

The Hedgerow



Issue 32, Summer 2013 ...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.

Birthday

Of all the gifts which date from birth
Released at times of joy and fun,
What better than your playful mirth
And sense of life as more than dun?
What better prospect lies ahead,
Than shifting to another gear?
From which to view with laughter bred
From thought of prospects held most dear.
Hail prospects good, as thoughts are sped
Towards times to treasure all the year
Of future happiness, mindfully bred
In seasons four that tempt the seer.
May fortune smile on you this day
And spread a glow o'er all you do,
Soft winds, sun, rain, delight your way,
Inspire your heart with pleasures true.

Sylvia Ayling

Dandelion-Day

Over Normandy fields
long in summer grasses
they dropped,
like dandelion seeds,
rocking slightly, straightening out
to slow drift down.

War blew out their clock.
Now Normandy fields sprout
a different crop,
crosses in white rows
which no breezes blow.

Hazel Dongworth

The Visitor by Emma Liebeskind

The first time she sat for me was on a rainy day in Kew. When I met her from the omnibus by the bridge she was already soaked through. Regardless, I held up my umbrella to keep her dry. The river seemed perilously high. She cautiously took my arm with her gloved hand, and let me guide her through the unfamiliar streets. Her family lived off the Old Kent Road.

Ours was a tenuous link, and her manner was naturally aloof. She fixed her gaze on the middle distance as we made for my parents' house. I dared not comment on the parlous state of her attire, and she chose to remain silent. As we passed the gates of the botanical gardens it struck me passing the queue there that our collusion, though purely artistic, must look faintly scandalous.

At my mother's insistence she was made to drink tea, and dry off by the fire, before being accompanied with me to the makeshift studio by my eldest sister. Sat in the garden chair wrapped in my younger sister's shawl, she looked far finer without her hat. I suspected the one she had arrived in was remaindered stock from the shop where she worked. Decorated with clusters of tiny silk roses, it now lay sodden on the rag rug by her feet.

The delicate oval of her face was like none other I had seen. At first I stood and simply stared. She pulled nervously at the fringe of the shawl looking back with hopeful eyes. Her consumptive complexion troubled me; she was so pale, so pink. It was imperative we got down to work.

Granted this shop girl's fingers were unfortunate, calloused with stitching ribbons and lace into countless silk bonnets. Her nails blunt and broken, I would have to overlook them. For you see I had resolved to seal only her loveliness onto canvas; to immortalise her not as she was but as she had filled my dreams ever since I spied her through the milliner's window.

She wore her hair in loose bunches, dressed with nothing more than a pair of simple blue ribbons, setting off its burnished brilliance to striking effect.

"Would you mind Miss Siddall...?"

Like the best artist's models, she understood my entreaty instinctively, and began with careful deliberation and poise to untie the ribbons. Nevertheless, the moment her hair came cascading down caused me to startle. Unfurled, her copper coloured mane fell to the crease of her elbows. As I had suspected, the waves were quite natural, and not at all coquettish. When she at last lifted her eyes to mine, I was surprised to find they were full of tears.

"Here, take this!"

I seized the opportunity to offer her my handkerchief. Gratefully she took it, and blew her nose. Wordlessly, I took off my coat and hung it over her shoulders, and so she sat for the next 2 hours with my handkerchief crushed in her hand, whilst my sister quietly sewed and I drew and redrew the contours of our visitor's lovely face.

Coronation June 1953. My sister Valerie and I cycled the two miles to Aunty Beat's home, escaping school for the day to see the Coronation on her newly acquired television set. The Wells Road was lined with hawthorn hedges and we needed to brush off the blossom and change our shoes before entering her front room.

The curtains were drawn to give a clear black and white picture, it was just like being at the cinema. After a while our eyes became accustomed to the gloom and we managed to make our way through the lines of chairs to our seats.

Gradually, we were able to make out the faces of other friends who were all enjoying the party atmosphere and Aunty Beat's generous hospitality complete with tea sandwiches and biscuits. We were also pleased to notice the part played by a local cleric, the Bishop of Bath and Wells.

Even without colour we were all impressed with the textures of the ermine, velvet, embroidered silks and brocade, glittering jewels especially after the war years. Not being used to the beauty and grandeur of church music we felt we should stand to attention when we heard "Zadok the Priest."

All too soon it was over and we cycled home to help pick strawberries to be sent to the Bristol Market via "The Strawberry Line Train, We wondered about our new Queen. Most likely changing into comfortable clothes and taking her children for a walk we decided, before settling down to see to the State Papers. We hoped she was reading and seeing the photographs of Tenzing and Hillary at the summit of Everest. Everyone felt this to be a promising omen to the reign of Queen Elizabeth the second.

Marilyn Hawes

A Coronation Glass of Sherry – or Two. To be honest the Coronation itself wasn't the main attraction.

Not many people had television in 1953. We didn't, but our neighbour did. Bob Harris and his wife Joan ran a B&B and its breakfast room was large enough to accommodate a few friends to view the ceremony on their television. In addition to ourselves there were one or two B&B guests and other neighbours – about a dozen of us crammed into a room where the television had pride of place.

Despite the unseasonable and disappointing June weather, both my mother and aunt had acknowledged the occasion by wearing floral dresses; red and white in my mother's case, and the vivid cornflower blue favoured by my aunt. Together they looked like flags saluting the royal celebration. Hand knitted cardies were thrown over their shoulders against a rather chilly morning. My grandmother (who had lived with us since her own house was bombed in 1942) wore a fresh white blouse, her best long dark skirt and – a real gesture to the importance of the day – her string of pearls.

The grown-ups had ringside seats while I – in my teens – stood at the back, squeezed between a solid oak sideboard and a standard lamp, the fringed shade of which tickled my neck. Anticipation was fuelled shortly after our arrival by the offer of a sherry. My mother ordered orange juice for me, but Mr. Harris said that at sixteen I was old enough to toast the new Queen with a real drink. Andrew, their son, a few years older than I, handed me my first glass of sherry and smiled. My day was complete. I didn't need any further reason for a celebration as I nursed a second glass, munched a cheese straw and boldly chatted to Andrew. **Monica Mukherji**

Memories of the 1953 Coronation. 2nd June, 1953. Looking back, do you ever recall a bleak year?

1953 began that way for me. Let me explain.

In February I was demobbed after completing two years National Service in the Royal Air Force. In truth, the camaraderie I'd enjoyed had dwindled as, one-by-one, friends were demobilised. In the dog days of 1952 I'd failed to meet the standard required by CACCTM - the Central Advisory Council to the Church for Training for the Ministry.

'Not yet,' they said, 'go and get better educational qualifications.'

So I applied to Culham College for the Training of Schoolmasters, and was accepted. That helped to offset the sense of loss I felt when leaving the RAF.

But, in January, my mother had an accident, slipped on some ice, and broke her leg. A nasty break, it turned out to be a double-Potts-fracture. So began a difficult, painful year as she attempted to cope with first one, then a second plaster-of-Paris, followed by an abysmal lack of appropriate physiotherapy.

Coronation Day dawned, very cold for early June, bright then overcast as showers turned to sleet and snow. The day was declared a public holiday. I lit a fire in the sitting room, switched on the wireless - television in our household was ten years into the future - and we made ourselves as comfortable as possible.

Daphne, my sister, had decided to join work colleagues and friends in camping out for the night along the route of the procession. She returned home early evening, cold but exhilarated. She regaled us with her experiences and how she was rewarded with a splendid view of the Queen in the Coronation Coach, smiling radiantly and waving to the crowds who had come to greet their newly-crowned monarch. For me, that was the bright moment of the day.

It was work as usual the next day. I'd found a temporary job at Thomas Cook, Travel Agents' Head Office in the West End.

Colleague Marie Pitt, ever the royal sceptic, had bought a television set for the occasion.

'Every inch a queen!' was her verdict, delivered in a lilting accent from the Welsh valleys.

I nodded, suddenly very proud of Elizabeth, our Queen. **Michael Wetton**

Memories of the Coronation in Western Australia. I was born in 1949 so not too keyed into world events in 1953, at 4 years old.

There was no television in Western Australia until I was about 12, so no amazing opportunity to see the pageant televised. I suppose the first I saw of it may have been the newspaper pictures as they were sure to be published in the only newspaper called The West Australian. After that there would have been the old black and white Newsreels that were shown at the cinema, which we called the pictures. There always seemed to be some man shouting out the narrative in a very enthusiastic voice and I remember seeing Castro on many occasions and not understanding one bit what it was all about. There were downstairs cinemas that showed films on a loop in dark and dingy places which my sister and I went to with our mother.

The most enduring memory of the Coronation I have, is at the neighbour's house when we played with the three sisters. Only one was about our age, the other two seeming to be very grown up and not playing with us much at all. They had little golden carriages and all the procession of the Coronation personnel and I thought they were very pretty and fun to play with, although I don't think I was encouraged too much to touch them. They must have been Matchbox models. In fact I don't think I associated the carriages with the Coronation of the Queen, and probably only understood the significance in retrospect.

Rhonda Anderson

Coronation Day

In the age of coal-fired economies, my younger brother and I travelled from our seaside resort on the Clyde coast by paddle steamer and steam railway to Glasgow, the city that had once been the second city of Empire. We were on our way, sans parents, to stay with Aunt Cathie and Uncle Henry, who lived in an Edwardian flat near Kelvingrove Park and the modest circular underground system that we had paid our thrupennies to ride round its entire length, just for the fun of it, a delicious smell of fresh earth wafting up the stairs, making the whole experience, this and the lack of crowds, such a thrill. On reaching our destination at Central Station, we walked through that great black cavern, its walls posterized with brightly coloured 'Come to....' adverts to resorts like ours, out into the bustling place to wait for the next tram. Amongst the traffic noises would be the clip-clopping of great Clydesdale horses as they pulled their heavily laden carts through the streets. There were always beggars; for whom we would ask our father for pennies, and much spitting onto the pavements from these poor bedraggled fellows.

It being the first of June, 1953, my younger brother and myself were looking forward to a great treat: to witness the coronation of Princess Elizabeth at Westminster Abbey on a 14 inch black-and-white television set, event of a lifetime. Aunt Cathie's sitting room would be packed with relatives and friends, packed cheek by jowl in view of its cluttered nature: a framed portrait of Uncle Henry's handsome younger brother, festooned with red poppies, killed during the First World War, which his older brother had survived, was hung to the left of a splendid piano. When, played by a friend, Uncle Henry and I would sing duets together, a favourite being 'Where are you going to, my pretty maid.' He had a fine baritone voice, singing in a Scottish Episcopalian Church as well as at the Three Choir Festival at Worcester. Next to the coal fire, flanked by two easy chairs, was a china cabinet. Against the facing wall stood a large, elaborately carved sideboard. In the middle of the room was a large dining table, chairs on its four sides, covered with a chenille cloth. Enormous paintings and photographs added to the room's warm ambience.

At the earliest moment of the televising of the Coronation, the set was switched on, all eyes focused on the corner of the room next to the china cabinet. All was reverential and exultant as appropriate, the tone set by the presenter, Richard Dimbleby. Despite being drained of colour, the scenes inside the abbey, with its many rituals, the wonderful music, the fragility and resilience of the sovereign-to-be, left an indelible impression on the mind. England! Such pageantry! A Nation to be reckoned with..... And then the rains came. In the lengthy procession that rode and marched through the wet in the direction of Buckingham Palace, the Queen of Tonga, who wowed the crowds, just went on waving and smiling while the heavens opened onto her open-topped carriage. That day in Glasgow enabled us to feel a sense of belonging to a great Nation for, in myriads of sitting rooms throughout the land, folk who gathered round tiny tellies would have experienced that great sense of togetherness that began our relationship with our future and beloved sovereign, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. Vivat Regina. **Sylvia Ayling**

The Night Before the Coronation. All people to be in their places by 8 a.m. Coronation Day, please. Huh, what a laugh. I had to be in my place by 6 p.m. Monday, and it wasn't a plush seat in a stand. It was a stand in a slush 'kerbstone' along the Marble Arch. 23 hours I stayed, and, believe me, I would have stayed another 23 hours for I have never seen anything so lovely in all my life.

Although according to the calendar it was June, I never would have thought it. The rain came down in stair rods and it was a north-east wind, and how I wished for my snow-shoes.

The night passed quite quickly because there was something going on all the time; news-vendors were selling the next day's editions but the buyers were not buying for news value but for warmth and protection against the weather. When the news-vendor came down the second time he didn't say, 'Tomorrow's ne - ew - es' but 'gen-u-ine waterproof papers'.

We had several callers during the night, people so desiring could have had hot fish and chips with roll and butter 'two bob all 'ot' and an orange box to sit on 'alf -er-crown'.

During the small hours a piano was wheeled up and down stopping every ten yards for a sing song - the crowds loved it - actually it was impossible to settle down and sleep, apart from the great physical discomfort one had to endure.

I had a meal of hard-boiled eggs and brown bread and butter about 2.30 a.m. I should have had tomatoes as well but unfortunately I sat on them in the confusion. Soon after that it got light and the policemen came to line the route amid vast cheers from the crowds but I think an even greater cheer went up for the road-sweepers. One of them offered me a tour of the route on the back of his cart but I couldn't afford to lose my place.

The wireless was relayed to us and started at half past five. Almost the first tune to be played was 'I'm singing in the rain' which was quite untrue because we were all cursing about it.

About 8 o'clock the troops started assembling and we all thought it was marvellous until we remembered that they would be standing in front of the policemen who were already standing in front of us.

By this time it was 10.15 a.m. and my friend announced that she was going to eat her lunch. I said, 'Mary, how silly you are. You don't usually have lunch at 10 o'clock,' but she soon squashed me by saying that she didn't suppose I usually ate hard-boiled eggs for my breakfast at half-past two.

After this time passed very quickly and soon we heard the guns acclaiming Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. When they played 'All people that on earth do dwell' tears ran down our faces.

At 2 p.m. the policemen got up and down came the rain again. I must have looked like Caliban with a hood on and Daily Mirror ankle socks.

Only another hour, how good that sounded, almost unbelievable. All feeling of discomfort seemed to leave us and then it came. It was lovely, lovely, lovely. I shall never forget it. It wasn't until it was all over that I realised how cold, dirty, wet and tired I was. But did I mind? Of course I didn't.

Colleen McMath

Lindisfarne

A few poppies blow in the breeze by the old church wall, a stray hollyhock blows in the wind. I came here once before; it was sunnier, warmer, a heatwave for that time of year. I remember a beach on the other side of the island, pale, hot, bathed in hazy liquid light. But that was long ago. Now I am alone.

The gentle sun warms my face; I taste the salty spray and tie back my hair. I sit on an empty bench facing the sea. The tide is out and the sand is littered with mussel shells and kelp as far as the eye can see. Behind me the 12th century church, solid and steadfast, overlooks the bay; a castle juts out on the far headland. I eat my sandwich and half a bar of chocolate. As I carefully fold it back into its wrapper I change my mind and finish it, screwing up the silver foil into a tight ball and burying it in my pocket. Carefully, I make my way across to the island at low tide, pick up a couple of pink stones to remind me of the sandstone priory nearby with its Norman arches and cobbled pathways. The breeze blows across my face, the gulls are crying, wheeling overhead. Clusters of ox-eye daisies lining the shore are distant specs, the priory ruins just visible.

Standing close to Saint Cuthbert's wooden cross on the grassy mound there is only sea and sky, wind and sun and perhaps a faint promise of fine rain on the incoming tide. The empty beach across the bay looks inviting – I will walk there tomorrow to find a sheltered spot to read and write.

I have only been here a few hours but I feel I have the measure of it all – a little shop to buy provisions, a pub and tea room, my little room with its neatly made bed and bare table. Later I will stop by the church again to check out the times of services or just sit a while, sheltering out of the wind and gaze at the light flooding through pictures of stained glass. There are pools of water flooding the beach; the tide is rising as I carefully pick my way back to the shore.

'Did you hear the seals?' a voice interjects. I shake my head, look up and smile at the stranger. Dark brown eyes meet mine; I notice his weathered face and greying hair.

'Listen,' he says and far away the wind picks up their strange sound and carries it to the shore. Daisies bend down in the wind and for the first time in days, but it seems months, years, I am not alone. Most of the day-trippers have made their way back along the causeway. We have the beach to ourselves as the waves start to creep along the shore and the little streets are quite deserted.

Penny Freeston

My David Attenborough Moment

Sitting at my picture window yesterday, an amazing drama was performed before my very eyes but, before I get to that, I must explain.

I have a squirrel friend who pops into my garden most mornings, either to bury or dig up nuts. As the earth is nice and soft in the big pots on my patio, these are favoured. He excavates like a small mechanical digger; earth and plants flying in all directions.

Yesterday, he appeared as usual but this time he had a large piece of bread firmly clamped in his jaws. In hot pursuit came another squirrel, obviously intent on stealing it. They chased each other round and round the garden for a while, finally disappearing into a clump of bushes on the far side of the pond.

A minute or two went by, then, suddenly, a lone squirrel came leaping over the pond with the bread. At this point I wasn't sure whether my squirrel had won and retained his prize, or the foreign squirrel had grabbed it and it was he who was rushing towards my patio. I am inclined to think it was the foreigner because he pulled up short of my pots and, after carefully placing the bread on the ground, started to dig in a small flower bed directly under an ivy-covered trellis, wherein live various families of birds.

Intent upon his task, he didn't notice a male blackbird emerge from the ivy and, with a grab-and-fly manoeuvre; start to fly off with his treasure. Enraged, the squirrel bushed out his tail and, like a well-honed 100 metre athlete, took off after the bird, uttering screeches of what I am sure must have been quite disgusting squirrel swear words.

The bird, frightened by the sight and sound of this manic animal, dropped the bread and flew off. Mollified, the squirrel retrieved it and started back with it to his partly dug hole. Twice he tried the bread in the hole and twice it did not fit. More furious digging ensued. When at last he was satisfied with its size, he deposited the bread and covered it up.

Happy with a job well done, he dashed off.

Less than a minute later, the blackbird reappeared, swooped down and poked about until he had unearthed the bread and flew off with it back to his family in the trellis! **Mo Woods**

Although we are unable to publish everything we receive, poetry, prose and fiction submissions for the next edition are invited. Ownership of copyright remains with the author. Please do not send original manuscripts, only copies. Manuscripts may be retained for inclusion at a later date. Typed manuscripts, with name, address and telephone number should be sent to: The Editor, The Hedgerow, c/o 67, Derby Road, South Woodford, London, E18 2PY

Many thanks to readers for donations received. Contributions welcomed to help finance future editions of this free publication. Contact the Editor.

The Hedgerow Contents © Copyright the individual contributors, 2013

The Hedgerow has grown from a Writers' Circle, established through the Friends of South Woodford Library.

Editor: Penny Freeston

This issue of *The Hedgerow* is also available on-line at www.penny-freeston.com