The Society of Women Writers & Journalists

120th Anniversary Supplement

1894 – 2014

Joseph Snell Wood – Founder 1894
Victoria Wood CBE – President 2014

www.swwj.co.uk

June 2014

Society of Women Writers & Journalists

120th Anniversary

1894 – 2014
Twelve decades of history for women writers

Written and compiled by Doreen Friend and Sylvia Kent.

On 1st May this year the SWWJ celebrated 120 years in existence. To date, thousands of female journalists, authors, poets and playwrights have enjoyed membership of this prestigious Society.

As the Twentieth Century dawned, the SWWJ celebrated its sixth birthday; things were changing for women in education, marriage, legal and political rights, but Suffrage was not achieved until the end of the Great War, and then only for women over 30.

How odd that a Society for women was founded by a man. In 1894 Joseph Snell Wood, a wealthy newspaper magnate and philanthropist, had faith in female journalists, many of whom he employed in his Fleet Street newspapers; he edited the Daily Graphic and The Gentlewoman. Mr Wood paid the initial set-up costs of the Society, provided finance, advice and located premises where his pioneering women could meet. He approached Mrs Pearl Craigie (novelist John Oliver Hobbes) to become the Society’s first President.

She was succeeded by Mrs Charlotte Eliza Humphry. Throughout the two first decades of the Society’s life he opened many doors and provided introductions for members of his fledgling society.

Mr Wood died in 1920; his granddaughter Daphne Wood became a Patron and a friend. Those early decades boasted prestigious Presidents including Mrs Humphry (“Madge” of Truth), poet Alice Meynell, Lady Violet Astor MP, Marie Stopes, Clemence Dane, Vera Brittain and many more whose work is still enjoyed today.

Alice Meynell (1847 - 1922), whose father was a friend of Charles Dickens, began writing poetry as a small child. Although she was nominated for the position of Poet Laureate in 1895 and 1913, the honour itself eluded her. Her poem, entitled She walks – the Lady of my Delight (The Shepherdess), appears in a number of school anthologies.

Vera Brittain (1893 - 1970), was a staunch campaigner for humanity and women’s rights. She served as a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment), her life and diaries have been the subject of a number of books, and her moving World War I novel, Testament of Youth, is as popular as ever.
Shirley Williams, Baroness Williams of Crosby, became Life President in May 2003. Speakers at the AGM and contributors to The Woman Writer have included Daphne du Maurier, Sir Compton MacKenzie, Leo Tolstoy, Spike Milligan, Claire Rayner, Penny Vincenzi and many more. Joyce Grenfell, Nina Bawden, Jacqueline Wilson, Jennifer Worth (author of Call the Midwife), Lady Sandra Howard and Martina Cole are just some of the past and present famous members.

Men were invited to become Associate Members in 2004. Sir Tim Rice, Lord Quirk, The Earl of Stockton and Simon Brett head the list of Patrons and Honorary members.

In 120 years the world of print and writing has changed drastically. What began as a simple printing press in 1440, has evolved into unimaginable forms of communication. Electric typewriters hit the United States around 1920/30. George Orwell wrote 1984 in 1949, now CCTV watches us and Big Brother is a TV series.

Flappers and the Jazz Age cheered up the Roaring Twenties, and in the 1930s there was the Great Depression. After the WWII years and rationing, the Swinging Sixties brought flares, flower power and the Mini Skirt; chunky platform footwear arrived in the Seventies and the Eighties saw padded shoulders and ‘power dressing’. The term ‘personal computer’ appeared in The New York Times in 1962, the laptop emerged in the early Eighties and Tim Berners-Lee invented the WWW 25 years ago. There are now an estimated 630 million websites worldwide.

Did you realise that we have been texting for 20 years? Amazon came along in 1994. We’ve been friends with Facebook since 2004 and began Tweeting in March 2006; e-books, Kindle, on-line, iPhones, Skype, and satellite tracking are the norm and suggestions that writing and print are obsolete are unfounded – they continue in tandem with new forms of communications.

The SWWJ welcomes digital communications and technology and embraces them as part of a brilliant future.
Victoria Wood has won more television BAFTAs than anyone in BAFTA history. She has won awards for her stand-up, her drama and her light entertainment programmes. Victoria was honoured with the Women in Film and Television lifetime achievement award for her contribution to the industry in 2011. She won the Outstanding Contribution to comedy at the Chortle Awards; she was the first woman to receive the top prize from the Writers’ Guild Awards for her outstanding contribution to writing. Also in 2011 at the Comedy Awards, she received the Best Female Television Comic Award for her performance in The Angina Monologues.

As a stand-up she toured for more than twenty years, and holds the record at the Royal Albert Hall for fifteen consecutive sold out shows. Recent work includes Acorn Antiques the Musical, which had a sell out limited season at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in 2005 starring Julie Walters and Celia Imrie. The tour which followed was directed by Victoria. One of her most recent TV dramas, Housewife, 49, based on the Mass Observation diary of Nella Last, won two BAFTAs and an International Emmy nomination for Wood as Best Actress. She also wrote and performed in a special – Victoria Wood’s Mid-Life Christmas – for BBC1 which was shown in 2009.

Victoria wrote and directed a short film called The Giddy Kipper for the Little Crackers season for Sky One, which was shown over Christmas 2010 and the year after she played Eric Morecambe's mother in Eric and Ernie, a BBC2 film about the early days of the double act, by Pete Bowker from an idea by Victoria.

In 2011, Victoria wrote and directed That Day We Sang, a musical about the Manchester Children’s Choir for the Manchester International Festival and in 2012 she wrote Loving Miss Hatto, about the fraudulent classical pianist Joyce Hatto, and she wrote and presented Victoria Wood’s Nice Cup of Tea, a 2-part documentary about the British national drink just last year.

Her latest project is an adaptation of That Day We Sang for the BBC, which will be shown this Christmas.
‘Just to say huge congratulations on your 120th Anniversary. I’m looking forward to a long association with you all. As Ann Fine has said, writing can be a lonely job, (I’m sitting here myself looking out at an empty birdfeeder and my wheelie bins), but it is a wonderful privilege to do it for a living, so there’s lots to celebrate!’

*Victoria Wood*
Greetings

‘To everyone at the SWWJ, on behalf of myself and all the members of the RNA, Happy 120th Anniversary and huge congratulations!’  Pia Fenton, Chair of the Romantic Novelists Association.

‘I went to my first SWWJ meeting when I was in my late teens, way back in the 1960s! My dear friends Celia Cross and Mary Howard took me under their wing and introduced me to everyone. I met such interesting women, attended many conferences, and learnt a great deal about the writing world. I wish all the current members a very happy anniversary.’ Jacqueline Wilson

‘A Happy Anniversary to the SWWJ! Writing can be such a lonely job, and the Society offers support and above all, the sense of belonging to a community of people with the same interests and problems. May the Society flourish for the next 120 years. Very best wishes.’ Anne Fine, OBE FRSL.

‘Congratulations on your 120th Anniversary! However, if the pen is mightier than the sword, why are we still pursuing equality? Best wishes,’ Glenda Jackson MP.

‘Happy Anniversary from all of us to all of you,’ from Mslexia, the magazine for women who write.

‘Happy Anniversary SWWJ. 120 years of celebrating women and writing is itself a wonderful cause for celebration. Here’s to the next 120!’ Tania Hershman

‘As one who has had the honour for several years of being a Patron, it gives me great pleasure to write and offer the Society my warm and delighted congratulations on our 120th Anniversary. I know from many women writers of the support and encouragement they gratefully enjoyed from the Society as they embarked on their careers, and of the important role the Society has continued to play in their professional and social lives.’ Lord Quirk.

‘Wishing you all the very best on your Anniversary, and many happy returns.’ Andrew Motion

‘Happy Anniversary to SWWJ! Funny now to think that the Society had to be founded by a man. We have come a long, long way in the past 120 years.’ Victoria Glendinning
Greetings

Anniversary... wonderful people

‘Many congratulations on your birthday, with best wishes.’
Stephanie Cole

‘I send many congratulations to the SWWJ, of which my late mother was a proud member, on the occasion of its 120th Anniversary.’
Tim Rice (Patron)

‘One hundred and twenty years! What a wonderful achievement and tribute to the talent, professionalism and camaraderie of women writers. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that at the time of the Society’s founding, women still had to write under male pseudonyms to be sure of being published and taken seriously. Today, the ability of women writers is recognised and renowned throughout the world. As the only woman patron I am particularly proud to see the Society still thriving and going from strength to strength. Warmest congratulations and happy 120th, SWWJ.’
Lady Sandra Howard (Patron)

‘Women journalists are active in every field these days but it’s been a long hard struggle. In many areas there are now more women than men. They are courageous and determined and know how to get the news out fast. I know the SWWJ has been a vital support along the way and I congratulate them on their Anniversary. Warm wishes.’
Anne Sebba, Chair, The Society of Authors.

‘I’m honoured to be one of the select group of men who claim membership of the SWWJ, and it’s pleasing to belong to a society that is older than I am. So I congratulate the SWWJ on its longevity, its continuing success and its inclusiveness! Long may it thrive!’
Peter Lovesey

‘A thousand congratulations to the SWWJ; as one who stands humbly amongst those luminaries celebrated today, I feel tremendously proud of all that women have achieved in the face of stern opposition in the past. I send all my warmest good wishes to everyone concerned and at the risk of lowering the tone slightly I would like to add “Cheers Sweetie! Be fab forever!”.’
Joanna Lumley, OBE

A photographic greeting from Jim Moir AKA Vic Reeves and his wife model Nancy Sorrell.

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The role of poetry within the SWWJ
by Gwyneth Box, Poetry Co-ordinator

Founded as the Society of Women Journalists, it wasn’t until 1951 that the SWWJ changed its name to the more all-encompassing “Society of Women Writers and Journalists”. Despite this, as Sylvia Kent’s history of the Society tells us, poetry has always been a popular genre among members, over 90 of whom are currently included on the list of Society poets. Many of these members are also active in other genres, as well as teaching or writing about their craft. Doris Corti, award-winning poet and our Poetry Advisor since 1986, is just one of the SWWJ members who has encouraged poetry both within and beyond the Society.

The annual poetry competition was established in 2002 and named for the late Lady Elizabeth Longford, historian and biographer, and Honorary Life President of the Society from 1977. It is one of the most popular of the Society’s competitions and winning poems are usually read at one of the Society events and published in The Woman Writer. In alternate years, the competition has a chosen theme: this year’s theme is “anniversary” and we are proud that David Morley – poet, critic and scientist – has agreed to act as judge.

Members were first invited to send contributions for The Woman Writer magazine’s “Poetry Corner” in 1947 and the page has recently been reinstated as a regular feature. There is also a regular poetry column, which I took over when I joined Council as Poetry Rep in February 2013.

As a translator, teacher and digital publisher, I have spent many years abroad and was resident in Spain when I joined the Society in 2007. I am particularly interested in developing the on-line facilities offered by the Society in order to reach out to member poets across the UK and beyond who cannot attend meetings and workshops, which are usually held in London.

Gwyneth Box can be contacted via www.gwynethbox.com

Poems by Gwyneth Box

Towards High Barnet
We’re moled and burrowing through London’s longest stretch of tunnelling dark, until East Finchley where sudden sunlight dazzles us.

A shock of daffodils tousles the embankment.

Ivy-drab drapes a dull brick wall beyond which, an old man digs for victory against perennial weeds in his allotment.

Terror Incognito

Whichever way you look at it that mountain has to be a dragon. See the bold curve of its haunch as it crouches hackles raised along the skyline.

Pinked by the morning sun the broad snout tucks under a crooked wing and snow webs taloned claws.

You can’t escape: each serrated ridge, each spur and scar of every mountain range proclaims the inevitability of dragons.
Dramatic goings on
by Martin Cort

Drama has always been part of the SWWJ. How could it be otherwise, with Clemence Dane among our past members and Joyce Grenfell as a beloved President?

For many years drama was intermittent – the occasional speaker on playwriting and one-act play competition, but in the early 1990’s we ran a series of successful all-day Drama Workshops at the Playwright’s Centre, near King’s Cross.

Vice President Mary Rensten urged Dramatists to attend an informal meeting at the New Cavendish Club to discuss the future. Jean McConnell, June Walker, Eve Blizzard and Benita Cullingford were among those present as the new Drama section was born.

Male Associate Member Martin Cort, Dramatist, Actor and Director, was appointed Drama Co-ordinator; the section has gone from strength to strength. The group is joined by professional actors whose experience includes the theatre, television, radio and films. These talented artistes read members’ scripts, providing valuable opinions and advice to see/hear their writing in a friendly, but critical light.

Special thanks go to actor Peter Stenson for his constant support, wonderful character portrayals and good humour. The actors include Dorothea Phillips, James Bradshaw, Carolyn Pertwee, Edmund Dehn, Rosemary MacVie, Anne Cunningham, Peter Mair, Shane Chester and Terence Perkins. Many perform at Society special events such as Summer Festivals, the Royal Institute of Great Britain, The Royal Overseas League, St Bride’s Foundation, The National Liberal Club, and the Concert Artiste Association, creating yet another platform for writers’ talents.

At one workshop actors James Bradshaw, Peter Stenson, Dorothea Phillips, Annie Dodd and Mansel David, used voices, facial expressions and body language to play characters in various situations.

‘Walkies’, by Jane Lockyer Willis, opened with gentle comedy, touched on loneliness, pet love and concluded with an unexpected friendship. An air of mystery surrounded the eccentric old lady who came for lunch, changed her shoes and left wearing clothes she hadn’t arrived in, in ‘The Lunch Party’ by June Walker. Benita Cullingford presented Smile, Baby, Smile – a short adaptation of her film of the same name.

The workshops provide those who enjoy the theatre with the opportunity to hear/watch material that could possibly be performed on stage.

James Bradshaw is currently starring as coroner Dr Max DeBryn in the TV series Endeavour, where he can be seen happily delving into dead bodies and sorting bones. Although James is only in his Thirties, he is an acting veteran having been on our TV screens for a number of years; he played Gordon Grimley in the series The Grimleys that ran from 1999 - 2001.

He was a monster-hunter in Primeval and appeared in EastEnders, Coronation Street, Doctors and many, many more that are, as they say, too numerous to mention.

James enjoys finding the time to read/act, chat and joke and help everyone with their scripts at the Drama
Odd one in
by Patrick Forsyth

Writing is an important part of my work portfolio, so much so that (amongst other things) I regularly write and speak about writing. The column “Going to Market” that I write for Writing Magazine resulted in my being asked to speak at one of SWWJ’s Cambridge conferences. That invitation was followed by another – very assumptive – suggestion that I should become a member, well an associate member as I’m a man.

Writing is a solitary occupation and I have created a number of informal collaborations (for instance I have co-written a number of books) that involve me with others plus I am a great fan of writing groups. My experience of the conference – the networking and informal contacts were as interesting as the formal sessions – led me to “give it a go” and sign up.

At the time I did not realise that men were so much in the minority, but this has not proved a problem. The foundation of the Society is its members’ interest in and enthusiasm for writing and for doing this on a professional basis – which means making money from publication, which in turn means never passing up an opportunity to plug your work. My latest book is Smile Because it Happened; light-hearted travel writing about Thailand. Check it out!

Unless people are muttering behind my back – bloody men – and I don’t think this is the case, the fact that every member is a writer overrides everything else. I have never really thought about being “the odd one out” (I am not the only Male Associate Member) and have always been welcomed to meetings and found them interesting, informative, pleasant … and fun. Though, come to think of it, was there a note of surprise linked to my being a man when the fact that I had won one of the competition prizes was announced at the December 2013 meeting? So, thank you for that and for welcoming me to the fold. The reason I will remain a member is not linked to the gender of the members, it is because the Society provides such a useful and professional arena for writers to meet, exchange experience and assist each other in a variety of ways. May it long continue to do so.

Associate member Patrick Forsyth can be contacted via www.patrickforsyth.com

Biographical note: Patrick Forsyth is a business consultant, trainer and writer, the author of more than a hundred books and innumerable articles. His work has been mainly in the areas of business, personal skills and careers, but now includes humorous books and three titles of light-hearted travel writing with (fingers crossed) a novel to come. He has also edited, co-authored and ghost-written books.

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120th Anniversary Celebrations

SOCIETY OF WOMEN WRITERS & JOURNALISTS
120th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS
14th October 2014

We will be meeting at the Journalists’ Church,
St Bride’s Church, Fleet Street,
London EC4A 8AU

at 11.30am for a special service with readings by
Baroness Williams of Crosby,
Libby Purves and Simon Brett.

This will be followed by a Celebratory Luncheon
at 1.00pm
at The Stationers’ Hall, Ave Maria Lane,
London EC4M 7DD.

Guest Speaker: Ann Widdecombe

(Tickets cost £40 each. Visit www.swwj.co.uk or email editor@swwj.co.uk)

Sponsors of this supplement
Our thanks go to the following companies/individuals who have kindly sponsored some of the cost of this Anniversary Supplement.

With all good wishes to the SWWJ on their 120th anniversary
JUST A TASTE OF WHAT WE’VE DONE...

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