

The Hedgerow



Issue 31, Winter 2012 ...a tangle of words from local writers...

The Hedgerow, a free publication from writers in the Epping Forest area, is distributed in libraries and bookshops from east London to Epping. Thank you to everyone who sent in submissions or helped with this edition. If you would like to write for *The Hedgerow* we would be pleased to hear from you.

Camomile Lawn

The gentle camomile lady was generous with advice
On her soft green website
But what hit me
Jumping off my hard screen was

'Camomile is not competitive'

As I tend a small new lawn
My heart goes out to my camomile
I have no time but find time
A meditative hunting for little enemies

My eyes, beadier than ever
Pounce on the tiniest weed
Examining every square inch
Knowing I have to be the Great Protector

My camomile would never
Phone the boss
To demand
Why she didn't get the job

Would let her lover
Dance in public
With a new floozy
And go home alone

Driven to my garden
Without complaint
She has no choice
But to stay forever

As I tread
She releases sweet perfume
As she spreads into a springy joined-up mass
I look forward to our future

I think she is teaching me
The meaning of love.

Ros Kane

Olympic Park Installation - Waterfall Words

Beneath dark bridge span
four crystal curtain drops in sequence start....
spotlit words - one -
shimmer down - two -
wind blown entry -three-
fountain splash - four -
changing the River Lea
into a magic underworld - stop....

Beneath dark bridge span
four crystal curtain drops in sequence start....

Hazel Dongworth

Wintersong

I heard somebody playing my tune today
A boy standing by my pond was singing my song
Unheard by me for fifty years.

He was playing my
"Stonesong on icepond" song
Skimming stones skilfully across the ice
Singing as they resounded
Echoing from the water under the ice
Singing, skimming, sliding, shirring -
A sound unheard in any place
Or any other time

"It only works on ice" he muttered
"Thanks for talking to me."

A lanky inarticulate adolescent
Bored with throwing stones
But finally finding his inner voice
Unknown until frozen.

Jean Medcalf

The Cupboard

"I've come from London to escape the bombs."
"Me, too - I live in Winson Green, in Brum."
"But, Roy, what is that tap-tap-tapping sound?"
He makes a sign. Bright-eyed, I hold my tongue.
Our nursery bedroom has a second door.
"This way," he says. I'm new, and follow him.
The landing's long, with carpeting, stained boards.
"Coo, what a lot of doors!" I say, bemused.
"The Squire, his wife, their daughters, sons," says Roy.
"The cupboard, John - see, all the family's coats!"
The door swings wide, the tap-tap-tapping stops.
I step inside. "I'll tell you something, John,
Old Granny Washbourne, after, hid in here."
"But why, what for?" A shiver grips my spine.
"She killed the Squire, blood dripping from her hand,
And hid in here, went mad, and tapped away."
"What does she want?" A cold draught bangs the door.
It's dark. A hand, caressing, strokes my arm.
A gentle voice breathes softly in my ear:
"Those cursèd Roundheads slew my lord, dear boy.
They said I did the deed - how foul their words!"
I place my hand on hers, and feel the rings.
The door swings open; only Roy is there.
"Come on, he says, "we must go down to tea."
But this encounter changes everything:
Ghosts from the past, and dark, become my friends.

Michael Wetton

Dowager

December 1977

The Queen is much interested to hear of you celebrating your 100th birthday, and sends warm congratulations and good wishes. Private secretary

Behind me stands the house. I have my back to the white washed door of the Hall, overlooking the front steps to the lawn that sweeps down to the ha-ha. Beyond, rough meadowland stretches across to the lake, where the children loved to go and play on the water.

They tell me the doors will need to be stripped of paint and restored to their former glory. Apparently there is a fashion for original features. I gladly agreed to the restoration work. The first Lady C insisted on white doors to keep the ghosts of her dead sons at bay. Of course the irony was Lord C profited from the grief of others. His colour-fast black dyes stood the family in good stead when mourning was a protracted affair, and people dressed the part. Even a poor man had a pair of black boots for the occasion in the old days.

Curiously I owe everything to formal observation at a time when all formality has left public life. Yet the people that come to visit the Hall want to snatch a moment in time before the wars when people could be confident of their place in the world.

My predecessor favoured this side of the house, with its distant panorama beyond the rifle field where the military once camped; a vista that once dreamt of pre-eminence over everything in its sight even to the Black Mountains on the far horizon.

Yet I have always preferred the other side of the house. The sitting room by the back door where the family let itself in and out, and staff could be seen crossing the courtyard. That is my domain - I keep my television on there, on the lacquered cabinet. The servants are gone, and the family prefers London life, leaving me to live out my days here alone. I do my own cooking in the Butler's pantry. I have learned to adapt. Time has taught me to be cautious of inheritance.

Nothing really belongs to me anymore - everything has been endowed. They asked to change the wall paper in my parlour, but I'm rather fond of it. I have heard them talking in the Business Room, saying it's hopelessly out of keeping with good taste, needs to be replaced - like me! They will have to wait.

One day, I will be gone, but my house will remain, custodian of the place.

Emma Liebeskind

The Garden 2012

Gardening isn't a competition – unless you count Chelsea. Nevertheless each year there are the winners and losers. Every year in the garden is different – it has to be, subject to the vagaries of weather, time, and resources. But, so much hope and anticipation can reap both delight and disappointments.

So what has happened to my Garden 2012? The spring bulbs were disappointing. In the first six months weeds and brambles grew happily with little check as the rain came down. It was wet enough for the Astilbes finally to take off as the clay soil retained the water, ankle deep in one particular period.

Now that the growing is over I can look back at what won Gold for me. By a short head (a blue one) it has to be Ipomoea Heavenly Blue. Of the Morning Glories Heavenly Blue is particularly tender. From one packet, eight seeds germinated. With much nurturing six of these grew strong enough to plant out. These were put into large pots with suitable compost and placed near plants already growing by walls and trellises. They were certainly not left to the mercy of the clay! I was left with two, hauling themselves up into the wisteria, discovering too late that they were the caviar of snails. On wet evenings I patrolled my surviving pot with a torch and a bucket. I watched the plant twine up, saw the tiny buds appear and then one bright sunny morning in August there was a flower – a Heavenly Blue it was, like the richest, softest, most delicate material. I admit to a lump in the throat. Each morning they were there, never more than three at a time to last just one day. Definitely the Gold medal.

The silver goes to Trachelospermum Jasminoides, a plant whose perfume first enchanted me, many years ago on a soft, warm, evening in Rome. My first specimen was left behind when I moved and its replacement could not be left to the mercies of the clay so was grown on in a large pot just outside the back door. Several years nurturing resulted this summer in a 4' cascade of white star-like flowers with a scent which put a smile on my face every time I stepped outside.

The bronze – here there was some indecision, but the Lupin tree got it. Again quite a bit of effort went into this. The seeds were germinated the previous spring, planted out nearly full grown in autumn, swathed in fleece for the winter and uncovered with fingers tightly crossed in spring. The morning you see the masses of lupin-like buds covering the plant and the gorgeous scent as the sun warms them you want to give them a party.

Two runners up: the nasturtiums which climbed and bloomed in a glory of reds and oranges all over a particularly dark corner of the garden. But they seem to like clay and no effort on their or my part was involved except to use an awful lot of seeds. Also, a usually small clump of Lythrum which sits at the edge of the pond. In this Olympic year an enormous clump grew to a towering 6ft of raspberry coloured flowers. Breathtaking, but with seemingly little effort. We do require a bit of effort from our winners!

Eileen Ward

That Takes the Biscuit

My niece arrives unexpectedly with her three month old baby. Barney my mongrel or designer dog as he likes to be known has never been in contact with a small baby before and I am unsure of his reaction. I place the baby on the floor and in trots Barney who gives a very thorough inspection of the infant. I am on tender hooks wondering what he will do when he goes out to his bed and comes back with the biggest biscuit he can find and places it on the baby's tummy. We were speechless.

Colleen McMath

Guitar Star Had A Long Run

Born in East Ham, the passing of distinguished guitarist Bert Weedon in April, deserves mention in this publication. Most authors, famous or not, would be delighted with the sales achieved by Bert and his 'Play In A Day' guitar manual-said to have exceeded the million mark. It came into print in 1957, when the British sniffle craze was at its peak, and like Lonnie Donegan, Bert was able to simplify the ability to play the guitar-leading to The Shadows. The Beatles, and other top groups, who, in turn, inspired others along the way.

My earliest recollections of Bert are hearing him on the radio-the old Light Programme, at the beginning of the 1950's. He was, I think, playing in the resident BBC dance band or orchestra, and way before any fame, although he had been mentioned in a local newspaper. In those days, there was very little television-one channel from the BBC, which seemingly gave endless transmission time to either the test card(for TV installers)or to an 'Intermission' between programmes. It was, eventually, on an intermission, showing a potter's wheel, that the music being heard, "Stranger Than Fiction" came from Bert. This became his first solo disc for Parlophone in 1955 as 'Bert Weedon and his Big Guitar'. As rock'n'roll beckoned, so he found himself as an in-demand session guitarist, playing on discs by most of the British teenage idols of the time. But it was 1959 that he was propelled into the limelight, when his version of "Guitar Boogie Shuffle" made the UK Top Ten. In the early 60's, he was a regular on a children's television series called Tuesday Rendezvous' with ex-skiffle star Wally Whyton & Muriel Young, and went on to top the UK album charts with '22 Golden Guitar Greats' in 1976.

Bert died aged 91, having collected an OBE in 2001. He was one East Londoner who certainly made his mark in the music business.

Alan Wheeler

My Bag and Me Reunited

Many years ago I went to a class where I made a big bag in navy and white mattress ticking with red braid handles and navy bottom. It languished in a drawer unfinished, as workshop pieces tend to do. Eventually I thought I couldn't die without finishing the bag. Truthfully I was scared of sewing all the thicknesses of the handle to the bag. Finished, it went back into the drawer. What was the use of it after all the effort I had made to finish it, and all the years it had lain there? In June 2011, Marsh Quilters were having an exhibition. I was going to be away, but wanted to support the day, so I gave the said bag to the Chinese Auction. Do you know what that is? I didn't. All items are displayed with a container in front of them. You pay a fee and put your name in the container in front of your chosen item. At the end of the day a draw chooses the winner of each item. I didn't know who won my bag and gave it no more thought, never expecting to see it again. At the October meeting of Marsh Quilters this year, I spotted a bag very like mine. As it was a unique bag, it must have been mine. The owner was a member of the Quilters' Guild. She was very pleased to meet me and to tell me that she loves her bag and uses it every day. In fact she was so delighted that she gave me a big kiss and thanked me for her ever so useful, strong and substantial bag and said she had often wondered if she would ever meet the maker. It made my day and hers, and gave me great pleasure that my bag had found such an appreciative home and owner.

Rhonda Anderson

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Editor: Penny Freeston

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Sweets Remembered

On the tube recently I sat down by an abandoned wrapper from a Mackintosh's Toffee Cup although it couldn't have been as they went out of circulation about thirty years ago. That screwed up piece of coppery russet foil reminded me of the tiny chocolate bar shaped like a Bonio dog biscuit oozing with sticky toffee cream. Although impossible to eat without making a complete mess, the effort was well worth it. Just like a Cadbury's crème egg that once seemed huge to an eight-year-old; the combination of sticky foil, melting chocolate and oozing filling was irresistible. I use to gnaw through the chocolate of a cream egg, savouring the rest to come, as my husband would have worked his way through a Walnut Whip, and even now I can't let Easter pass without treating myself to at least one. They seem smaller now, or am I just bigger and older? And the foil, though still bright blue, red and yellow, seems thinner too.

One thing that's remained constant is a Terry's chocolate orange. Christmas isn't the same without one of those on the go. I love the thick pleated foil covering, the orange scent of the chocolate and the way the segments stubbornly stay together on being prised apart. We ate lots of sweets when I was growing up, probably because they were rationed prior to that. My fillings testify a diet of squares of Clarnico fudge wrapped in Cellophane, copious numbers of white chocolate rainbow drops and a penchant for sugary fondants in pretty pastel colours, handpicked from a box lined in tissue paper on Saturday evenings. All too sickly now, but I could still manage a few of my teeth could stand it. I'll give the sherbet lemons and aniseed candy we used to pass round in Latin classes a miss. And then there were boxes of Quality Street, all tipped out on the coffee table; my favourites were the soft centres and those elusive triangular chocolates wrapped in green foil we used to rake through the dross to find- Now that they sell them individually and in larger sizes they don't have the same cachet, somehow. Like opening a box of Black Magic and diving in to find the orange crème, its rarity was part of the attraction.

In the 60s After Eight mints came about and I still love rustling through the empty papers in those long dark green and gold boxes to see if any wafer-thin chocolate covered mints are left. Sturdy Mint Chocs, their former rivals, were an expensive cinema treat in the old days; a cardboard hexagonal prism wrapped in Cellophane, much more upmarket than buckets of pop corn and ice cream flavoured with cookies. Matchmakers came along as a cheaper alternative, although the unsatisfactory flimsy box often fell apart, unlike some of those Terry's caskets, built like jewel boxes, that long out-last their contents. My favourite Matchmaker chocolate sticks were coffee or orange flavoured. What else did I like? Heavy coin-shaped Nestlé's milk-chocolate croquettes, tint tubes of sweet-smelling Parma violets, Cadbury's twenties: miniature chocolates I often bought for my children with an accompanying plastic slot-machine dispenser. A quarter of neatly wrapped Terry's Neapolitans and a bar of Fry's 5-Centre would set me up nicely anytime. Such is the power of advertising that black slacks and roll-neck sweater will always evoke a man scaling walls 'all because the lady loves Milk Tray', a white sandy beach will be a dead ringer for a Bounty ad. and belly dancing forever associated with Fry's Turkish Delight, 'full of eastern promise'. 'Have a break, have a KitKat' or a Cadbury's Flake that never fails to shower fragments of chocolate over your clothes, unlike its sensuous image, hazily filmed in poppy fields in days gone by.

Penny Freeston

Once I was a soldier

Once I was a soldier, with rifle in my hand,
Proud to be of service, marching with the band.

Once I was a soldier, advancing to the front,
Glad to be of service, eager for the hunt.

Once I was a soldier, alert to gas and gun,
Trying to be of service, but feeling almost done.

Once I was a soldier, standing in the rain,
My mates are still close by me, no longer feeling pain.

We tried to be of service, we tried to be so brave,
But now we lie here lonely, in our foreign grave.

Howard Anderson

What of leaders, bold and bright
Who go to war on pretext slight
Who ask our sons to fight and die
Without the spine to tell us why

Howard Anderson

An answer to Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poet said
The poppies blow, among the dead.
Between the crosses, row on row,
A dad, a son, a friend, a foe.
Once they lived but now they lie,
Below the gun's relentless cry.

We are the living, but what is life?
Is it war and death and strife
Or is it that which leads us all
To love and laughter or what we call
Joy? Yes, we see the sunset glow
And we see our children grow
In Flanders fields.

So keep the faith with those who died,
Don't join the ranks of those who lied,
Of those who will not tell you why,
That our son's sons will fight and die
In Flanders fields.

Howard Anderson