I received from Jim White and I think it sums up the group's feelings very well.

My project for Mandy is a series of poems based on factory closures, closing the fish docks and generally the slow decline of industry in our area. So far I have written about seven poems, rhyming and not that I have presented to Mandy for critique. I have called the series Factories with individual titles for each poem. They are quite political. What have I received as support from Mandy?

- 1) Confidence to write the serious stuff I have avoided and to write it with commitment.
- 2) Commitment from Mandy to give me the best critique I have ever had.



Mandy Sutter (right) and Grimsby Writers member Sue Havercroft during the first one to one session

3) Confidence to write blank verse and poems without metre that work.

4) Basically the best damn course I've had.
Jim White

As you can see from Jim's comments it is a very worthwhile project. Again many thanks to the FED for your support.

Writers' Placements offer the opportunity for member groups to employ a writer to run workshops, give advice and surgeries, or set up projects with the group as they the group require.

The next set of 10 Placements will be available from January 2002, with up to £500 available per Placement.

We are pleased to announce that the Fed's Vice Chair, Eric Davidson, married Anne Daniel in Lockerbie on June 16th 2001, and we all wish them both every happiness.



Montage of images from the visit by Des Dillon to Lockerbie Writers and Dumfries and Galloway Survivors Poetry, as part of the Writers Placements scheme

Here Today and Here Tomorrow Too

Rebecca O'Rourke writes about a proposed Research Project based on working class and community publishing

What is planned?

With colleagues at the University of Leeds (where I have worked since 1992), I am putting together a research application to the Arts and Humanities Research Board. If we are successful, the research project will collect and record information about the hundreds of community-published collections and anthologies which have been produced since the resurgence of working-class writing and community publishing in the mid 1970s. The idea is to provide three resources. First, to develop a record of, and a guide to, the publications. Second, to gather together information about where actual copies of the publications are held, for example in archives or in public or private library collections. Third, to pull together other published lists and guides to these publications.

Why is it important?

These publications have, for the main part, been small-scale. They were pamphlets or small booklets done in runs of 100 or 500 and distributed locally, often without lodging copies in public or copyright libraries. Fifty or a hundred years from now there will

be no trace of them. And this will mean that an incomplete story of writing and publishing will be told in the future, just as it has done in the past. Did you learn about Chartist poets at school, or John Clare, or the hundreds of working people who recorded their response to the industrial revolution in poems and stories? No, I thought not. When future generations write the literary history of the 20th Century we need to make sure working class writing and community publishing is more than a footnote.

When will it happen?

We submitted the application in May 2001 and will hear if we are successful in the autumn. If we are we will begin work straight away. If not, we'll continue the fund-raising campaign.

Who do I contact if I want to stay in touch with what's happening?

Rebecca O'Rourke, School of Continuing Education, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT
e-mail - r.k.o'rourke@leeds.ac.uk

2001 Working Class Studies Conference

Leah Thorne reports on her visit to The University of Youngstown, Ohio, for the biannual conference, hot on the heels of the Feds under the Bed visit in 1999

Youngstown, Ohio, USA, was a fascinating venue for the Conference, given its history of labour politics and the 'death' of the town with the death of the steel industry. It was eye opening to wander around the town before the conference and witness the tangible despair and worn-downness of the place. It was also great to meet local artists at the conference and see how they continue political organising through their art. The Conference attracted about 150 people - mostly academics in English, Sociology, Politics, Media Studies Departments in US, England, Canada, Germany. I'd say the majority were working class, and a lot of discussions were had about upward mobility and whether you could still be working-class if you were an academic and earning a huge salary.

More Artists

The organisers of the Conference had learnt from previous years that people wanted more artists involvement and this year artists were very evident. There was a very positive memory of the visit two years ago by the Fed. There was a keynote event in the Labor Museum featuring some published poets and several workshops featured poets. One of the huge joys for me was the conference recognition of the artists role in working class liberation, and I loved the work of many of the poets there. I went with a dozen copies of my book to sell and came home with nearly as many from other poets. We swapped books and addresses and examples of social transformation work we were involved in as artists - in prisons, schools, psychiatric hospitals, and the Appalachian community, refugee communities.

More personal

The workshop I presented at was a round table discussion about being working class artists - I was there as a working class Jewish poet, there was a sculptor from northern England who was a ship builder for many years before using his skills as a public artist, and an art historian from the States. To my surprise the room was very full. I had decided to do a formal presentation about Jewish Liberation in England, issues of acculturation and upward mobility and my role as an artist/educator in making issues visible, but after being at the conference a day or

two I realised I wanted to be more personal and not give in to what I thought I OUGHT to say to an academic audience. I immediately realised that this is a key dilemma for me as a working-class poet and as a Jew - how to find my voice, what I want to say, as opposed to what I have already decided is acceptable.

So I started by talking about this - and also owning up to the fact that I was much more excited about being at the conference than I was showing. I decided in that moment to show as much as I could what being there meant to me, and I found my voice breaking, and my eyes getting wet. Several women told me afterwards that this was a very different experience for an academic gathering and that they had cried too and they had enjoyed the tears, that it felt hopeful to be admitting that they hadn't always known that they would be here - and also the cost to us of trying to hide our feelings, or not being able to find a place in our lives to acknowledge feelings.

Challenged

I talked about coming from Leytonstone, a working class area of E London, and what I was taught as a child of a Holocaust survivor born just after the Holocaust - about how I was only safe in the family, how I was 'different' to Gentile working /class people around and how they wouldn't want me. I talked about how the conference was a contradiction to this. And how it was probably a contradiction to everyone in the room who had ever been told lies about themselves, as a working-class person. At one point, an Asian American man challenged me, saying that he could see the political nature of the content of the poem I shared but he felt my middle-class accent and demeanour undercut it and he wondered why I hadn't reclaimed my original voice. In answer I talked about the current pull in England of people wanting to claim working class identity in a particular way, because it's cool [in the same way white people appropriate Black street talk and culture]. I gave the example of Guy Ritchie, Madonna's husband who is actually owning-class but has re-created himself as a Cockney lad. I talked about the need to be accepted, as we are, that my accent and posture comes out of heavy terror and assimilation and that I'd lived with this voice for 44 years and it would be pretence to be otherwise. This also gave me a way to talk about mental health oppression as it hits working class

people and Jews in particular - the split between who you are and how you're perceived.

I got something from every bit the Conference - I made new friends, learnt about other cultures and their issues got thrilled by American poets and contemporary American poetic form. And in fundraising, I 'educated' London Arts about being a

working class Jewish artist and they gave me £500 towards my fare.

Leah Thorne

Leah Thorne's book "The Art of disappearing Jewish women on mental health" was highly commended at the 2001 Raymond Williams Publishing prize

Hard Stuff

Poet, performer, and parent Mike Hoy writes of a self help group in Sheffield of drug addicts parents, he has been working with for the past few years.

Millions of lives have been destroyed, Worldwide, by drug addiction but little has been heard of the parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents and children of addicts. Their lives can also be ruined. My youngest son has been a heroin addict for over ten years. By the time he had children of his own he was desperate to come off. My wife, Liz and I helped him through a cold turkey attempt, twenty four hour support for over a week. It was one of the most difficult and unpleasant experiences of my life.

Some people go to support groups, I write about my situation.

Letter of Complaint

To Messrs. Life and Fate,

Re item received in sixty eight

According to the manual I see

It should be looking after me.

But it only functioned sixteen years

Before the major faults appeared

I really should have sent it back

Now it only runs on Smack.

It causes grief and pain and strife

Wasn't there a *Guarantee for Life?*

Poet and councillor, Steve Allan, asked me to combine the two. He had funding for a writing group for parents of heroin abusers. It sounded tough but was positive and even fun. Originally we met at a library in a district notorious for drugs but the group was not from there, most of them live in an 'idyllic' suburb. Sometimes it is harder for these parents to deal with drug problems simply because they feel so isolated.

They produced loads of good, deeply felt writing, attempts to put the moving, painful and sometimes amusing stories in the public arena. I put them together in a book, *Hard Stuff*, which was launched at the Sheffield *Off the Shelf* Literature Festival. It sold out in a couple of months and was reprinted, almost unheard of for a poetry book by unknowns.

Eighteen months later I was asked by Signposts to run another series of workshops for their Writing and Health Project. The group had expanded and the writing was even better.

Hard Stuff 2 was launched at Sheffield's Voice Room. The format is much the same as before with all the original writers but with a different guest poet, John West, a nurse from Australia who contributed via the Internet. The other difference is a new optimism: most of the contributing parents have succeeded in helping their children kick the habit and the book ends with series of brilliant poetic Detox Recipes, at least one of which worked. Carol's daughter kicked the habit and had a baby of her own:

The Gift

Tiny hands reach out for love

A baby's face

shines innocently

brightly, a light

that is reflected in eyes

no longer needle pointed.

To give him life

she has turned her own around.

Let go of years of pain

to produce this purity.

Not one new life

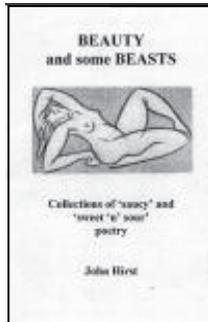
but two.

See p23 for a review of *Hard Stuff 2*

R e v i e w s

Beauty and some Beasts

Poems by John Hirst
 ISBN 1 903031 01 X
 £3.00 available from
 GalleryPoets,
 37Micklehill Drive,
 Shirley, Solihull
 B90 2PU



The title of this book of poems by John Hirst, *Beauty and some Beasts*, immediately summons up images of the Beauty and the Beast in the children's fairy tale. In the tale the Beast has all the wealth and Beauty has none, and yet each has the power to captivate as is the case here with this mosaic of powerful poems.

The poem, *Gulliver girl*, is reminiscent of John Donne's *Elegy 19 To his Mistress going to Bed*. John Hirst may well have borrowed John Donne's idea of using the metaphor of a piece of unexplored territory to describe a woman's body. *Gulliver girl* is sensuously erotic, spread out ready for the reader's delectation. In the same way that Gulliver was in the book, *Gulliver's Travel*s.

The exploration of new territory is echoed elsewhere in the book. *Fingering the contours* is an example in Part II of the book under the title *Reflections*:

They dip fingers into the seven seas
 Linger awhile..shore to shore
 Hand stand the peaks and mounts,
 City-hop with the stars and celebs,
 Sample the extremes in comfort,
 Pause without peril at the poles.

Beauty can be seen and explored in the work of visual artists and in the decaying city of Napoli, :

Hung with chop-suey
 Lines of washing, all the colours of Benneton.

In the sonnet *Tricked* John Hirst evokes the Prozac Queen who has turned into a monster through her habit. The very strict rhyming scheme contrasts well with her chaotic world:

Barbiturates with Pheno's a bad brew
 Turns a brain into mad house stew

In *Candy Girl* John Hirst explores the beast within, the sexually abusive father:

Sweets in exchange for treats
 he would hand them out,
 then lay his hands on me.

John Hirst's book is a very stimulating 'chop suey' of the sad and the happy and the beautiful and the bestial. I hope he continues to produce such excellent material.

Louise Glasscoe -
 Commonword & Buxton Survivors Poetry

Light and Life

Poems by Andrea Chell
 ISBN 1 901045 06 4
 available from Leeds
 Survivors Press, 54b
 Shorebrooke Avenue,
 Leeds LS7 3HB

Simply and beautifully written, with hand-drawn illustrations. Contrasting photographs introduce each part. You feel the author is talking to you personally. Rhyming or non-rhyming, the same rhythm is there, the same urgency. To choose a favourite is so difficult, for I love them all! Such perception, such profundity, such awareness - a real treat. Anybody who loves poetry will love this collection. Refreshingly revealing, so descriptive; words which evoke emotion.

There is sadness at times, and insecurity as in *To the Moon and Back*. Though turn the page from there and discover Today - encapsulating such joy and fulfilment. I urge you to seek out and read this book. I, for one will not part with my copy!

Robert Brandon
 Shorelink Community Writers



R e v i e w s

Thirty Years in the Trenches

An oral autobiography by Peter Richards with Nick Osmond
 ISBN 1 873487 10 X £8.99
 - available from White
 Cockade Publishing, 71
 Lonsdale Road, Oxford OX2
 7ES



"...and his not wanting to repeat what had happened to him... we're not going to sort of follow on, automatically we know there was a reason...

we've broken the cycle..." Born blind in one eye - "...only child. I was an only child and my parents separated before I was five", from last to first and in betwixt - compiled from taped conversations between Peter Richards and his friend Nick Osmond... as always the blurb only tells half the story.

So - Buy. Read. Absorb "this book is to enlarge your experience". Experience someone who "comes over as self-reliant, opinionated..." I can relate to that, but remember "...comes over...". Dip into 11 chapters including "Into the Trenches" - "Better out than in" - "Part-time Hippy" - "Shit happens (as against incidents)" - "Hierarchy" - "Renaissance".

In "Tearing into it" he describes how sometimes you had to carry a man... who may not be well. "He'd got his hand in a plaster because he'd punched his wife in the head and broken his fist. Little guy."

Peter describes digging for what is now Transco, and how he could only dig 6 yards as against someone else's 8 yards. He'd do his best... "I compete against myself if you like" as he said in his childhood "I wanted to see more than I could see".

Because the jobs became more mechanised there's less need for physical labour. No sweat, a bit like today... and we're paying for it. Personal viewpoint, mind you. But the raw meat is there. Big book with "Different Companies, Same Hole". The phrase "So far as is reasonably practicable". Should be compulsory reading for all employers. Learn the rules properly so you can break the rules properly. Trade Unionists - such as it is... beware. Very "Who gives a damn?" He fought for his successes - few as they were... by fighting as dirty as management*. As the *Song of the Working Man* says - "Oh master of mine, listen and take heed - for you have taught me, oh many a terrible deed"

My experience is "about to be enlarged". I want to learn lessons not yet learned. Amen.

*"There are more defeats than victories" - *Consider the Lilies*
 Eric D Davidson, Lockerbie Writers Group

Bill Allerton Reads... The Train and Other Stories

CD - 11 tracks 77 minutes, Gordiegit Studios, for details phone 0114 2684732

When they want "mesmerising by the public anarchist" Sheffield audiences enjoy listening to Bill Allerton, and this compilation of recordings on CD, some from local BBC radio, shows why. Bill's material is written to be read aloud, and he has developed a popular repertoire with the pieces featured here such as *Fishing*, *Bomber's Moon*, *Annie*, 'Tick Tock' said the Penguin, and *The Comer*. Why is it called a comer? You'll have to listen to find out...

Bill's reading and the rich quality of the writing stand being heard again and again, even without a few sound effects added here to give appropriate colour. His comfortable and familiar Yorkshire tones beguile you into thinking this is a cosy fireside selection of tales - but while there's a lot of humour here, there are also hard issues.

Opening with *The Train* - a tale of the first world war, Bill proceeds to lead us up and down the landscape of human emotions. It's a ride which is always entertaining, often taking strange and unexpected corners over mantelpieces or up the Amazon, or turning up familiar domestic items which become objects of mystery and vast potency, and never far from the poetic even where it's prose. *Annie*, an extended poem, deals with the human aftermath of a burglary, and when you hear the Wellsian beginning of *Vox Humana* you know that Connie was very ill advised to pull that stick out of the water and put it to his lips. If you want to find out "how many 'f's there are in bugger" get a copy. You'll not be disappointed.. if you're quick.

Nick Pollard
 Heeley Writers

R e v i e w s

Spouting Off

Jewelled Tree, by Louise Cole, ISBN 1 899114 61 0, £3.50

Found Objects, by Mary Males, ISBN 1 899114 66 1, £6.00

Going to the Island, by Mirian Scott, ISBN 1 899114 65 3, £3.50

Keep Walking, by Robert Furze, ISBN 1 1899114 70 X, £3.50

Available from – Spout Publications, The Word Hoard, Kirklees Media Centre, 7 Northumberland Street, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD1 1RL

Four exciting writing collections combined with smart design, particularly Mary Males' *Found Objects* which mixes graphics with text collages.

Males's pieces often begin innocuously with some reassuringly straightforward instructions such as you might find in a recipe book or the side of a cereal packet, propelling you towards bizarre conclusions like "Next time you will know to stop and put up your tent before you start going invisible". The bathetic is made absurd, the everyday stood on its head. A man is anaesthetised, given open heart surgery and his wife cannot imagine what has happened to him and he can't tell her. "You are still here in the twenty first century. You put both hands to the cold stone o the perimeter wall... Perhaps you will be able to feel something, an echo of voices. Somewhere, somewhere between this broken wall and the tablecloth sky, a peculiar place, almost within your reach and further away than Mars."

Furze's *Keep Walking* features some of Doncaster's local landmarks, watertowers, so immediately it appealed to me with this poetic tour of the landscape in which I work. This is a watertower de force – a thorough excavation of the possibilities presented by the "tower's low, perpetual shadow" around the town, and its influence on the streetscapes. This is concrete poetry.

Scott's *Going to the Island* is in the celtic tradition of personified geography, and is a beautiful rendition of an old story, rich in colour. In a cycle of poems the island coalesces, emerging from the mist with a mythology, and an increasing presence, which, as you begin to realise towards the end of the cycle, is ironic, given the history of the remote and until recently primitive island communities of these isles. How close we are to the people of those

islands, and at the same time, how far.

Cole's *Jewelled Tree* laments the loss of a sister, tracing the progress of grief through a series of incidents, memories and the rites of childhood passage. It works against the temptation to find a 'closure', with a complex exploration of the relationship between the sister that was and the sister who is being outgrown. Memories play tricks on the mind, and what is portrayed here is often uncertain: "To find you/ pare down each second/ split it, scrutinise it,/ speck of you look/ your hands and hair." "Perhaps the world is as we will it to be.." Cole writes, chasing this vein of doubt as to how things are through to the final line: "there is always a new spring".

These books are closely worked. Their writing is against the grain, challenging expectation and making demanding reading. I especially enjoyed *Going to the Island*, with its mythological theme, but all of these writers offer fine demonstrations of their talents.

Nick Pollard
Heeley Writers

Cutting Teeth: New Scottish Writing

Issue 17 – £2.50 per issue or £7.50 annual subscription – available from Arts & Cultural Development Office, 17 Castlemilk Arcade, Glasgow G45 9AA

Cutting Edge promotes new writing from Scotland, by both new and well established writers. Issue 17 is largely devoted to poetry, a mixture of natural observation, war reportage, ending of relationships, and even a wistful meditation on the Winter Solstice. Only one poem, *Hangover Toon*, in Scots dialect, seems to relate to life in the city, which is perhaps surprising. The poets share the ability to set the atmosphere immediately and to say all that needs to be said within two verses. This might even be an editorial decision to go for the sharp and impressionistic.

I can't recommend this issue enough. It is full of gems. The only omission is that brief biographies of the authors would have been interesting.

Roy S. Holland
Survivors Poetry, London

R e v i e w s

Hard Stuff 2

Edited by Mike Hoy £1 ISBN 0 9535701 2 6 – available from Hi Rise Publications, 2 Netherdene Road, Dronfield, Sheffield S18 1TR

So the Tories want to decriminalise drugs in the name of "Freedom", they should read this collection to see the experience of drugs as slavery. So many children and young people start out thinking they can 'handle it', a tragic illusion! No one can, and don't let them fool you that they can. Read on...

Oh Shit

Started with packets of fags
nothing to go wild about
I can handle it.
Try some grass, what a gas
I can handle it.
Then the beer, whiskey, gin
I can handle it.
Need more thrills
pop the pills
I can handle it.
Heroin and all that shit
had no doubt that I could quit
I THOUGHT I could handle it.

Does this next piece sound familiar? It will to anyone with friends or family who are addicts.

10 Things I Never Want to Hear Again

Mum we need to talk.
Can you lend me?
Can you just?
Can I have?
One more time, I won't ever ask again.
Sorry to call so late but I'm in a bit of trouble.
This is the police.
I've had enough, I want out!
This is Calow Hospital, it's about your daughter.

Hard Stuff 2 is an anonymous collection of poetry by members of The Families and Friends of Drugs Misusers Project, offering a grim but too true picture of this tragic blight within all of our communities. It's tough stuff, not easy to read, but unforgettable and compulsive. In the end the collection left me thinking what a waste of lives, but also with a greater understanding of what is going on in the minds of the addict, and the all consuming effect on families. As a counter balance there is some hope, as in the poem *Life Signs* and the final *Detox Recipes*.

I recommend you buy this book, and it is worth noting that all proceeds go to support the group. It is

hell seeing someone especially a child, loved one, or good friend descend into the grip, both physical and mental, of heroin and crack. It is somewhere no-one wants to go. One final piece which for me sums up much of the book.

Changes

Tune in to heroin
Turn on to an autumn world
Drop out of summer

Tim Diggles
F W W C P

see p19 for an article by Mike Hoy on the project

Dragon Song

An anthology of writing by Dumfries and Galloway Writers Groups, collected by Liz Niven (Writer in Residence – Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association) – £3 available from DGAA, 28 Edinburgh Road, Dumfries

"When I see what was written, I'm sure – if I put my mind to it – I could do as well" Anne Lambie Dumfries and Galloway Survivors Poetry in an interview with Eric Davidson.

Anne related to *Word Finding* by Agnus McMillan of Lockerbie Writers, especially as both have had new grandchildren.

...Words...
but it is hard work
and now I must sleep
my head
on my mothers palm

Also to *A Rose by any other name* by Val Horton of Newton Street about a mother whose son has phoned from Australia to say he's not coming back. Resonation.

The previous day her known world had crumbled, today it was she who was taking life by the throat, and she was going to be OK. She was blooming.

The anthology also includes eight writers from Fed member groups, including Eric Davidson's *Un-Titled*, and Peter Grant's *4 o'clock in the morning*, a very descriptive piece set in a tea bar in Finchley. Five men are discussing one not present.

...finally four men and cafe owner exchange glances, drink deeply of their tea...
The reader is left to wonder.

Anne Lambie
Dumfries and Galloway Survivors Poetry

Fed News!

Fed Moving to Burslem

In mid September the FWWCP office will move from Tunstall to a room in the Burslem School of Art, about two miles away. This is a newly refurbished building originally built in 1905, where many pottery designers such as Claris Cliff, learnt their trade. It will be a great improvement and at last fully accessible office space.



2002 Festival/AGM

The 2002 FWWCP Festival will take place at the University of Liverpool between April 5th and 7th, the weekend after Easter. This will, surprisingly, be the first time the Festival/AGM has taken place in Liverpool, and it is hoped many people associated with the Fed in the past from the area will participate.

We plan the costs to be about the same as 2001, with a small increase for inflation. The site is similar to those we have used in recent years and should create a very exciting and rewarding weekend.

Fund-raising Worker

The Fed have appointed Norma Pearson as a Fund Raising Worker, for an initial two year period. Norma will work from home in Northamptonshire and her first task will be to increase the levels of funding for the Fed, including the next application to the Lottery, and funding for the 2002 Festival. She will in future years work with the Membership to support their fund raising, offering practical advice and training. This is the first time the Fed have had a dedicated fund raiser.

Summerbank School Project

The after-school writing project with Summerbank Primary School in Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent has been highly successful. The school is now on holiday and workshops will begin again in September.

We have been able to use the new computer facilities at the school, and children are creating their own website, which will link them to many other schools and let them share creative writing projects.

With only one hour available per week progress is slow, but the children are very enthusiastic and numbers attending have remained the same throughout the project.

Over the two terms they have worked with a theatre company to look at creating characters, written reviews and reports, created a 'Front Page of their Life', and learnt how to place text and pictures together.

We will report further in future issues and place links to the school website from the Fed's site.



N E X T I S S U E

Issue No. 23 will feature the FWWCP members visit to organisations, schools, and colleges, and meetings with writers in Dortmund, Germany.

The deadline for submission of articles or reviews for consideration for Issue No.23 is September 28th, 2001.

Send (preferably on disk or by e-mail) to:

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