

Publishers

Worker Writers & Community

The Federation of

FEDERATION



...How *Da* Ordinary People Become Writers? ...

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- Peases West Railway Walk
- Writers Should be Readers #2
- Writers, Workers & Worker Writers...

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THE
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The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers

Since 1976 the Fed has established itself as a voice for community writing and publishing. Working with and on behalf of our Membership, we have developed our policies so that all who wish to participate are able to do so. Representing people from Mauritius to Merseyside, Wales to Whitechapel, ours is truly an international organisation.

The Fed encourages an inclusive approach to creativity.

Community based writers' groups, publishers and adult literacy organisations network to help people develop their skills. Performance, oral and life history projects enable people to take an active role in their communities. Our co-operative approach values the participation of those who are homeless, survivors or people with different abilities. Groups meet regularly to share skills and offer constructive criticism and support.

The Fed IS its Membership.

Management and strategic planning are directed by representatives elected from member groups. All are encouraged to play an active role in decision making.

We believe that our difference is our strength.

We'd like to hear from you.

Mail: The FWWCP, 67 The Boulevard, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent ST6 6BD

Website: <http://www.fwwcp.mcmail.com>

Phone/Fax: 01782 822327

E-mail: fwwcp@cwcom.net

Feditorial

This issue of Federation features a number of examples in which ordinary people have become involved in writing, whether as part of an oral history project leading to a sculpture, as in Julie Ward's piece, or else actually becoming a novelist, as Anne Cassidy or Linda Ho describe for their audiences at the Eastside Awards and in Doncaster.

We also feature a letter (page 8) from Tim Diggles asking whether we should drop the term "worker" from "Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers". Does "worker" still have the same resonance it had in 1976 when the Fed was set up? It's a fair point, which many query, and Tim is asking for a debate...

And to set the ball rolling, I argue for the retention of "worker" in our title. We do not live in a classless society, and divisions remain with a consequent difference of outlook. The difference is of both resources and opportunity. Perhaps "worker" doesn't encompass the marginalised position of those on benefits, and hearkens back to a class division which needs re-appraisal; there are fewer idle rich and a lot more people in the middle. But it still retains a focus on reversal of a literary process. We are not as merely receivers of culture but creative agents who produce *our own* portrayals of life.... Discuss!

Nick Pollard

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Peases West Railway Walk

Julie Ward describes how a distillation of oral histories led to a collaborative sculpture work in the Wear Valley

...suddenly I could see recurring themes more clearly; the links between things and people became more obvious. I took the strongest images and played with them until I found a way to make progressions from each. I wanted the poem to “grow” as the little girl had done, each line rooted in the one before, the whole thing ending on a note of hopefulness.

The History

In 1854 the colliery at Peases West was the largest in the area, producing coal which made excellent coking coal. The walk retraces the railway line which once linked the Stanley and Wooley Collieries with the main railway network at Crook. A static steam engine sited at Stanley, Crook hilltop, hauled the coal trucks for the two collieries up the Stanley Incline.

Peases West was once the site of Bankfoot Coke Ovens, a fireclay works and a complex of railway sidings. Eleven years earlier, the Stockton and Darlington Railway Company connected the works with Darlington, bringing the iron smelting works of Middlesbrough within easy reach.

It was soon realised that valuable by-products from the coking process were being lost in the original beehive ovens. These were replaced in 1882 by twenty-five Simon Carve ovens, the first in the country, enabling the extraction of sulphate of ammonia, benzene, coal tar and the like.

Heat from the ovens powered a generator in the power station attached to the colliery. It was common to see Crook Beck

steaming from the heat of the water discharged from the site. Heat from the coke ovens also served another purpose: they provided the local tramps with a warm, dry place to ‘bed out’.

Eventually the police had to take action. In one six-week period, 37 ‘loafers’ were caught. Brought before the magistrates they were sentenced to imprisonment.

Branching off the railway line, just to the north of Peases West, another railway line went to Sunnyside and Tow Law. The two mile Sunnyside Incline was one of the main inclines in the county.

The railways depended on the mines for their traffic. When Roddymoor pit closed in 1963 and Bankfoot works in 1965, the closure of the line was inevitable. Freight and passenger services from Crook were withdrawn in July 1965 - the passenger service to Tow Law had already closed in 1956.

In Stanley, Crook, the walk links with the Deerness Valley Railway Walk which continues for a further 13km, ending at Broompark picnic area to the south west of Durham City.

***The little girl who waved at trains
walked the earth where rabbits ran
and tree roots green to touch
the coal that men once hewed
while singing softly underground
of how the swallow will return***

...the final design based on an ancient species of palm tree was then carved, rather aptly, over 16 railway sleepers, made of yarrow, each at least 100 years old with cracks full of coal dust. Laid out like a section of railway line, the image with the text gradually unfolds as you walk along the line.

The Sculpture

Fifty metres from the southern start of the walk is a piece of artwork, commissioned by Wear Valley District Council to celebrate the UK Year of Visual Arts in 1996. It results from a collaboration between sculptor Keith Alexander and writer Julie Ward. Julie talked with local people who remembered the route of the walk as a working railway line and distilled their memories into a poem.

The poem became the starting point for Keith's work and the text is incorporated in the final sculpture:-

The little girl who waved at trains
walked the earth where rabbits ran
and tree roots green to touch
the coal that men once hewed
while singing softly underground
of how the swallow will return

Thinking on the origin of coal led Keith to the discovery that Crook was once on the Equator, and that its landscape would have included tropical forest.

Further research at Kew Gardens resulted in the final design based on an ancient species of palm tree. This was then carved, rather aptly, over 16 railway sleepers, made of yarrow, each at least 100 years old with cracks full of coal dust. Laid out like a section of railway line, the image with the text gradually unfolds as you walk along the line.

On August 26th 1910, Great Uncle Robert, boarded the early morning train at Tow Law station, on the first leg of his journey home to Kansas, where he operated a successful retailing business. As the train prepare to leave, a baby boy was born nearby in Dan's Castle.

When Great Uncle Robert heard the news he asked the station-master to delay the train whilst he ran to

Peases West Railway Walk

Mazzuchi's, the jeweller's shop, to buy an old ring. "Put this on the child's finger," he said to his nephew, "and e'll take no harm." Then the train left the station with Great Uncle Robert aboard.

If you stood on the fence and watched the trains as they came out from underneath the bridge at Billy Row, you would see the faces of people leaving, never to return; young boy soldiers mobilised at Tow Law, off to fight in the fields of Flanders; newly-wed couples clutching their dream tickets to a better life in Australia, Great Uncle Robert in his dapper suit and six gallon hat.

The little girl who lived at Roddymoor Farm used to stand on top of the fence and wave at the trains. The Guard would wave back. Sometimes there was a ferret or two in his pocket. His was a pleasant job; on sunny days in the country he would go rabbit-catching in-between train journeys.

The farm-girl always had a ribbon in her hair - and she always lost it whilst out playing. One day she lost her ribbon on the smouldering spoil heap next to her home. She and a little boy called Eric had gone there to play. It was a dangerous place to be.

Both children were brought

home tarred and feathered, carried aloft by the miners who had found them "out of bounds" and thought to teach them a lesson.

ROOTS AND WINGS

Perhaps the children dreamed that night that they could fly with their new feathered limbs, rising like twin phoenix from the poisonous ashes of the mountainous waste tips. Perhaps they only wanted to join the pigeons and sit atop the coal tips that rolled in and out of the drift at Woolley Colliery at the top of Stanley incline, anxious to see what passed beneath their feet as well as what lay above the clouds.

Deep underground miners sang hopefully of the return of the summer swallows and rats made nests in stables built for pit ponies. One little girl used to lead the ponies from the colliery head to the pond where they were washed down after a hard day's work. The pond is still there, supporting colonies of frogs and newts, water spiders and beetles skimming and diving across the surface. The sediment of the Past has now settle below the surface.

Even when the mines were here, and the rail-tracks were in constant

use, and the air was thick with ammonia, benzol and tar, and sulphurous clouds from the German-built coke ovens obscured the sun, *nature* breathed somehow.

Families set their gardens with cabbages, onions, carrots, potatoes and leeks.

They grew prize marrows and giant dahlias. One man nurtured over a hundred rose hushes in his plot on Billy Row bank. Meanwhile, down on Roddymoor Farm the little girl collected eggs, carrying them in a basket to give to neighbours.

When she grew up she went away to college, a long train journey south. On her return, three years later, the coke works and the spoil heap had gone. In place of the latter, a new plantation of trees whose roots might just touch the rich coal seams remaining below.

And the boy with the gold ring on his finger? *He* is now the guardian of an ancient well for, at the bottom of his garden, there stands a stone edifice which once supplied life to a whole village, From his lookout on the hill he reads the changes in the landscape and wonders what will be coming next...

On the "White Lands" which once were playground to the wild Brigantes and their treacherous queen, where the Romans observed

Peases West Railway Walk

the slightest movement of grass from their signal station at Woodfield, where the Abbots of Blanchland presided over 400 years of relative peace, where the farmers of Old White Lea coaxed the earth to yield up its goodness, where the long “Cow’s Tail” of the Sunnside Incline-astounded engineers worldwide in the mid 19th century, the coal is too close to the surface for comfort. How long, we wonder, before big business digs its mechanical claws into the

green sward? And who will listen to us if we say “No! Let the land lie still now and the air be clean”

Julie Ward

With thanks to:

Jack Amos

Roy Carroll

Elsie Craggs

Robert Lowes Graham

John Mallon

Heather Stewart

SOURCES

Heather Stewart (nee Burns) grew up in the 40s and 50s. Her father, Ralph, leased Roddymoor Farm from the National Coal Board. Although she played in the shadow of the massive spoil heap at Bank Foot, Heather’s childhood memories are almost idyllic. She is the little girl who waved at trains.

I first met Heather in 1993 at Peases West Primary School where she had taught for 19 years. I was observing classroom practice as part of a drama research project. I learnt loads from Heather, not just about education but also about the local area. When I was asked to create the text for the sculpture she was, naturally, my first port of call.

Heather lives in Staindrop now but the memories of special childhood places have not vanished. We spent a wonderful evening talking and looking at old photographs. Only then I realised the enormity of the changes first wrought upon the district by the industrial revolution and more recent degradation of the area by the dying coal industry.

Heather spent so much of her life committed to being in such a small geographical area. She herself went to Peases West School, as did all her siblings. Her father, his brother and their sister

COMPOSING THE TEXT

I was pleased and flattered to be asked to work on such a significant artwork. I have lived in the district for five years along with my musician partner and our two boys, who both go to school at Stanley Crook. I decided to approach the brief by indulging my passionate professional interest in oral history.

wrote instead a longer piece, “Roots and Wings”, which wove together many stories and images. It was a good way to acknowledge my sources and honour their memories. It helped too with the process of creating the final text. Suddenly I could see recurring themes more clearly; the links between things and people became more obvious. I took the strongest images and played with them until I found a way to make progressions from each. I wanted the poem to “grow” as the little girl had done, each line rooted in the one before, the whole thing ending on a note of hopefulness.

Given the wealth of information told to me by the four people described below, (without whom I could not have done the job) writing a few simple lines that would sum it all up was a nightmare task. (I am not known for my brevity of speech!)

At first I couldn’t do it and

Peases West Railway Walk

were also former pupils. Before moving to Staindrop, Heather had been living in East Terrace, Roddymoor, caring for her mother and two daughters. Her brother took on the running of the family farm and he's still there, getting up early to milk the cows.

The house in East Terrace is now home to Heather's daughter, who lives there with her husband - and there's a baby on the way!

Recurring images of renewal and continuation, such as those in Heather's family saga, became an overriding feature in my work as I gathered material for the project. Following an appeal in local papers for more information I met two gentlemen with quite different stories to tell.

John Mallon lives in Darlington. For much of his life he worked on the railways, travelling through Crook countless times. He came and walked along the old track with me one balmy day in July 1996, explaining engineering feats that were still way beyond my comprehension! The air was heavy with pollen; insects buzzed incessantly. I marvelled at the range of nature on show along the old embankments; the industrial and the natural worlds in such close proximity.

John told of the joy of a job that took him out into the country each working day

and how a guard he knew often took his ferrets to work with him in order to catch tea at *lunch-time!*

Jack Amos, now resident in Willington, spent his childhood playing around the pit-head at Woolley, Stanley Crook. In 1941, aged 14, he started work at the shaft bottom, "coupling and uncoupling the tubs, greasing the rollers and changing the switches" During the war they used pit ponies but, later, hauling the coals became more automated. In the 1950s Woolley and Roddymoor collieries became a joint operation and Jack used to take the coal tubs halfway to *Roddymoor* underground. He finished work in 1963 when the pit closed.

Bob Graham was another ex-miner I spoke to. Born in Tow Law, he now lives in Billy Row, his house affording a wonderful view across the village. From his conservatory he pointed out local landmarks, directing my gaze to distant hilltops where the Romans had built look-out stations. He showed me old surveying instruments and maps of the local coal seams.

Bob is in his late eighties so he has witnessed massive changes in the area. Whilst acknowledging the comradeship and sense of community which accompanied the coal industry he does not mourn its passing; there were too

many casualties and he loves the greening of the land around him.

As I write the local community is awaiting the outcome of RJB Mining's planning appeal* to opencast the site at Old White Lea for 10 years. People steel themselves against the prospect of even greater change. The earth is rich in these parts, the stories even richer.

Julie Ward

* Which failed, partly due to Julie's interventions with home made jam!

Eastside Stories Award 1998

“I wrote the first thirty pages of it in an old exercise book and looked at it and thought, I’m a novelist. It was as easy as that. It took two long years and it taught me more about writing than any book or course could. At last I began to feel like a Real Writer.”

The Eastside Stories Award offers £1,000 to a writer \Working on a first novel. There are also awards of £100 for nine runners-up. This years £1,000 winner is Kevin John Evans for his manuscript ‘Searching for the Big City Beats’.

Kevin who lives in Stratford, Newham E15 is originally from Wales. He has played bass in a punk band, worked as a performance poet and is the founder of The Hard Edge Club (performance poetry venue) in Soho.

Kevin said -“I was completely surprised but obviously pleased to have won. The *Eastside* Stories Award is important because

it is intended to encourage new Writers rather than reward those who are already established.”

Supporting New Writers

Organised by Eastside Arts in Whitechapel, the award offers financial support to a new writer in the boroughs of Hackney, Newham or Tower Hamlets. The *announcement* was made at a special ceremony on November 26th at St. George’s Hall, Cable Street. The entries were *judged* by writer Anne Cassidy, author of over a dozen books for teenagers and young people. They include *Talking to Strangers*, *Driven to Death* and *The Hidden Child*. Her thrillers in the *Fatsy Kelly~ Investigates* series have been translated into several languages.

Variety

Anne said -‘What struck me most about the manuscripts was the variety styles and subject matter. Also, this years award winner’s chances of finding a publisher will be boosted by being read by a major literary agent, Laura Longrigg of MBA Literary Agents Ltd.

At the ceremony Anne Cassidy spoke about

her writing career, which included involvement in the Fed. “I started writing short stories and poems in the 1980’s. I had a lot of fun sharing these other people but I can honestly say that I never really considered myself as a Real Writer when I did them. I always saw it as having a sort of a hobby.

Then one day in 1985, I decided I wanted to write a novel. I can remember the moment exactly. I was on holiday in a cottage in Cornwall and the wind was howling and the rain was slicing past the window. It was the usual August climate. An idea for a short story had been playing around in my head and I found myself adding bits to it until the thought came to me.

Novel

Why not write a novel?

For a few moments I found myself feeling a bit audacious. Me?

Write a novel? No, surely not. That was for real writers. People who didn’t have jobs. People who had Rooms Of Their Own and who spoke like BBC newsreaders. Not for the likes of me!

I started it later that day. I wrote the first thirty pages of it in an old exercise book

Letters

and looked at it and thought, I'm a novelist. It was as easy as that.

It took two long years and it taught me more about writing than any book or course could. At last I began to feel like a Real Writer. In the last couple of weeks I've been reading manuscripts by other Real Writers. It's taken them a lot of courage but they've all taken that leap into the unknown and landed in the middle of a story of their own making."

She said of the Kevin John Evans' prize winning entry "I was thrilled by its pace and its economy of style. I smiled at the cleverness of its language and I wanted to know what happened to the characters next. That's what I look for in a novel. That's why I chose 'Searching for the Big City Beats'."

Anne Cassidy

Dear Editor,

Is this where you put me up against the wall and shoot me!?

I am putting forward a suggestion for discussion that we (The FWWCP) change the our name to:

The Federation of Community Writers and Publishers or something like that. Why?

- Because the words 'Worker Writers' have been a bone of contention for some time with people outside the organization, leading to questions on the phone and at meetings such as - Are we an organization only for people whose work is writing? What about unemployed writers? If I work in an office am I a Worker Writer?

- The name The Federation of Community Writers and Publishers, I feel, is a clearer definition of what we are. I am not trying to be New Labour about this. I am trying to suggest ways of encouraging groups to join and individuals to become Friends, not by watering down but by clarification. Too often the opening 10-20 minutes of a conversation or talk has been dominated by a definition of terms.

I love the term Worker Writer, but it has little meaning to many today, especially for younger people. It is a term typical of when the Fed was formed, the mid 1970's and much earlier. In "The Republic of Letters" (pub. 1982) the term Worker Writer was summed up thus:

"...to register the fact that the working class, the majority of the population, are still, in Tillie Olsen's words 'marginal to the culture'."

Has this changed? Does it still have the same meaning? That is the question I am asking. I feel at the very least we should set up a dialogue about this in Federation Magazine. I feel this is an issue we should discuss, even if it is to clarify our own meanings and understanding.

Of course one (in)famous politician said "There's no such thing as Community", but we do not want to go that far!

Tim Diggles
FWWCP Co-ordinator

Reading for Life -Writers Should Be Readers?#2

Who's Reading Who: Fed Members and Their Influential Writers

Continuing the Fed's celebration of the National Year of Reading, we ask members about the books which have influenced them to write?

It's often said of community writing, especially poetry, that more people write than actually read. Does your group exchange information about other writers - if you feel that certain books have played a major part in your life why not write in. Tell us which books, and say something about why they are important to you.

This issue's contributors come from Eastside, QueenSpark, Grimsby, Doncaster, Tunstall, Commonword and Heeley

Fitz Lewis:

Nelson Mandela's moving and exhilarating autobiography, **Long Walk To Freedom** influenced my own writing by the sheer determination to stand fast in whatever we do, and not be broken or distracted from our true belief and commitment, especially when the benefits will be shared by others.

Betty Mahmood's **Not Without My Daughter**, This true-life story shows how one can be trapped by love and the trust that should go hand in hand with love. How deceiving it can be at times. A book filled with real- life ideas for the beginner writer.

Omeros by Derek Walcott (winner of the Nobel Literature Prize) brings history back to life in the form of two fishermen characters who took on the mythical side of their Greek namesakes. This was an *author* whose imagination went wild as all budding writer should.

New Selected Poems 1966 1987, by Seamus Heaney. Heaney speaks with a rural tongue which is reminiscent and *passionate*, probably of earlier days in Ireland and of the current situation which exist today. This book is also a winner of the Nobel Prize For Literature. Many of my poems are based on similar background.

Anna Karenin, by Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy uses his imagination to create a mass view of contemporary life in Russia at the time and indeed across the world. With part of my early life reflected in the novel I have found new inspiration in creating poems reflecting the elements that affect our lives from season to season. I see myself as Levin who was a farmer and was closer to the peasants than other main characters.

June Roberts:

The Water Babies, by Charles Kingsley, was the first book I remember being read to me that had a profound effect.

Palgrave's Golden Treasury was my constant companion in my teens and I learnt many poems which I still recite!

The Big Fisherman by Lloyd C Douglas brought to life the Bible Stories.

Steinbeck's **The Grapes of Wrath** showed me a degree of suffering of which i was unaware.

The Tree of Man by Patrick White takes one through all the differing stages of life. A great philosophy.

Writers Should Be Readers?

Sarah Richardson:

I guess like most of us, what I would put as my 5 most influential books changes from time to time. These then, are my current thoughts. I've left out "Anne of Green Gables" which is my all time number 1 because someone else chose it last time.

I Capture The Castle by Dodie Smith, the author of "101 Dalmatians", this story is for adolescents and is written in the voice of a young woman. She lives in a ruined castle with her sister and her dad who's a penniless writer. I remember it being fantastically romantic when I first read it- aged about 14.

The Women's Room by Marilyn French. An influential book for many women I'm sure, a 70's feminist tome and a racy read. The characters develop and change and I learnt a lot in an unpreachy way. I read it for the 1st time aged about 20.

Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful by Alice Walker. A slim book of poems, every one a gem. This was bought for me as a present and I've since given copies to many people.

"I am the woman

offering two flowers

whose roots

are twin

Justice and Hope

Let us begin." (from 'Remember?')

Billy by Albert French. An unbelievably powerful 1st novel. It made me cry by telling the story of a 10 year-old black boy in the American south in the 20's, on death row.

Hidden Lives by Margaret Forster. Written by my favourite author. All her books are great, but I think this is the best. She tells the simple story of her family's life- an "ordinary" working-class history of Carlisle but gripping. Inspired me to do some writing about my own family.

Michael Bates:

Crime and Punishment, Dostoyevsky: The powerful, obsessive, neurotic narrative drive of the cat and mouse hunt of the killer

Madame Bovary, Flaubert: Paints wonderful images - the soft focused sadness of a woman living in the Provinces - bored and frustrated

Hard Times, Dickens: The industrial North and its effect on families and individuals. It is all in here!

The Rachel Papers, Martin Amis: The weary world of late teens, documented by a clever clogs

The Iron Man, Ted Hughes: Rhythms and sounds - the poetic imagination!

Tim Diggles:

Five Influential Books

To begin at the beginning. The first book I remember that 'inspired' me was C S Lewis' "**The Lion The Witch and The Wardrobe**". I can still remember the wonder of those early chapters, pushing through the winter coats and into the snow filled landscape. Wonderful writing. I know now it has many other layers of meaning that I didn't at nine, but it still leaves great memories and a sense that in writing you can believe anything.

A book I read when I was twenty was Michael Holroyd's wonderful biography of **Lytton Strachey**. It showed me how entertaining and moving biography could be. Holroyd is able to make characters live, when you've finished it's like you've shared the persons life. The book also introduced me to many wonderful writers and artists who I've followed up, such as Carrington, whose pictures, letters and diaries are quite magical.

In my early 20's I found Gunter Grass' "**The Tin Drum**" and it has led me to read everything he's written. I remember reading a rather blasphemous section on an American train, sitting behind a family who were reading (very loudly) sections from The Bible to each other, if I had had the

courage I would have read my book to the carriage as a counterpoint, but.... All Gunter Grass' writing is dense and full of the history of North Poland and stories/legends that veer off from the 'plot', but it is some of the most inventive ever written.

More recently I have been reading Iris Murdoch and A.S. Byatt's novels. To choose one is very difficult, "**Babel Tower**" by A.S.Byatt is the third book in a quartet of books, you really have to read the earlier two to make sense of the plot, but she writes very intelligently with many paths that veer into bits of history. There is a parallel book running through the main story and characters and sub plots abound. Both writers have a deep understanding of the dynamics of groups of friends and colleagues. "**The Book and the Brotherhood**" is wonderful Iris Murdoch, perhaps New Labour should read it very carefully.

For my fifth (perhaps I've cheated and referred to others) I choose "**Germinal**" by Emile Zola which I first read at nineteen. Reading this has led me into a lifetimes reading of his work (there is so much). His writing doesn't date and the horror, imagery and characters live

inside me. Germinal tells of a miners strike where the miners are pawns in a greater more lethal game, it's heart rending stuff that was also well portrayed in the recent film. I have read this book twice now, I look forward to picking it up again in the next ten years.

Pip Smith:

Lucy Carmichael by Margaret Kennedy;

Cat's Eye by Margaret Atwood;

Precious Bane, by Mary Webb, and **The Smell of Roses** - a really good book but I can't remember who it's by.

Writers Should Be Readers?

Arthur Thickett:

Five Books - and a bit

Growing up as a working class child without any class conscious adult support, good books of any sort rarely came to and: 'Biggles' was the pinnacle of literary level at my school. So I discovered my FIRST book in a cupboard.

It had been left behind by the stuffy, upper-crust landlord in a house my family moved into. *Called ONTO THE RESCUE* and subtitled 'a tale of the Indian Mutiny,' (authorship lost), it was painstaking and terrifyingly long, though for its' time, well written.

Being about ten at the time I found it very heavy going; (physically heavy too, it was - beautifully bound.) I enjoyed the challenge and could not fail to be impressed. But oh, how thoroughly patronizingly racist it was; exuding the worst of the ethics of upper-middle class Victorian Britain; their smugly simple belief in their 'natural right' to rule; in this case, India, and of course, their own subservient classes.

Remnants of that Victorian 'super-class/ super-race' psyche pollute high and low corners of our society still, and compel us to understand that the poorest and most exploited sections of 'our' working classes now reside in the so-called Third World.

Book No.2. '**CATCH 22**': because it halts 'The Conventional Wisdom' of the '39/45 War dead in its' tracks. Seriously funny all the way, it never allows that C.W. to regain the reins of its self-righteous War Chariot. And the characters! They are all real, I knew them, 'met' them, myself.

No. 3. Upton Sinclair's, *The Meat Market: (and others in similar vein)*. An authentic story of the immigrant working classes to America in the tough 'twenties/ thirties' decades, with not only a passionate cry for socialism (or else!) but also a *revealing* account of the way humans dealt with animals: an early 'animal rights' cry.

So to... SARTRE! (*Nausea*, but obviously others too). He makes the world spin round the other way so violently that you have to cling on; but the rough ride is worth it: *Thrown Into the world, Man is condemned to be free.*

An optimistic pessimist, he accepts Marxism, though not uncritically. Marxism's 'totalisation of knowledge', he declares, needs his (and others?) existentialism of the 'subjective individual human being' to inhabit it. Here I must say that Sartre led me to 'Simone de Beauvoir' and her brilliant and wonderfully *entertaining*

writing (Sartre's is *not*, usually) with her own unique existentialism.

Finally, I have to confess that I ignored our ruling class dictum and read Marx(ism) - some of it! I could blame Sartre for that but I won't. **Marxism, an analysis, not a dogma.** For me it made sense of so much that before was nonsense. Marx even allows the 'Free Will' of Sartre to reside together with Marxism's own 'Determinism', within *one* of his marvellous 'contradictions', which I personally cannot do without!

Sorry I've gone over the odds, but I did say, five and a bit...

Nothing modern? Well, er... Jimmy McGovern...?

Hand in Hand

Update

Eighteen months ago Hand in Hand was little more than a glint in the Fed's eye, but after a lot of hard work and a successful bid for Lottery funding the project finally got up and running last March.

It is a three-year training programme which aims to increase Fed members' organisational, fund-raising and marketing skills, and to help create long-term networks of groups which can share training. Here is an update on what has gone on over the autumn and what is planned for 99:

Working with the Media

Hand in Hand's busy autumn started with a weekend course at Wedgwood College in September on Working with the Media. Run by Password Training, the course aimed to help people develop their publicity and marketing skills in order to raise the profile of their group or organisation in the press and media. We had a mixture of participants from a wide range of newer and older member groups, and the majority had never attended a Fed course before.

The course covered: marketing a writers' group to its local community, attracting the interest of local media, building relationships with journalists, working with TV and radio, interview techniques, and writing press releases.

Two guest speakers, a journalist from Stoke's local paper and a radio journalist from Radio Stoke, gave useful insights into how journalists work and what can be done to establish relationships and place stories with them.

Participants rated the course very highly and felt they had gained confidence and practical skills. There was such a demand for the course that we are considering running it again in autumn 1999, perhaps in London this time. I will be in touch with member groups about this nearer the time, but do contact me before then if you would like more information or would like to register early.

Promoting Your Group and Events

Another major Hand in Hand training project, this time based with Commonword in Manchester, is being developed for early 1999.

The first part of the project will offer groups training in how to attract and keep new members, and will include practical opportunities for groups to design and produce effective publicity materials. Then the project will move on to offer training in planning, organising, funding and promoting writing and literature events.

For more information, contact me or Cathy Bolton at Commonword (0161 236 2773)

Helping Hand

Talking to Fed member groups last spring, it quickly became clear that there was a need for individual groups to have access to intensive, short-term training and support on particular issues affecting them. So the Helping Hand scheme was set up to offer short bursts (up to four days) of specialised, tailor-made training for individual groups. This way, groups which may not feel ready to get involved in a major, long-term training project can still benefit from training.

Three groups have had Helping Hand training up to now, with another six groups benefiting from the scheme within the next few months. The main areas groups are asking for training in are fund-raising, marketing, financial planning, developing their publishing, and running groups.

So far all the groups using the scheme have some kind of paid worker, so for 1999 we are hoping that smaller groups without paid workers will use the scheme. I will be contacting groups about the scheme soon.

Making A Living As A Writer

Four London groups, with Hand in Hand, have planned a training programme for writers who want to explore and develop opportunities for getting writing-related work. It will be a practical course, once a week over eight weeks with some follow-up, with guest speakers, and will cover getting published, working as a writer in residence, working in schools and prisons, getting on to the performance circuit, getting a foot in the door of TV and radio, freelance journalism and lots more.

So if you live in or near London and want to know more about, for example, finding an agent, how to pitch an idea to TV, your rights and responsibilities as a writer in a school, or simply how to survive and plan your time – then this could be the course for you. It will take place in the early summer at a central accessible London venue.

To be put on the mailing list to receive more details as they become available, contact me at the address or number below.

If you are unable to attend the course but would be interested in what it's covering, information and tips from each session will feature in the magazine later in the year.

Course for Small Groups

Hand in Hand is planning a weekend course specially to address the needs of smaller Fed member groups who do not have a paid worker. I will be canvassing the views of these groups in the coming weeks, but if you are a member of a smaller, newer group and have any ideas on what kind of training would be useful, please do get in touch before then.

1999 Projects

In 1999 Hand in Hand is particularly keen to develop training projects with:

- Member groups which haven't benefited from the project so far;
- Member groups which don't have a paid worker;
- Member groups which want to explore ways of working with other groups and organisations;
- Member groups which have a specific training need
- Member groups who have links with, or would like to forge links with, older people.

So if you have any thoughts, ideas, queries about how your group could be involved, do contact me.

*Christine Bridgwood
Training Development Officer
37 Airdale Road
Stone, Staffs, ST15 8DP
Tel/fax: 01785 286 177
E-mail: handinhand@cwcom.net*

Hilda Cotterill 1912-1999

Hilda Cotterill died on 4th January after a long illness at the end of a long and fruitful life. She was without doubt the best loved person on the Sheffield writing scene. She had no children of her own, but her many friends were the children she nurtured.

She left school at 14 with no formal qualifications, but a love of reading. With her husband Jack, she ran a fish and chip shop in Sheffield for many years. Her writing career began late in life after Jack's death, when she came to Heeley Writers and also began her long and happy membership of Hurlfield Writers.

Hilda did not venture far from home. Members of the Federation may remember her from the AGM/Festival that took place in Sheffield, or they may have admired her poetry in the collections published by the community press.

She shared *"Coming of Age"*, a collection edited by John Killick for Other Voices Press. *"Sidelines"*, published by Rotherham and District Arts Council is solely devoted to her work, as is *"Changing the Decor"*, published by South Yorkshire Writers.

Hilda was an accomplished poet, but what stands out to me is the honesty and courage of her vision. Here are two examples:

Teaching Hospital

"Did you ever see such wrinkles?"

I hated him then, as I lay half naked, on the examining couch, opened tight shut eyes, and saw a ring of bright, intelligent faces, dutiful smiles, heard the odd snicker.

He poked in private places, told an anecdote, name-dropped, commented on age and deterioration.

Abruptly I ceased to interest him.

He and his flotilla swished from the cubicle, but one, quite young lagged behind. (I remember his eyes.)

"take no notice of him" he said.

"Let me help you down."

And gently, so gently gave me his hand.

It Is Enough

It is enough, this moment
This stone behind my back,
Oven hot.

It is enough, this quiet,
This warmed-through moment.

A stone thrush, so still
In this stone-walled garden.
Nothing moves,
The thrush sculpted in sun.

I never saw a bird so still
So unafraid
Cloud skirts the sun,
Cat skulks along the wall,
Stone thrush
Elongates,
Shadow stains the grass,
Upward rush of wings.

I too, am stone
Frightened by shadows
No shadow here as yet,
Cat gone, Thrush gone
Silent trees and the distance of water.

Jet rips the sky,
Startles a clucking blackbird

Both gone
Butterfly flits
is gone

Aloneness
Only this moment of sun-warmth

This. NOW.
Enough.

Hilda will be greatly missed by all those who were privileged to know her

Alan Brown

Fitz Lewis:

My Relationship With The Fed

“ I did not know that was what the festival was about. I whispered to Steve, I did not know I should carry some of my work, I have no poems. Write one, he whispered back and pushed me two sheets of paper from his book.”

How it began:

I was an able reader from a very early age and for that reason grew up to love reading and writing, with a passion for writing letters. In those days I read comics, detective stories and news papers, along with a running series of books called *The Hardy Boys*.

All the enjoyment and education that I derived from reading brought the thought home to me that if I enjoy what other people writes, I may be able to write so that other people can get something from it.

After becoming unemployed in 1986 and had idled away the first year I joined an adult English class (basic) then went on to gain a certificate in GCSE, and eventually dropped out of an English Literature course in 1990.

In June :1988 the first poem I wrote was published in an anthology by Commonword (Black and Priceless).

I faced an audience of about fifty for the first time at the launch of the book, twice that day. At 1.30pm. and 9.00pm. My shirt was soaking wet at the end of each occasion.

I had not heard of the Federation of Worker Writers & Community Publishers, but one Wednesday evening at a workshop at Commonword I was asked if I would be interested to attend the Festival that year. I did not know what it was about but accepted.

I was sent to see Patricia at Gatehouse Books, three days later we were on our way. Steve Waling was my confidante. We arrived at the venue at about 7.30pm., and enjoyed it all until during the AGM I overheard a talk about reading in the evening. All I carried was a diary and my pen, no written work. I did not know that was what the festival was about. I whispered to Steve, I did not know I should carry some of my work, I have no poems. Write one, he whispered back and pushed me two sheets of paper from his book.

There and then I got down to work and that night the encouragement and

support I received was *overwhelming*, but only Steve Waling knew that it was really a hurried up job. That was the beginning of my relationship with all three organisations. I have been on the Commonword Executive for about four years, one term as Treasurer.

I have participated in many workshops facilitated by Gatehouse and perform at most of their book launches. I have always attended the festival, except for a three year break when I found a another job. Over the years the Fed has helped me *to realise myself and my writing ability*, giving me more confidence as I go along. After shying away for many years, today I must say it is an honour to sit among you as a member of the Executive. I thank you.

Fitz Lewis

Alvin Culzac:

How I became aware of the Fed

“I took part in a community photographic project... An exhibition of our efforts attracted some acclaim. I had to write a poem to complement my contribution, and I wrote “Boys Will Grow Into Young Men” which I performed at the 1998 Fed. Festival.”

I joined Shorelink Writers, about two years ago when i was unemployed and needed some mental stimulation. I chose creative writing, and started a computer course, because I was hearing so much about “information technology”

I was under the tutelage of Nan McCubbin, whose policy it is to allow individuals to develop at their own pace, while being part of a wider group. Eventually all members produced something they could be proud of.

Shorelink

Shorelink began in 1990 with basic adult education classes in Hastings and Bexhill. Published writers were brought in to inspire

them. Over the years people became very committed and a special class was started at the 73a Day Centre, for people with mental health problems in Bexhill. These classes were funded by the centre for continuing education of the University of Sussex and Hastings College.

When I was out of work I took part in a community photographic project, which was run free of charge by Sussex University, and the Arts and Leisure services, in Hastings. Cameras were issued to all, and a professional photographer tutored us in the finer arts of photography.

Exhibition

An exhibition of our efforts attracted some acclaim. I had to write a poem to complement my contribution, “Boys Will Grow Into Young Men” which I performed at the 1998 Fed. Festival.

A grant was given by the Baring Foundation for the exhibition to travel, and it duly went on its way all over the country and to some parts of Europe. We held a party to say farewell, and every now and then we would receive an update on its progress.

Now enter Rt. Hon Chris Smith MP, Secretary of State for culture, media

and sports. He came up to Hastings to meet us and to be briefed on how the project got started. (This was not his only reason for visiting Hastings I might add). I took the opportunity to pass on a couple of salient politically slanted poems, to the cabinet minister, via my local MP. I duly received a letter acknowledging that the poems were passed on, with a by-line that the sentiments expressed were not agreeable. To judge for yourselves check out the next Federation Broadsheet.

Alvin Culzac

RAYMOND WILLIAMS PRIZES FOR COMMUNITY PUBLISHING 1999

The Raymond Williams Prizes were set up by the Arts Council of England (formerly the Arts Council of Great Britain) and are now in their ninth year. They are awarded annually to two published works of outstanding creative and imaginative quality which reflect the voices and experiences of the people of particular communities.

THE PRIZES

The winner will receive £3,000, £2,000 to the publisher and £1,000 to the authors/groups. The runner-up prize is £2,000: £1,500 to the publisher and £500 to the authors/groups.

Judges for the 1999 Prize are the poet and writer, James Berry OBE; Ruth Borthwick, co-Director of Spread The Word; and Dr Alastair Niven, Literature Director at the British Council, who was responsible for establishing Prizes in 1990.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY?

Any UK non-profit making community-based publisher producing books in a mutual and co-operative way. Publishers entries (one only) must have been first published in 1998. Previous winners have included publications which take a broad definition of 'community' to include gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and other self-defined sources of cultural identity.

This year's Prize will give preference to those applications which demonstrate a clear sense of place and which result from a truly collaborative process. All genres of creative writing are eligible, but should be more than "merely documentary". Judges will be looking for publications which are well-structured, inventive in their use of material, and which engage the reader.

PRODUCTION AND DESIGN

Many community publishers work with limited resources. 'The judges will regard favourably those books that achieve the highest possible standard of production and design within these constraints. Particular *attention* should be paid to proofreading by applicants.

HOW TO APPLY

For an application *form* contact: Valerie Olteanu, Literature Department, Arts Council of England, 14 Great Peter Street London SW1P 3NQ Tel: 0171 973 6442, Fax: 0171 973 6520, e-mail: valerie.olteanu@artscouncil.org.uk The deadline for entries is Friday 30 April 1999.

Networking at The Point

Some 40 writers met on January 19th at Doncaster's new arts centre, The Point, in the third event organised through a network of writers groups across South Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire.

The events, initiated as a result of contacts between Heeley Writers, recent new Fed members The Grimsby Writers and Rotherham Writers have attracted other writers and groups in the Doncaster region with a mix of performance and discussion. The Fed has contributed to the cost of running this and the next event in the spring.

While the bulk of those attend an afternoon performance somewhat reminiscent of the Fed's Festival Readings, smaller groups take place around a surreal round table (fitted with hooter, whistle, false teeth and known as Ian McMillan's table) to organise the next event and share information.

These meetings generate "homework" themes which are then voted on to focus the next Network session: the previous meeting in November produced lively pieces about "Recipes and Relationships". This quarter's theme "Origins and Time" was concluded with a talk from children's writer Linda Hoy. Reading

excerpts from her recent books *United on Vacation*, *Poltergeist*, and *The Oracle*, she related her own experiences from growing up in Sheffield to her writing, and spoke of the importance of writers workshops in fostering and working on writing.

Nick Pollard

The Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust

The Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust aims to advance public education, learning, and knowledge in all aspects of the history and philosophy of socialism and the working class movement.

Founded in 1980 by Norman Melburn the Trust was named for his friend and fellow Marxist, the lawyer Barry Amiel. Both men are now commemorated in the name of the Trust, following Norman Melburn's death in 1991.

The Trust says "**Marxism** is not a fixed interpretation of history and society but a critical method, which generates a different critique in different periods and situations. As a philosophy, its purpose is to understand the world in order to change it. It therefore takes creative account of other critiques of society as part of the reality which it seeks to understand and change.

Historically Marxism has sought to understand capitalist society, and has worked for change to a socialist form of society. Its critique has now necessarily expanded to include 20th-century socialist societies and the received Marxist tradition itself.

The trustees have adopted the following statement as a working translation of the Trust's objects: societies, as they depart from their past, but of every society in which a new form of socialism is argued for or attempted in the future, will be a part of the history of socialism. The part played by the working class movement past, present, and future, is in itself a proper object of study, both in its own right and as a part of the history of socialism and the study of Marxism.

Thus the Trust's objectives may be seen as parts of a continuing process of understanding the development of modern societies *in* the light of the intellectual and social movements which have sought and still seek to transform them to non-exploitative and egalitarian societies."

The Trust as well as initiating *activity* or research in pursuit of these objects has funded lectures, discussions, seminars, and workshops; the carrying out of research, written work, and publications; and the *maintenance* of libraries and archive materials.

Requests for funding should be made on an Application Form available from the Trust. **Please contact** the Secretary for **application** forms or **further information: The Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust**, 5 North Villas, London NW1 9BJ. Tel: 0171 428 9383 fax: 0171 428 9193

Bittersweet

Ed: Karen McCarthy

Publisher: Women's Press

Price: £8.99

ISBN: 0-7043-4607-9

Anthologies are probably the most single most important vehicle for showcasing new work and *Bittersweet* is an outstanding example of this. With such poets as America's first African-American poet laureate, Rita Dove, and Pulitzer Prize winner, Alice Walker plus other respected names from across the Diaspora, previously unpublished and new poets finding themselves alongside these stalwarts, gives them incredible weight.

The book itself is weighty, nearly 300 pages of funny sad, witty, angry thought provoking poetry. Split into eleven sections using the elements and the environment, such as water, salt and electricity, it is loosely thread by the theme of womanhood.

Poets known primarily as performance artists are here such as **Patience Agbabi**, **Vanessa Richards**, and live artists such as **Dorothea Smartt**, **Stacy Makishi** and **Akure Wall**. Lesser known poets whose work has a lasting impact are the prose-poetry stories of girlhood by **Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni** and the simply expressed worldly thoughts of **Ramabai Espinet**. Although the representation of poets from the African continent is sadly limited - and this is not for want of (published) African women poets, woman or not, Black or not, *Bittersweet* will enhance the flavour of any book collection.

Kadija

Playing with Time

**Playing with Time:
mothers and the meaning
of literacy by Jane Mace
(UCL Press)**

I confess I haven't actually finished reading this book yet (being a mother without much time to play with!) but I will – I'm hooked.

At first glance I thought it might be perhaps a bit too theoretical and specialist, but a quick flick through and my eye was caught and held by one of the many quotes weaving through the text, a woman talking about her mother:

"When you read, it used to annoy her. She tried not to get annoyed, but you know how you get lost in a book? And she would take a book off me sometimes and she'd say 'I've spoken to you three times' and I'd say, 'I'm sorry mother I haven't heard you'. She found it very difficult to understand this fascination that my father and I had for books." This struck a chord and I read on, fascinated.

This utterly compelling book is full of stories, fragments of women's lives, hidden histories. Its primary sources are both written and oral memories of mothers and grandmothers bringing up children in the early twentieth century, but it also uses social and cultural history, poetry and fiction to explore literacy and its meaning in the lives of mothers.

Jane Mace's voice is unsentimental and wonderfully readable – there is an urgency in her writing, a need to know, that is infectious and makes you feel like a partner in her "search for the reading and writing lives of women in the past". She turns the easy assumptions about literacy and about motherhood on their heads, and reminds us that the personal really is political. Everything is here that should be: class, love, anger, power, injustice, time, memory.

Christine Bridgwood

ps There will be further reviews of this book in future issues

I'd Ask and She'd Nod

**I'd Ask and She'd Nod
Poetry by Pam Leeson,
Commonword (Crocus
imprint)**

ISBN 0 946745 81 1

£3.50

If you like your poetry up-front intimate and sexy then this is for you. It succeeds because of the poet's willingness to take risks with her subjects. *Ghost Talker*, an extract from a longer piece and the best poem in the selection succeeds in this way.

Pam has the ability to pick out the essentials of the subject and disregard the rest, delivering it in a series of punchy clipped lines that immerse you in a world we would probably all recognise:

drink a toast to love
to love and all who have
died in it
gone blind and mute to it
forgotten their children for it
two-timed their night for it

Phil Hatfield

Mudfog Voodoo

Raining Is No Excuse

by Pat Brown,

ISBN 1 899503 31 5

£3.50

A smouldering ember this collection of poems from Pat Brown. Seaside town in the closed season, closed in thoughts of the lonely and retired hanging on behind. A sifting of voices in beach cafes, wet days at the beach, tea dances, bridge, relationships, resignations and disappointments around the development of a late love:

“The are seen together
watching

Rombout’s coffee filtering,
buying tickets

for performances and taking
turn and turn about

to treat to casseroles and
quiches,

carafes of house red wine
and beer.”

You can see the rain
lashing on the windows,
the condensation on the
“Vacancies” signs, and feel
the texture of the bamboo
pattern wallpaper...

Over the Border

by Norah Hill

ISBN 1 899503 34 X

£4.99

Perhaps Norah Hill’s dedication to her mother best sums up this book of Teesside poems “When y’re little, the cracks in the pavement at very vivid”.

It is unfortunate that such a marvellous collection, so brightly focused, should be so fogged with errata. These poems, often working childhood memories into reflections from the present, are carefully crafted to fit a conversational idiom into a flowing structure, rolling with deceptive ease.

Three Little Deaths

by Marion Husband

ISBN 1 899503 33 1

£2.00

Three short stories, as the title suggests, sex and death, against a background of war, the first and second world wars, and the Falklands. These are excellent reading, dense and multilayered, and Marion Husband’s characters have a delicious turn of phrase “a nowt in uniform” says, one; “memories are like holes in teeth” another. Wish I could have thought of that.

Sublunary Voodoo

by Subhadassi

ISBN 1899503 32 3

£2.00

The first poem I opened the book on was “Mutability”, which talks of love as “a sofa, comforting, with nothing to pay til 1998.” Immediately it appealed to me, but I should have started at the beginning of this pithy poetic love story. Its fated, and Subhadassi “tells it like it is”.

Nick Pollard

**Mudfog c/o 11 Limes Rd,
Linthorpe, Middlesborough
TS5 7QR. Include 50p p&p with
each title.**

The 1999 FWWCP Festival of Writing

**April 9 to 11 1999, at The Alsager Campus of
The Manchester Metropolitan University, Alsager, Cheshire**

The Really Good News

The good news is that the cost for FWWCP Members, Friends of the Fed, and Magazine Subscribers will be **£78** per person, full board. This is nearly £20 cheaper than the 1998 Festival! The cost for non-members will be **£98**, £25 lower than 1998. Contact us at the address below for a booking form. NOTE: All bookings **must** be made and paid for **by March 24th**.

The Even Better News!

All FWWCP Members, Friends of the Fed, and Magazine Subscribers attending will get £5 knocked off their fee to help towards their travel! For people in the North West Arts and Yorkshire and Humberside Arts Boards regions there are even larger discounts! Contact us for details.

Workshops and Readings

There will be workshops run by members from all around the country on writing for children; poetry; drama; radio; typography; publishing. If you wish to convene a workshop, contact us as soon as possible.

There is of course the Saturday night celebratory reading, where you get a chance to read and perform and see and hear others from around the country. A truly memorable time!

We will also be running a diary writing project of your journey to and your time at the Festival, to take to conferences in the USA!

So where on Earth is Alsager?

Alsager is a large village in Cheshire, about 10 miles north of Stoke-on-Trent and 5 miles east of Crewe. It has a local railway station with good connections to the main line network. Alsager is about 3 miles from the M6 Motorway.

Festival Contact

For more information and booking forms write to:

Deborah Rogers
FWWCP Festival Co-ordinator
67 The Boulevard
Tunstall
Stoke-on-Trent
ST6 6BD

e-mail: fedfest@cwcom.net

phone: **01782 822327**

Forms are available to print off our Website:

<http://www.fwwcp.mcmail.com>

We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you at the 1999 Festival.

Federation Magazine is published quarterly.

Subscriptions are £7.00 per year or £13 for two years. Subscribers get a generous discount on training and other events and free copies of *The Broadsheet*.

To Subscribe send your name and address and a cheque/PO made to "FWWCP" to the address below.

The Deadline for your writing to be considered for the next issue of *Federation Magazine* is November 13th 1998. If you wish to review books, write an article or advertise contact The Editors at the address below.

Federation Magazine is published by The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers. The views and opinions published are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of The FWWCP or our funders.

All correspondence, reviews and articles (on disk if possible) should be sent to
FWWCP, 67 The Boulevard,
Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent ST6 6BD
or e-mail fwwcp@cwcom.net

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