

VERACITY

The Magazine from Verulam Writers



Edition 42

Winter 2019

NEW SILVERWARE FOR THE LISBETH PHILLIPS COMPETITION



The Lisbeth Phillips Competition for creative non-fiction was won by Tina Shaw, who was awarded with the new Lisbeth Phillips Plate.

This time in VERACITY...

- Phil's *Christmas cake disaster...* story...
- Nick on understanding *ελληνικούς μύθους...*
- Tina's *roaring twenties...*
- Wendy goes from *A to Z* in St Albans...

The Lisbeth Phillips competition has seen a dwindling number of entries in recent years and so questions about its future had been raised, but it was the research done as part of Verulam Writer's 65th anniversary that sealed its fate.

During the research it was discovered how instrumental Lisbeth Phillips had been in starting The Verulam Writer's Circle (as it was known). As a show of enduring thanks the Verulam Writers committee decided to revamp the competition and commission a trophy too. Given Lisbeth's interest in food writing, a plate was thought to be particularly appropriate.

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From the Editor...

Hello and welcome to another edition of VERACITY – the newsletter by Verulam Writers about all things writing.

Verulam Writers has had a very busy start to its 66th season with another **Local Writers' Showcase** event at St Albans Library in October. More events will be coming soon. This is not to mention that two of our members have seen new publications – Lesley Eames' **The Brighton Guest House Girls** and Wendy Turner's **A-Z of St Albans** – both are available now in local shops and online.

In competition news, we are delighted to announce the new piece of silverware being added to our trophy case – **The Lisbeth Phillips Plate**, awarded for creative non-fiction. Tina's winning entry can be found on page 35.

This edition is our winter edition so you can expect articles with a Christmas theme, and a sprinkling of festive cheer too! Not only is it a new year but a new decade, so we've looked at how to make the 2020s the new roaring '20s for writing.

Finally, we have updated our twitter account and we are now available at [verulam_writers](https://twitter.com/verulam_writers).

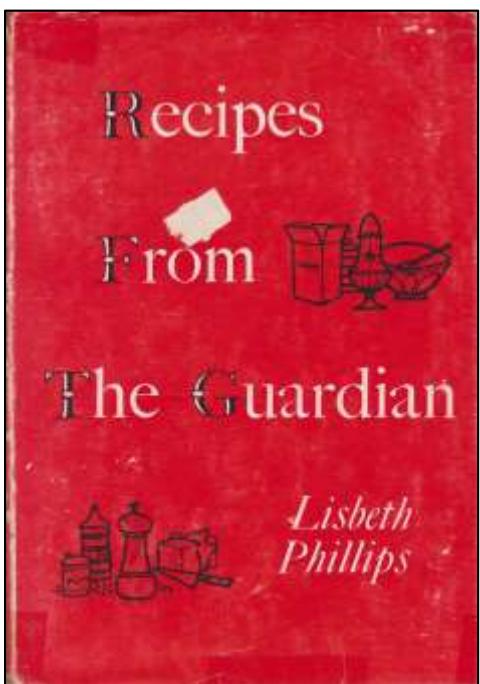
Sending you all winter wishes, and we look forward to seeing you in the next decade!

Sam Ellis, Editor
VWVeracityEditor@gmail.com

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Who Was Lisbeth Phillips?

An extract from an article from Edition 40 of Veracity by Sam Ellis

In September 1953 a new weekly evening course was introduced at the St Albans College of Further Education entitled 'Writing for Pleasure'. English tutor Philip Heather (later deputy headmaster of St Albans School) was hired to lead the course by the principal of the college, Donald Newman. Ten students duly signed up.

The course was not a success as numbers dwindled, and by December the course had shut down. But one student's enthusiasm proved to be formidable. With the support of Philip Heather this one student invited the remaining and keen colleagues to her home in Radlett to continue their studies. That student's name was Lisbeth Phillips. As one article says, "...if any one person could be credited with getting the Writers' Circle rolling, it is Lisbeth Phillips." With Lisbeth's drive and Philip's support The Verulam Writers Circle was born.

Lisbeth was an accomplished writer in the field of cooking. She was a Cordon Bleu cook and had sold recipe articles to The Guardian newspaper, leading her to publish a book Recipes from The Guardian. By accounts she was a great source of encouragement to other members and was elected vice-president, but sadly Lisbeth died prematurely. The Lisbeth Phillips Competition was set up in her honour and continues to this day. While now a factual writing competition, it began with the apt theme of 'food glorious food'.

The Success Book

We're delighted to share some of our member's successes from our success book, circulated at every meeting at St Michael's.



Month	Writer	Type	Title	Publication	Words
July	Camilla Chester	Novel	Not given	N/A - Finalist in Mslexia Children's Novel Award	
July	Camilla Chester	N/A	N/A	Signed with Laura West at David Higham Associates Agency	
Sept	Wendy Turner	Article	Keeping in Touch	Evergreen	800

Local Writers' Showcase - 12th October 2019

Our events managers, Phil Mitchell and Gerwin de Boer, on the latest VW event.

As part of Libraries Week, Verulam Writers held their second Local Writers' Showcase of 2019 on Saturday 12th October at St Albans Library. Eleven writers read their work to a capacity crowd in the newly refurbished library's Creator Space.

The event introduced local readers to local writers with the aim of strengthening the local writing community. Writers included both Verulam Writers members and non-members, presenting work from fiction, poetry, and non-fiction.

Dave Weaver from Verulam Writers opened the event with a reading from his novel, *Japanese Daisy Chain*, followed by Kate Griffin, author of the *Kitty Peck Crime* series of novels published by Faber & Faber, reading in an excellently acted cockney accent. Rebecca Gibson, a wildlife photographer, writer, and member of Verulam Writers read a piece about her grandparents before Abigail Morgan, a performance poet from Luton, had the audience laughing along with her insightful poetry. Gerwin de Boer, co-organiser of the event, read his prize-winning story about hunting Bigfoot, and before the break, Wendy Turner read a section from her new book, *A-Z of St Albans – Places, People,*

History, about Agent Zigzag who was tasked with blowing up the local de Havilland factory in World War II. During the break, to celebrate the launch of her book, Wendy treated everyone to Prosecco and an excellent cake as the audience mingled with the writers.



After the break, FJ Campbell read from her debut novel, *No Number Nine*, a coming-of-age story set in Munich and at the Sydney Olympics. Chris Phillips from Hertford Writers read a short story of espionage, *The Third Man*, followed by Verulam Writers member Yvonne Moxley reading a fascinating section from her newly published book, *An A-Z of Aylesbury*, about the town's famous white ducks. Amelia Hendry read a powerful extract from *What Nobody Knew*, her account of growing up in St Albans, and

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the night finished with Robert Patterson, Verulam Writers member and Librarian supervising the event, reciting a poem about the difficulty of dating set to the rhythm of the 12-bar blues.

Lesley Eames, Verulam Writers Chairperson said of the event, “I attended expecting to enjoy a pleasant evening but what I actually enjoyed was a truly fabulous evening. Talent fizzed in the air but so did warmth and friendliness. I’m looking forward to more events like this and to meeting new faces at our regular Verulam Writers sessions. From beginners to experienced writers, all are welcome.”

Verulam Writers is grateful to the library for allowing us to hold the event and librarian Robert for ensuring the event ran smoothly. Thanks also go to Wendy and her daughter, Jen, for organising the slides and catering, and of course the audience. Admission to the event was free but the audience kindly donated money to the library in appreciation of the event.

Further events are planned for next year, so if you’d like to volunteer to read at a future event email Phil and Gerwin at verulamwritersevents@hotmail.co.uk

Photos courtesy of Mike Shaw



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Photos courtesy
of Mike Shaw

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Photos courtesy
of Mike Shaw

The David Gibson Cup 2019

On October 4th 2019 the winner of the David Gibson Cup was decided by popular vote on the topic of 'a secret' set by last year's winner Claire Evans. One of the most prestigious competitions in the Verulam Writers calendar, the David Gibson Cup sees all entries read and voted for by VW members attending on the night.

Eleven entries were received and, as usual, the range of stories was typically varied and of high quality.

Suzanne Stanton's *Nowhere Man* was about a man who mysteriously disappears after being convinced 'they' are after him. *Guinea Pig* by Dave Weaver shocked us all with a twist on a CIA agent being tested on a new lie detector. A *Butcher's Shop Near Boston* was Robert Peterson's entry, about a butcher accused of harbouring a rebel spy in 1777 Massachusetts. *My Secret Life* was Tina Shaw's entry which left the reader guessing about the nature of the central



character until the end, revealing they were not human at all. *The Grey Wall* by Sam Ellis saw four character's perspective on a skeleton

hidden in a wall. *Turing Test* by Oscar Windsor-Smith was the story of Albert, a severely disabled man who finds love online – or does he?



A few of the stories focussed particularly on family. John Spencer's *The Certificate* saw protagonist Caroline discovering she has a twin sister who could be a perfect organ donor. *Three Half Sisters* by Richard Bruckdorfer revealed the abuse a family had from their stepfather, making for a difficult birthday party. *The Big Secret* by Molly Le Messurier looked at the effects a secret brother has in a family of privilege. *Door* by Jonny Rowland was a short

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piece (proving once again that well-written stories can be any length) about a hidden door to the attic in a family home. *Jack's Back* by Wendy Turner was a comic twist on the Jack and the Beanstalk tale where Jack dreams of college despite poor exam results and no money, but the discovery of the golden baked bean gives him a chance to make his dreams come true.

Votes for second place were very close, resulting in four runners-up; Suzanne Stanton, John Spencer, Robert Paterson and Tina Shaw with two votes each. However there was one clear winner with five votes – *Jack's Back* by Wendy Turner. By popular vote the Gnome de Plume went to lucky winner Richard Bruckdorfer, aka Tanya Hyde.

Wendy later said “I was so delighted at winning the David Gibson cup. I have never done that before!” Wendy’s winning entry is reprinted with her kind permission on page 10.



Jack's Back – The Winning David Gibson Cup Entry

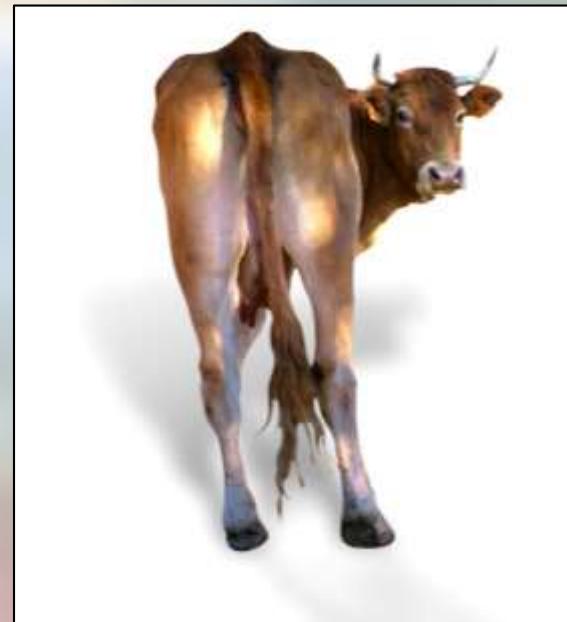
This year's David Gibson Cup was won by Wendy Turner with her story Jack's Back. It is reprinted here with her kind permission.

"Jack!" His mum's voice grated like a rusty file. "Stop day-dreaming and get milking Daisy." She plonked down wearily. "We're so poor Jack. All we've got is rice pudding and a tin of beans."

Jack pulled a face. "Can't we pop out for a bargain bucket or a pizza"?

"And how will we pay for it – with sea shells? That's about all we've got since your dad did a runner."

"Mum", Jack began awkwardly, "you may not have noticed, but I'm all grown up now. I don't want to milk Daisy all my life. I want to get out there and do my thing," he said, bopping about.



A secret desire burned deep within Jack's soul. *I want to go to Uni and study electrics. I want a 400QMD scope and 165DFS mount with precision servers like on TV. Yeah, that would be cool.*

"Wake up Jack, you Jack-ass," his mum spat out. "We haven't got any money. Why don't you get yourself a real job?" She brightened. "You could work for the Council and sort all our bins out."

Jack sighed. He knew it was true. There was nothing to be done. No-one to ask. *How pathetic - the cow's my only friend.*

I will go to Uni. I'll find a way.



After milking, Jack fired up his ancient computer. He Googled New University of Technology Chemistry and Scientific Engineering (NUTCASE). Up came a list of homicidal maniacs over the last 20 years. He finally found the campus website and dreamed until dinner time. But fury raged at the sight of the meagre fare.

"I don't want beans!" he yelled. He picked up the tin and lobbed it out of the window, which fortunately was open. "I want a spicy chicken and bacon wrap and soft dairy ice cream with rocky road." His mum stared

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at him. "OK", she said. "That does it. You can have your fancy menu but we're selling Daisy. Go on. Get out and take her to market right now."

"Sell Daisy? No!" But his mum wasn't listening. She half-throttled Daisy yanking the rope around her neck. "Out!" she said. "And I want a good price for her or don't come back."

Jack found himself outside the front door with Daisy who studied him with her great sad eyes. "Sorry old girl," he said, "but times are hard. We've gotta eat." They started along the road but his boots were rubbing and he sat down on the pavement. A dapper little man with a peaked hat appeared. "You can't park that cow here" he barked, stapling a ticket to her ear. He flicked open his notebook and licked his pencil. Jack heaved himself to his feet. "There's no peace anywhere – jobsworth," he yelled in the man's face.

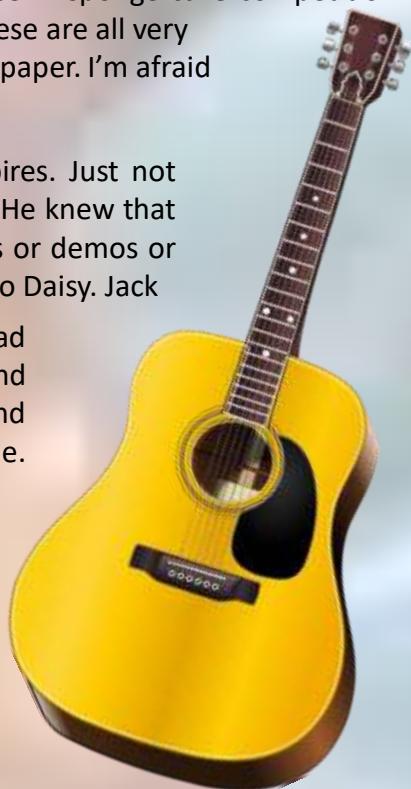


The market was busy and Jack looked for a buyer. He spotted Fred the Spiv. It was tough going but Jack finally capitulated when Spiv offered him two bent candlesticks and an old guitar that he claimed had fallen off the back of a lorry.

On the way home Jack, full of hope, called in at the Uni. "Have you brought your NVQs and your A-levels?" the person asked. Jack produced his certificates. 'This is to certify that Jack swam 50 metres' one said. 'First place in sponge cake competition' said another. The man looked down his long nose. "These are all very well," he said, "but you have to have the right piece of paper. I'm afraid you're just not academic material, Jack."

The man's words stung as Jack left the dreaming spires. Just not academic material. You won't get in. No, he wouldn't. He knew that now. No electrics, no 400QMD scope, no student digs or demos or annoying the neighbours with loud music. And now - no Daisy. Jack collapsed in a heap. He'd hit rock bottom. His mum had been right all along. He was nothing but a dreamer and didn't amount to much. A salty tear dripped off the end of his nose and he felt a strange splintering deep inside. Was it really possible to feel your heart break?

At home, Jack's mum regarded him menacingly as she weighed up the two candlesticks. "These are highly sought-after, of course," she hissed, "and I suppose you're going to make our fortune playing that thing," she jerked a thumb at the sad guitar.



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"Well Jack, you'd better get those beans out of the bin. It's a good job the Council only collect every two weeks."

Jack wandered into the garden and located the beans in a cascade of potato peelings and carrot tops. His mum served it up with week-old toasted crumpets that had a strange sulphur-like taste. "Mum", he started, "why do we..." But suddenly Jack cracked his tooth on something hard. It was small and round and glinted when back on his plate. He picked up the tin and read the label. 'Find the golden bean' it said 'and win £1,000.'

A golden bean - that was it! Jack spluttered in amazement. His mum was speechless for which Jack gave hearty thanks. "I'll ring this number and claim our prize," he said, delighted. "And then the dentist," said his mum, ever practical.

It was a happy ending after all. Jack found he had a strange affinity with the old guitar. He strummed away practising Elvis songs for a bit of rock and old Andy Williams numbers for some smooch. He dyed his hair green, called himself 'Jack's Back' and caused a sensation singing in local pubs, clubs and civil ceremonies. He sold the Edwardian candlesticks on *Flog It* for an amazing £2,000, bought Daisy back and took his mum out for a celebration Happy Meal at McD's.

Later, back home, Jack smiled as he read the booking form from the University, an invitation from the Student Union to entertain at the Freshers Ball. *I always knew I'd get to Uni!* Secret dreams sometimes come true in the most surprising way, he mused.



Where in the World are We?

Jonny Rowland *on building worlds.*

I have been asked about world building in a few sessions, especially when it comes to how a fantasy setting relates to our own reality. When writing speculative fiction, it is important to convey a sense that your setting exists beyond the limitations of your narrative. If you want to explore this in depth, I'd recommend looking up Liesel Schwarz's *Writing SFF*; it is a great guide to science fiction and fantasy world building. For me, knowing how your speculative world relates to our one is an important step.

If you're a fan of classical fantasy, you may want to create a separate world similar to Tolkien's Middle Earth. As such, you need to create everything from the ground up: a world map containing all of the locations your protagonists visit; the different cultures and races of your planet, including the human and non-human races; the history of how the world as it is now came to be. With Tolkien, he created a large canon of lore through poetry, songs, and stories that the protagonists share on their journeys. He is also the codifier of the Fantasy Appendix, creating hundreds of pages of genealogies, cultural notes and linguistic guides for Middle

Earth. Not all of this is necessary for creating a good narrative, yet it helps to create a fantasy setting as with Hemingway's Iceberg Theory, providing enough information that an author can draw on when writing.

Of course, these concepts also apply to other fantasy and science fiction sub-genres, such as the Parallel World or 'Narnia' setting, where the protagonist is launched into a fantasy world for a variety of reasons, or urban speculative fiction where the protagonist discovers that the world he knows is simply a masquerade maintained in order to protect the mundane population from The Truth. Regardless of the nature of this fictional world, it is important

to establish a sense of context in relation to the ordinary world we know.

One of the popular practices of Middle Earth world building include creating an audience surrogate character who is unaware of the culture and history of the new world, providing the writer with an opportunity to provide exposition in a manner that makes sense in the context of the narrative. Hobbits live in an insular community of curtain twitching and judgement, discouraging villagers from venturing out to go on sordid adventures - therefore every hobbit can experience the world around them with fresh eyes, and ask the questions a reader needs to know about the world. Unfortunately, trying to use this trope also leads to using the stock character of the orphan blacksmith's apprentice, which can lead to creating a lead protagonist who is completely vacant. It can still help to avoid a main character engaging in "As You Know" dialogue where the same inhabitants discuss concepts that they are already aware of. Some series, like Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, manage to take both of these approaches: characters from parallel worlds experience



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our world with fresh eyes, and compare this to experiences in their own worlds.

For me, what makes a fantasy world come alive is a sense of value. Sweeping vistas, bustling cities and tumultuous seas are great as set pieces, but it is when the characters ascribe meaning to these locations that the world begins to feel real. The tumultuous seas are

treacherous, but they carry the romance of freedom to the Pirate Kings and the promise of legendary treasure. The mountainous passes separate acolytes from their holiest shrines, but taking a shortcut would diminish their pilgrimage - ritual and process are key. And the bustling cities are crowded and often filthy, but to a citizen it is home, and a place where what they want and what they given are often

at odds.

World building is a strange fish, which demands a level of attention to detail and complexity that might not readily appear on the surface within a narrative. However, through exploration of world building, a rich setting for a narrative can develop and create an environment for characters to engage in a physical and cultural journey.

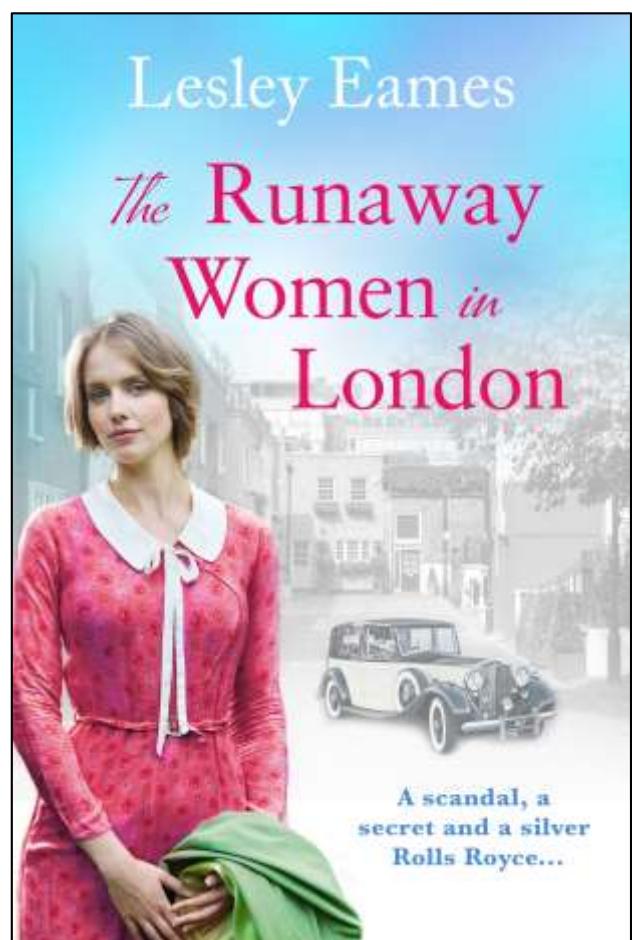
From Runaway Women to a 1920s Guest House

Lesley Eames on how writing book two differed from book one.

My first book, *The Runaway Women in London* (originally *The Silver Ladies of London*) was published in July 2018. My second, *The Brighton Guest House Girls*, was launched on the world a year later. Both books are set in the 1920s and are about young women who challenge expectations and fight to right wrongs from discrimination to fraud.

In some ways writing the second book was harder. The pressure button had been turned to off when I wrote the first because no deadline had been imposed and I didn't even have a particular publisher in mind. By the time I came to write the second book I had both a deadline to meet and a publisher to please.

Further, I had to juggle writing the second book with promoting the first on an ongoing basis.



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Writers are expected to undertake a considerable amount of marketing these days. My marketing has involved launching an author Facebook page, joining – and getting known in – various Facebook groups, learning all about twitter and building an active following, and writing for various blogs about writing in general, my books in particular and even an interview with one of my characters from the first book, Lydia Grey, who loves cars and doesn't suffer fools.

I also moved settings for my second book so this involved a considerable amount of new research. While the post-war 1920s is a fascinating era in terms of women's opportunities, fashion, culture etc, it's time consuming to find source materials and study them. Fortunately, the internet is an Aladdin's cave for sources materials and my 'finds' include a '1920 Ordnance Survey map of London and the South East' and a book of photos of Brighton in the 1920s.

In other ways writing the second book was easier. From the outset I knew the publisher's needs in terms of word count so could target the book to the allowed maximum of 100,000 words. With the first

book I'd needed to cut a whopping 30,000 words without changing the story or the characters in any significant way. Having written numerous short stories for the women's magazine market I've long been a fairly 'tight' writer but cuts on this scale were quite an undertaking (a nightmare, in fact). I decided that the simplest way to achieve a lower word count with my second book was to reduce the number of lead characters from four to three. This worked well.

I also knew that the second book would be categorised in Historical Romance/saga genre along with the first. This meant I could bear genre in mind when choosing a title and also suggesting sales copy for platforms such as Amazon, the aim being to make the book appealing to readers of the genre. I'd regretted the title of my first book almost from the moment of publication and also thought the sales copy could have been better. Both title and sales copy have now been changed. I feel *The Runaway Women* far better reflects a story about young women who set up in business on their account and even become involved in racing cars.

In its first months the second book has out-performed the first so I'm hopeful that, in addition to the publisher's initiatives, everything I've learned about marketing and promotion is starting to pay off.

What comes next? Not liking to make life too easy, I'm now writing another Historical Romance/saga which covers the period 1909 – 1919 so I'm involved in even more research. Never a dull moment, eh?

Our Member's New Book *A-Z of St Albans* is the Last Word

Sam Ellis interviews Wendy Turner on her new book, A-Z of St Albans.

Congratulations Wendy on the publication of your book *A-Z of St Albans*. How did the idea for the book come about?

An editor I had done some magazine articles for asked if I would like to write a book. I said yes first and asked questions after!

It's clear from your book that St Albans has an enormously rich and varied history – is there a particular time in its history that you'd have liked to visit?

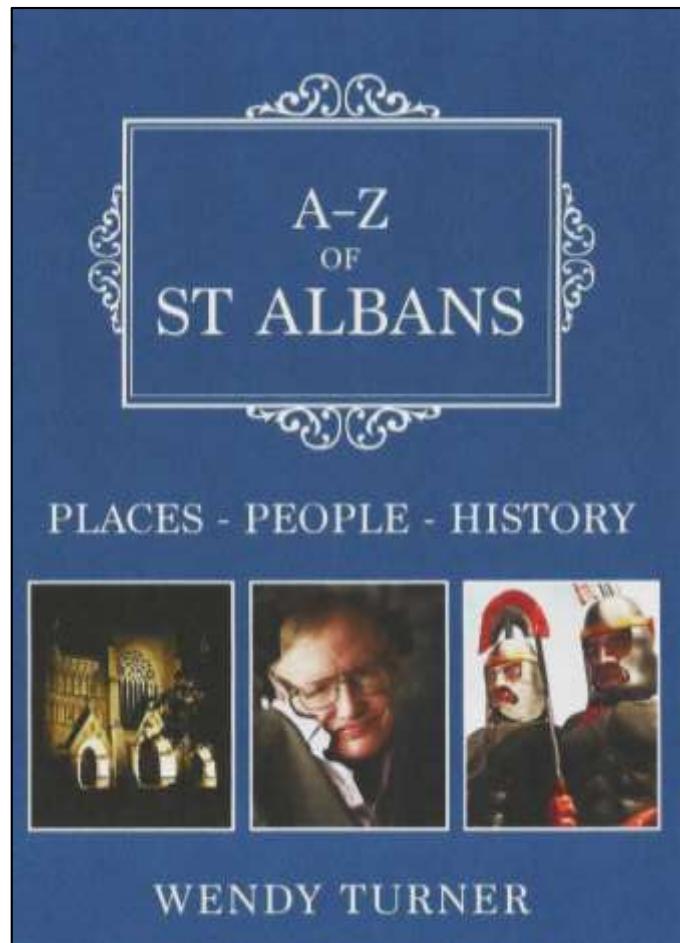
Hopefully dodging the Black Death, I would whizz back to the cathedral in 1361 to see how Brother Thomas Rocliffe made and cooked his hot cross buns and how he distributed them, not to mention some sampling! I would love to see what life was like in St Albans at that time.

The book must have required an awful lot of research. Where did you begin?

I had a head start with some articles I had already done including on Sopwell Nunnery, the cycle path, de Havilland, Duke Humphrey, hearing dogs, Verulamium Park and an article for *Veracity* entitled 'Inspirational St Albans.' I also already had some of my own photos and was pleased to use two of my late husband's photos.

What resources did you use in your research?

Numerous books on St Albans' history, buildings, Heroes, Travellers' Jottings and English Kings and Queens. Contacts at the Cathedral, the two museums, St Albans Council, the Civic Society and 'Friends of' various places were very helpful checking text and emailing me some photos. The Cathedral sent me a link to their archive in return for a credit in the book. Likewise from 9. I planned to work on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesday but that didn't work out so I just went for it. Actually, I loved the whole thing so it was no problem except that not the Estates of 'Orchid King'



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Henry Sander, Suffragette Lady Connie, Prof Stephen Hawking and many others. VW's own 'Gnome de Plume' insisted on being included!

What advice would you give to writers who have to do a lot of research for their work?

Stop if you are unsure and pin it down. Use reliable web sources e.g.: British History, Encyclopedia Britannica and credible newspaper reports. Double-check info in the books you use - there are lots of surprises.



The Verdun horse chestnut tree

Why did you decide to work on an A-Z style for the book?

The Publishers run a series of 'A-Z: Places, People and History.' The Editor left it to me to choose a town or city and emailed me a model A-Z. It happened to be Edinburgh which was great as I was going there the following week!

Did you struggle finding something for any of the letters?

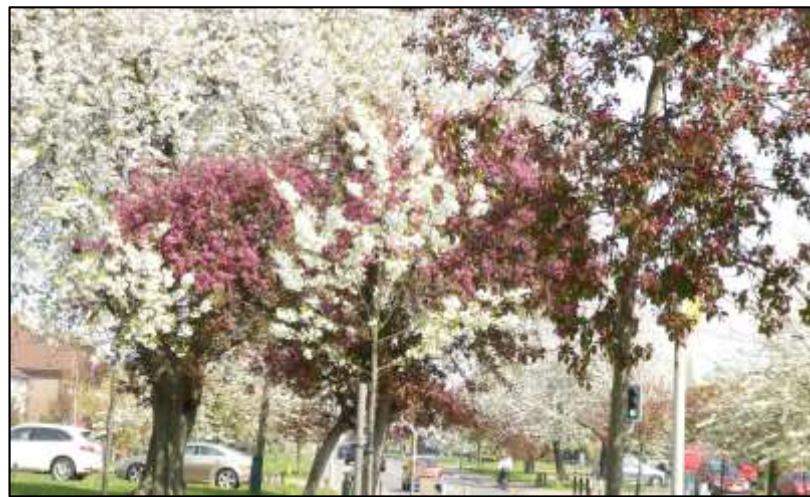
worthwhile and was amazed to discover that Stanley Kubrick had lived at Childwickbury, St Albans. His wife kindly emailed me one of her paintings of him to use in the book. For Z, if you haven't got a zoo or a zeppelin you can be a bit stuck. Luckily Double Agent Zigzag turned up. He had connections with Hatfield and died in St Albans.

What was the most surprising thing you found out about St Albans?

The beautiful red and white trees that blossom every spring at Bernard's Heath, planted in memory of the Wars of the Roses, and the Verdun Horse Chestnut Tree grown from a conker from the battlefield at Verdun.

What was your process in writing the book? Did you have a routine?

I planned to work on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesday but that



The Wars of the Roses trees

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didn't work out so I just went for it. Actually, I loved the whole thing so it was no problem except that not much else got done. I found a cleaner which really helped.

Did you learn anything new about writing as you were writing this book?

Writing needed to be really tight to keep within the word limit and yet say all you want about something. One paragraph could take a long time. The book was to be 20,000 words plus 100 photos and as maths is not my strong point, even with the word count facility it wasn't straight-forward. Putting together the Bibliography and Acknowledgements was also very time consuming. Writing up was great but housekeeping was a bit tedious!

What's coming next from your pen?

The Editor advised me to have a rest and then perhaps tackle another A-Z! I'm currently working on an A-Z of Lincoln. I visited for the first time this year and while it is very different from St Albans, there's a huge amount of interest.

The A-Z of St Albans is now in Waterstones, the Cathedral and Museums bookshops.

All Greek to You?

Nick Cook writes about how to understand myths.

The Greek myths are not just great stories. For writers throughout the ages they have been and still are a constant source of inspiration. Not only do they hold up bright clear mirror to being human, more importantly their sheer imagination makes them hugely entertaining.

But sometimes reading the original myths can seem awfully like hard work. Even in translation it may seem all Greek to you.

There are two main reasons for this.

Firstly, some translators attempt to capture the "Homeric" style of the original Greek version. Fortunately, today there are many very readable translations available. For example the translation of Homer's *The Odyssey* by Emily Wilson (2018) is not only the first ever English translation by a woman, it is also one of the most readable.

But you do not only have to rely on translations. There are also popular retellings written in everyday language. Two of the most recent are by Stephen Fry. (*Mythos* and *Heroes*), both written with his customary charm and wit.

And of course the Greek myths still inspire retellings in the form of novels. Madeline Miller's novel *The Song of Achilles* (about the greatest Greek hero in the Trojan War) won the Orange prize for fiction in 2012. But best of all are the novels by Mary Renault (1905 – 1983). If you want to get a real feel for life in ancient Greece as well as the myth of Theseus, read *The Bull from the Sea* and *The King Must Die*.

The second reason that many modern readers find translations difficult to read is that they were originally composed by poets and bards who could assume that their audiences had a good general knowledge of Greek mythology.

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This familiarity resulted from the fact that before they were ever written down the Greek myths were told and retold by word of mouth for hundreds if not thousands of years.

This familiarity enabled bards, poets and, later, playwrights to make passing references to other Greek myths without having to explain them in detail. For example, in *The Odyssey*, Odysseus summons up the spirits of the dead. Homer does need to give detailed information about these ghosts. The mere mention of their names would cause their stories to resonate inside the heads of his audience.

But of the mere mention characters such as Castor, Polydeuces, Leda, Phaedra, Alcmene, Sisyphus and Neoptolemus will not have the same impact if you do not know the stories.

But today we have lost that familiarity. Fortunately this need not be such a big problem as it might seem. The translations still tell great stories. And of course familiarity is at hand. It is available on Google at the touch of a key or in reference books such as *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (Penguin) or The Penguin Book of Classical Myths by Jenny March.

Finally, knowledge of Greek mythology can unlock more recent literature. For example take this passage from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

*Gallop apace ye fiery footed steeds
Towards Phoebus lodging: such a wagoner
As Phaeton would whip you to the west
And bring in cloudy night immediately.*

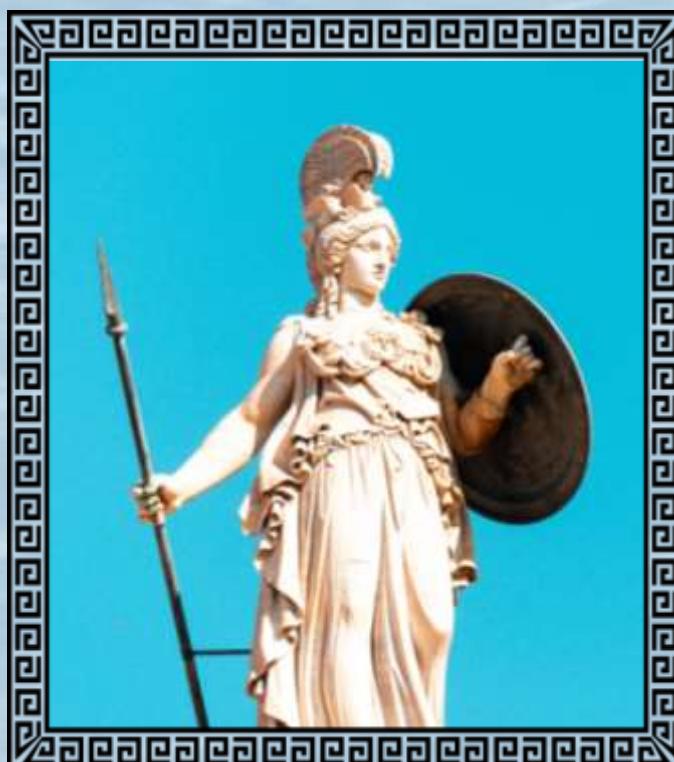
The words are spoken by Juliet in the second balcony scene in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. She is waiting for Romeo so that the doomed lovers can spend what will be their last night together.

But her words only make sense if you know the

Greek myth that inspired them. She is urging Phaeton to drive the chariot of the sun to the west so that night and Romeo will come more quickly. The doomed lovers must spend their last night together. And the irony of course is that Phaeton himself is also doomed. He had begged his father Phoebus (Apollo) to, in effect, give him the *keys to the Jag* for just one day. Against his better judgment Apollo agrees to allow him to drive the chariot of the sun and inevitably Phaeton loses control of the "fiery footed steeds". Zeus has to kill him with a thunderbolt before he writes off the planet.

Shakespeare's contemporary audience would have been familiar with this myth and so would have understood the Juliet's words.

Greek mythology lies like a giant jig-saw puzzle across not only the myths themselves but European literature. Another good reason for reading them. Fitting those pieces together will open so many doors to storytelling for you – past present and future.





Powerful Women in Greek Mythology



A Saturday Course in St Albans



When: 10am-2pm, Sat 25 January 2020

Where: St Michaels Church Hall, St Michael's
St, St Albans AL3 4SL

Tutor: Nick Cook.

Cost: £25

More info:: Nick Cook 0744 3044 529

mr.nickcook@googlemail.com

Wonderfully Wacky Gifts for Writers

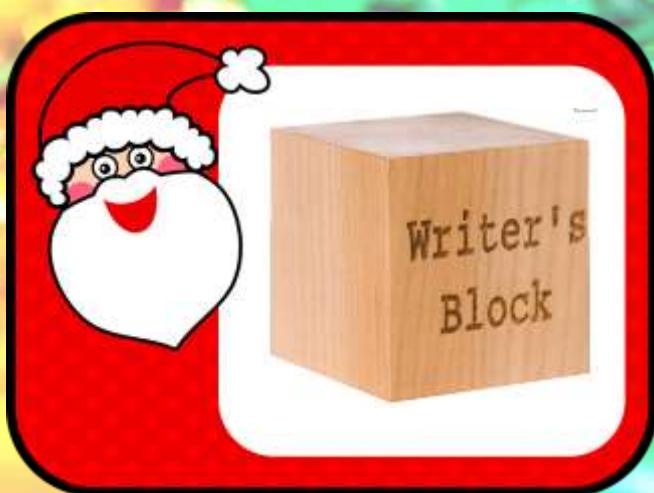
Oh yes, it's the most wonderful article of the year. Steve Barley on what to get that writer in your life this Christmas.

Amazon may be primed for your Christmas gift orders but, if you're like me at this time of the year, you'll be staring at a blank Christmas present list that's eBaying for ideas of what to buy your friends and family. Luckily, you can leave your Mothercare's behind, forget your usual boxsets of *House* or *Frasier*, and simply select from these Wonderfully Wacky Gifts for Writers*. Hopefully, as it's a PC World; there's something here for everyone.

Banned Books Coffee Mug

Yes I know, writers and mugs are inseparable pairings as gifts at Christmas, but this one is different. It features banned books that remain redacted in black pen until your skinny flat white, double shot Americano heats it up to reveal all. For twelve quid that's pretty cool/hot eh?

www.booklovergifts.com/products/mug-heat-reactive-banned-books



Writer's Block

Why should everyone else have all the fun? Get your very own Writer's Block for just £16 from www.etsy.com/uk/market/writers_block.

Perfect for gazing at when you should be writing – with the added bonus that you can debate for hours whether they've got the apostrophe in the right place!

VERACITY

Scratch Off Essential Novels Poster

Think you're well read? Scratch that idea with this 100 Essential Novels Scratch-off Chart. Perhaps a tad pricey at £32 on Amazon – books not included either – but, what the hell, it's Christmas!



Writing T-Shirt

You've read the book, now buy the T-shirt.

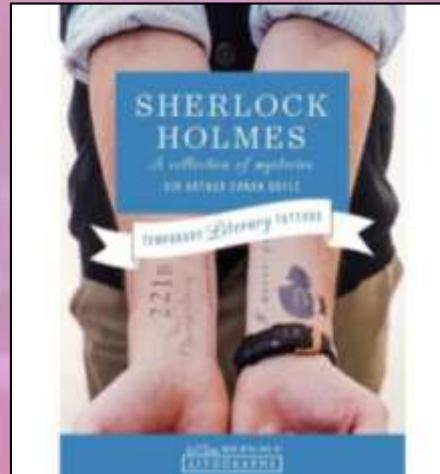
www.zazzle.co.uk has a large selection of writing-themed apparel for you to choose from.



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Literary Tattoos

Puppies aren't just for Christmas, but these temporary literary tattoos are. Whether you wear yours with Pride or Prejudice, they're only £6.99 and I'm sure your writing friends will be wowed by such an ingenious use of ink. Find them at www.theliterarygiftcompany.co.uk



Wordsmithery Game

Marketed as '*The game for every wordsmith, young and old*', this is an ideal alternative to your usual Boxing Day tequila bingo. With over 700 words to guess the meaning of, and an easier three choices round if you get it wrong, this game is the perfect outlet for everyone's vocabulistic tendencies.



Bookends

What a perfect gift to end on...bookends! Knob Creek Metal Arts may be based in Kentucky, USA, but their highly original handcrafted bookends span the world, so to speak. Buy them now on Etsy, or perhaps shelve the idea for later?

Hopefully these stocking fillers have started your creative gifting juices flowing. Time to get shopping and have a fabulous Christmas!



Writer Bookends
£50.95



Owl & Woodpecker Bookends
£52.56



Pig Bookends
£48.52



Π Bookends
£48.52



Deer Antler Bookends
£52.56

* Or non-writers, so they can re-gift them back to you Next** year

That was my TopShop...ping* pun by the way

*** You'll be glad to know I'm spent now on shopping puns...BooHoo

It's the Most Inspiring Time of the Year!

Robert Paterson asks why the festive season is a time for inspiration.

Isn't this a fabulous time of year in which to set stories? Most of us have a favourite festive tale, whether it's *A Christmas Carol*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, or even *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*! Even winter itself has inspired many wondrous narratives, such as *The Snow Queen* and, of course, *A Winter's Tale*. It's the time of year when young Russians fall in love during a sleigh ride or underdogs rise to glory in the Winter Olympics.

But why are Christmas and winter so inspiring?

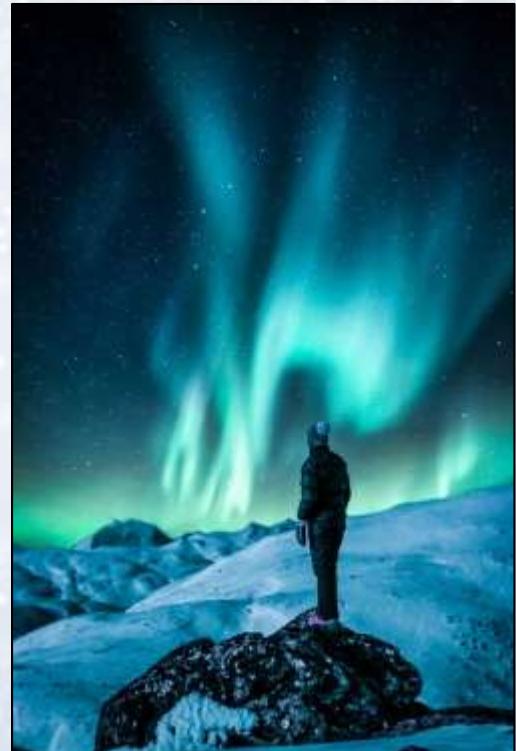
Well, for one thing, in the winter time, good and bad hold sway in equal measure. The nights are long and dark, the trees are bare, cold numbs our bodies and the creatures either flee, hide away, or perish. Even humans without adequate shelter are vulnerable to the unforgiving weather.

Yet winter can be as beautiful as it is dreadful. Frost coats the branches and glistens magically. Snow blankets the grass and children hurry outdoors to fight with snowballs, race each other on sledges or build snowmen. On clear nights, the moon lights up the darkness with a shimmering halo. Even those who live near the poles don't have it all bad. They can lie back and watch in awe as the northern lights dance across the sky in ghostly waves.

As for Christmas, it too inspires mixed emotions. On the surface, it's a fabulous time of year. There's the joy of reuniting with friends and family, the anticipation of receiving gifts, the satisfaction of

giving them, culinary indulgence, playing games, singing memorable songs and the hope of miracles. It may be just days after the winter solstice, but to quote a festive *Doctor Who* special, we are "Half way out of the Dark."

But Christmas is also a time when negative emotions can come to the surface. Some people get cynical about the greed, consumerism, or overspending. That message was at the heart of Dr Seuss's tale *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*; the Grinch steals all



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opening up their wrists!" It turns out later that her father died by misadventure on Christmas Eve, so the chaos the gremlins cause gives her a new reason to be cynical about Christmas.

I myself have reason to feel a cloud over Christmas these days. My mother died of cancer on 16th December, leaving us suddenly without her; a prospect it felt difficult to conceive considering how comparatively healthy she was the year before. Given that winter can often claim elderly lives, I don't doubt that my experience is shared by many.

Some years before that, I wrote *Twelve Nights*, a novella about a young man, Charlie Baker, a late bloomer finding his first love in between Boxing Day and Twelfth Night. During these days, the anti-climax of Christmas is keenly felt, and yet it receives virtually no attention compared to the build-up. This was what spurred my need to write a story about it.

In short, inspiration comes apace in winter and at Christmas, because the emotions it produces are so varied. Joy contrasts with dreariness and foreboding so sharply that it provokes conflict in our psyches, as we try to reason whether we have the will to bring out the good in the season, or let the bad prevail.

Wrap up warm this winter, and have a Merry Christmas both before and after the big day. I hope the season and the new year brings inspiration to all of you. God bless.



the presents, food and decorations in Whoville, yet the townsfolk still sing happily together, because the joy of Christmas was what was most important.

Furthermore, winter's short days and long nights can disrupt our natural circadian rhythms and engender depression. Psychiatrists call this Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). It can cause the lonelier ones among us feel our isolation more keenly. Don't forget what Kate says to Billy in *Gremlins*; "While most people are opening up their presents, some people are



Libraries in the Digital Age

Are libraries relevant in this digital age? Phil Mitchell finds out.

The Local Writers' Showcase was held as part of Libraries Week 2019, the theme of which was "celebrating libraries in the digital age". Which begs the question, are libraries still relevant?



There's no doubt about it, libraries are great. And every writer wants to see their work on library shelves. But I'll be honest, I'm not a regular user of a library. There was, however, a time when I loved them. When I was a child, my mum took me and my brother to the local library every weekend. The children's books were kept in a beige-carpeted cave in the basement of the building, where you could look up at street-level windows, and see peoples' legs walking by. It smelt of old paper — grass, vanilla, and musk, and the chemically aroma of new ink. The shelves were stuffed with books, hundreds of multi-coloured spines, arranged by librarians who were no doubt frustrated by the inability of children to respect the Dewey Decimal System.

My brother and I ran around choosing books, flicking through them to see how wordy they were, and if we liked the pictures. We'd check out three or four at a time,

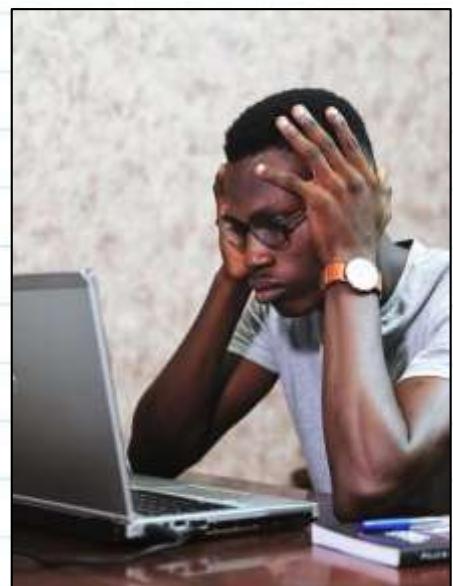
take them home and devour the words. I progressed from Dr Seuss, to Roald Dahl, to Terry Pratchett, before the adult books enticed me to the next floor up. I moved straight to Stephen King—I was far too young to be reading such scary stuff—yet I was encouraged to read anything.

I used the library regularly until I went to University, whose library I only used for researching mind-numbing coursework assignments, and then I stopped. I didn't step foot in a library for years and instead bought books from charity shops or received them as presents. On one occasion, I sat in St Albans library, and worked on a short story — but it was so noisy and busy, I couldn't concentrate, and longed for a librarian to hold their finger to their lips to shush everyone.

But now a wonderful thing has happened and I have a 17-month-old son. At the moment

he's far too young to read. He's at a stage where he likes eating books, or randomly turning the pages and pointing at pictures, making it virtually impossible to read him a full story. But I've started doing exactly what my mum did and together we visit the library most weekends. He makes excited noises and I chose him books to suck on. I want him to love libraries just as much as I did when growing up.

Even in this digital age, when so many things can be done online, when the fear that books are redundant is never far away, libraries will always be a special place. Libraries are a resource to be treasured and celebrated and I love them again.

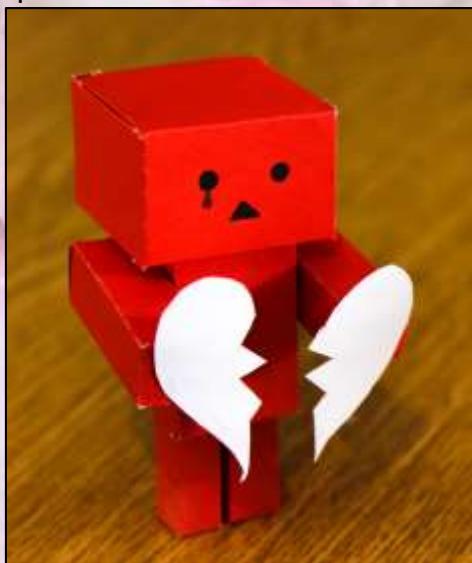


Writing About Love

Anne Ellis on an illusive topic – love.

Finding love in real life can be a difficult process—or it can be the easiest thing in the world: person #1 meets person #2; they hit it off; they go on a few dates; love ensues. It makes for a happy couple—and a deadly boring bit of romantic fiction.

The hard part, when writing a romance, is *not* getting your characters together. It's keeping them apart.



It's a bit like trying to pat your head while rubbing your stomach. The goal of a romance novel is to get (usually) two people together—while simultaneously putting off that happy ending for as long as possible. What any good story needs is conflict, and if the path of true love runs smooth, there's no conflict—and no story.

So how do we introduce conflict, and keep our perfect couple apart?

One way would be to enlist **external factors**. Say, for instance, River is a homicide detective, and Jude their chief suspect who's just been banged up in jail. Or they could be separated by some natural disaster, alien invasion, or well-meaning (and perhaps misinformed) friends who somehow don't see that they'll be perfect for each other. However, care is needed: ideally,

external conflicts will keep the pair from coupling up while still allowing them to interact together (see below).

Alternatively, or additionally, it could be **internal factors** that keep them apart. **Opposites attract** is a perennially popular trope in romance. Perhaps they have differing views on Brexit, or one partner is a neat-freak while the other is a compulsive hoarder. They're going to need to reach a compromise if they're going to have any chance of living together happily.

Ideally, your couple should **complement one another**. One's weakness should be the other's strength, so that together they have a romantic synergy that makes the couple more than the sum of its parts. In fact, their love for their partner should inspire them to be better—not only is the couple stronger together, but each partner is also stronger *individually* because they are together. This ties in nicely with each having an **individual character growth arc**.



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Let's say we've got our perfect couple and a nice bundle of obstacles to strew in their path to Happy Ever After. Time to get writing™ — but how do we actually portray growing affection on page?

Here, as in many other areas, let **show not tell** be your guide. Readers don't want to be told these people are falling in love; they want to experience it with them. They want to **feel** those highs and lows, and relate them to their own experience of love and/or heartbreak.



Time on page together is key (and this is why you need to be careful with your external conflicts). If our star-crossed lovers really can't see or talk to each other for an extended length of time, they should very definitely be thinking of one another. **Pining** for the absent partner is good, but so is **seething in fury** at whatever unbelievable sin the other has just committed. Hate and love are never so close together as between the pages of a traditional bodice- or breeches-ripper.

Keeping it real: Readers won't be fully invested in your love story if it comes over as fake or contrived. **The Big Misunderstanding** is nowadays a very tired trope: if the only thing keeping your lovebirds apart could be cleared up by a ten-minute conversation, you may want to introduce some other sources of conflict—or at least, a very good reason why they can't *have* that conversation—to keep it believable.

For me, the key to a believable romance is **staying true to the characters**. Don't have them behaving in ways that betray their core principles simply because they're falling in love. Love can, and does, make you do the wacky—but it can't perform a personality transplant.



And for Aphrodite's sake, if you're writing a **sex scene**, keep the vocabulary true to your characters' voices in the rest of the book. If you're writing about body parts, don't let your gruff, blunt (or as might be, feisty and outspoken) POV character inexplicably descend into coy euphemisms (or worse, purple prose) while in the throes of passion, even in their head.

On the other hand, there's nothing wrong with staying firmly outside the bedroom door. Love stories come in all flavours and heat levels, and so long as you don't mislead the reader with your cover and/or blurb into expecting something different from what you're delivering, you'll find your happy readership.

VERACITY

Anne Ellis writes gay romance and mysteries under the pen name JL Merrow. She has had around 25 novels and novellas published, plus over 60 short stories. Anne's most recent publications, available now, include...



Belling the Kat and Other Stories

Office worker Kat didn't think the statuesque Belle was her type—until she saw her friend rocking a slinky satin bridesmaid's dress. Now Kat can't get the gorgeous image out of her head, but dare she risk losing Belle's friendship by trying for something more?

To add to her woes, ever since a close encounter of the feline kind, Kat's had an embarrassing little problem that keeps recurring. Surely someone as beautiful as Belle won't fall for a woman who occasionally sprouts whiskers—and a tail!

This mini-collection also includes three more super-quick reads featuring women loving women: contemporary romance *Little Bit of Ivory*; Japanese fairy tale *Ice Maiden*; and the haunting *Dance With Me*.

These super-quick reads have been previously published but are now appearing together for the first time.

www.mybook.to/BellingKat

Counter Culture

Customer service has never been this personal.

Robin Christopher, beleaguered retail worker, isn't having an easy November. His boss is raising stress levels planning a Black Friday to end all Black Fridays, his family doesn't understand him, and his best friend thinks his new crush is a hallucination brought on by watching too many episodes of *Doctor Who*.

Archie Levine dresses in Victorian style and divides his time between caring for his young son and creating weird and wacky steampunk gadgets from bits of old junk—when he's not looking after his mum and trying to keep on good terms with his ex. The last thing he's got time for is a relationship, but the flustered young man he met while disembowelling a fridge is proving very tempting.

When his mum's social conscience is roused by a local store with a cavalier attitude to the homeless, former rough sleeper Archie shares her anger. Little does he know that Robin works for that same store. When Archie finds out he's sleeping with the enemy, things could cut up very rough indeed.

www.mybook.to/CounterCulture



Christmas Cake-tastrophe

A Christmas story, by Phil Mitchell

Ian loved Christmas. He waited all year for it to arrive. If it wasn't for his wife, Susan, he'd have Christmas decorations in his house all year round.

Ian always put a lot of energy into everything he did. He was the kind of guy to say things like, 'go big or go home,' 'do it to the max,' and 'let's super-size this thing.' And when he saw Susan making her Christmas cake, he saw an opportunity to, 'go large.'



Several weeks before, the kitchen had become a Christmas cake command centre. Flour and sugar, spoons and spatulas, were scattered everywhere. Ian watched Susan as she weighed and measured ingredients.

'What's this?' asked Ian, sticking his nose in a large bowl.

'Dried fruit soaked in brandy.'

Ian took a cherry from the bowl and popped it in his mouth.

'The brandy's weak. Add a bit more.'

'No,' said Susan, slapping his hand as he reached for a plump sultana. 'People have to drive after eating it and they might go over the alcohol limit.'

'Nonsense,' said Ian. 'It's a cake. No-one's been convicted of drink driving due to eating cake.'

Susan stirred up the Christmas cake and baked it slowly for hours, a rich aroma filling the house. She wrapped it in foil, kept it in the cupboard and every two days fed it with a tiny drop of cheap, weak, supermarket brandy to keep it moist.

One day Ian saw her feeding the cake and remarked, 'Don't be shy with the booze.'

'It's fine as it is,' said Susan.



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But Ian couldn't leave it alone. The cake needed more impact, more oomph—it wasn't extreme enough for Christmas.



He fumbled around in the cupboard where they stored all the alcohol gifted to them but never drunk, until he found what he was looking for: a large, heavy, and dusty bottle of expensive-looking brandy. He couldn't remember who'd given it as a present. He pulled out the wax-sealed stopper and the escaping alcohol fumes made him wince. Wow, he thought, that's super strong stuff.

Ian waited for Susan to leave the house before emptying her bottle of cheap, weak brandy down the sink, and refilling it with the good stuff. During the transfer, a drop of the expensive brandy landed on his hand, stinging the skin, and leaving a red mark. Sign of a good brandy, thought Ian.

Susan, without noticing the change, continued to feed the cake every couple of days. And in addition, whenever Susan was out of the house, Ian lifted the foil covering the cake, and fed it a little too. Susan would never notice. This would be the most fantastic, mind-blowing, incredible Christmas cake ever.

Christmas Day arrived. Ian and Susan's children tore the wrapping paper from their presents and played noisily with their pile of new toys as Susan prepared Christmas dinner and Ian set the table. He laid the Christmas tablecloth, and arranged crackers, cutlery, glasses, and napkins featuring Santa Claus and his reindeers. He positioned tinsel around the special Christmas placemats, sprinkled the table with Christmas confetti, and lit Christmas candles.

The candles burned bright as they devoured Christmas dinner, then watched the Queen's speech, after which, Susan disappeared to the kitchen, and returned with her Christmas cake—its smooth white icing topped with the same plastic Father Christmas and Rudolph figures she used every year.

'Who wants a slice?' she said.

Ian leapt up, 'Me,' he shouted.

Susan cut through the icing and fell back rubbing her eyes.

'My eyes are stinging,' she said, glaring at Ian. 'What have you done?'

There was a whoosh as a candle flame leapt and ignited the cake, turning it into a fireball, flames touching the ceiling, cake crumb, currants, cherries, and hot, sticky marzipan exploding across the walls.

With surprised cries, they all fell back, their hair singed.

'Get out,' shouted Ian, ushering Susan and the children into the kitchen, as lumps of molten cake continued to burn.



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He grabbed a tea towel and valiantly tried to extinguish the fire. Unfortunately, he only fanned the flames, and the tablecloth, and then the tea towel, caught alight. He threw the tea towel to the carpet, setting it ablaze. The heat and smoke grew unbearable, and everyone left through the back door.

Flames leapt into the clear, dark sky as thick, black smoke drifted across town. Ian stood gazing at his burning house, flashes from the neighbour's extravagant Christmas lights reflecting green and red on the new bald patches where his hair had burnt away, as the windows exploded from the heat, the roof collapsed, and his car melted on the driveway. This isn't how he'd imagined Christmas Day would end.

Susan and the children, naked patches where their eyebrows had been scorched away, hugged each other close, keeping warm. Susan glared at Ian, shaking her head, tears running down her cheeks.

'Will Father Christmas replace the presents?' asked their daughter, her clear voice cutting through the sound of approaching sirens.

As two fire engines arrived, and firefighters extinguished the flames, creating an aroma of damp bonfire, all the neighbours came out on the street, rallying around to support Ian and his family, bringing them hot drinks, mince pies, and blankets, offering reassurances, and places to stay. They're displaying the true spirit of Christmas, thought Ian—Christmas spirit to the EXTREME.

Ian smiled, feeling the overwhelming joy of Christmas in his heart, as Susan and the children climbed in a taxi to stay at her parents, and left him, perhaps forever.

Note: the author endorses the use of enormous quantities of brandy in cakes, puddings, and mince pies—just don't drive or operate heavy machinery after consuming.



The Roaring 2020s! What Opportunities will they Bring for Writers?

Tina Shaw on what the next decade may bring.

The 1920s were an amazing decade, when writers such as Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, D H Lawrence and Virginia Woolf were plying their trade, and using literature to illustrate what was happening in the world around them.

Things were changing fast and offered them great scope for describing those changes in both fact and fiction. A decade which began with Spanish flu and ended with the Wall Street crash, saw the rise of political movements from Communism to Fascism, with scientific and technological advances from the proliferation of cars and radios, (1922 saw the start of the BBC), to the new innovation of sound films. Social changes were also high on the agenda in the Western world. In the UK all women finally gained the vote by the end of the

decade, whilst shorter hair and shorter skirts became acceptable. More women went out to work and 1928 saw the first women's Olympics. In America, it was a decade of prohibition and the beginnings of restrictions on immigration (*Plus ca change....!*).

So what are we likely to be gifted to aid us in our quest for topics to write about in 2020s?

It looks as if we shall be spoilt for choice. Our world is also changing fast. On the positive side, and our potential readership is likely to welcome some positivity, there are significant advances in the medical field with gene therapies and potential cures for such illnesses as Huntingdon's Chorea. Meanwhile the diabetes explosion and the ageing population have already spawned some interesting fiction.



The changing political landscape of the 1920s looks like being well matched by what we can expect in the 2020s. We may be heartily sick of politics by the time this edition of *Veracity* comes out, but the scope for the budding writer is immense. Is history repeating itself with the rise of the far right? Will the extremists on the left have a resurgence? Is politics as we know it dead? Whatever we may think on 1.1.20, is unlikely to be what we believe on 31.12.29.

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Climate change is of course the other ‘biggy.’ Extinction Rebellion’s view is that we will be living in a very different world by the end of the next decade, with mass starvation and huge population movements a real possibility. All you science fiction writers take note. Your fiction, like that



of HG Wells, may have become a reality. Those technological innovations you included in your fantasy novels may also have become everyday objects; robots doing everything;

human beings surplus to requirements. Currently, technology is sending us down the road of software that reacts to the human voice, and is encouraging us to print less hard copies of our work. Those thumbs, overdeveloped for texting, may no longer be required. Alternatively, perhaps the power sources will run dry and we shall need to relearn to write letters and read maps once again.

Social changes in the 1920s were probably slower than most of us have experienced in our own lifetimes. How they pan out in the 2020s will be heavily influenced by scientific, economic and political factors to some extent beyond our individual control.

As writers, we have already had to face the reality of

change. Less physical books being published and purchased, more online material and more self-publishing. There may be a resurgence of interest in books as there has been in vinyl. It is an uncertain world. Currently, certain genres, such as crime and celebrity, are the most marketable. In a fast changing society what will be the next most popular genre? My guess is some form of escapism from the unpleasant realities of the decade. My gloomy predictions might be wrong. Either way, we face a generation of potential readers who have grown up expecting instant gratification served by short attention spans. Will we have to adapt our writing to meet this head on, or could another James Joyce or Tolstoy yet become a best seller?



Lisbeth Phillips Plate Competition 2019 – The Winning Entry

Carrie Meoff's (aka Tina Shaw's) winning entry to the Lisbeth Phillip's Competition on the theme of 'for the betterment of mankind.'

An imaginary invention, socio-political movement or simple concept that will have the effect of improving life for every single person on the planet. This is a tall order and one which many well-known figures have tried to come up with answers to in the past. Think Jesus (or possibly his disciple Paul), who wanted to convert us all so that we could all be saved. Think Karl Marx, who believed that to each according to his needs, from each according to his ability would prove a recipe for universal happiness. Or think the inventor of the World Wide Web who fancied that enabling everyone to share knowledge and information would transform our lives for the better. And then think again. Whatever their good intentions, and whatever their wide ranging effects, the results have had both significant positive and negative effects on the wellbeing of mankind.



My suggestion, however, is staggering in its simplicity, virtually cost free and certainly carbon neutral, all the criteria we need to care about in today's uncertain world.

I propose that a law should be passed in every country in the world as follows –

Each and every individual has a duty to smile at, and greet positively, every person they meet in the course of the day.

Humans are programmed to respond to other human beings from the beginning of life when their survival is dependent on the goodwill of others. Babies cry for attention so that their needs will be met. As they grow older, they thrive on being noticed and given time by other human beings. They learn that making others smile and laugh brings rich emotional rewards. This continues into adulthood. We are social beings who need the company and approval of those around us. We benefit most from receiving face to face approval and attention from others. Even on social media, many judge their happiness by the number of 'likes' they receive on their posts, but can never be satisfied that they have received enough. Loneliness is a major cause of human unhappiness. Just talking to another human being brightens people's day, as the Silver Line charity set up by Esther Rantzen demonstrates. One of the worst forms of loneliness is spending days without speaking to another human being.

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The benefits of simple, friendly human contact are enormous and are strikingly obvious in a world suffering from a crisis in mental ill health.

In the UK one in four of the workforce will experience mental illness each year. In 2016 15.8 million work days were lost due to mental illness. The largest cause of sickness absence is depression, stress and anxiety. The more complex our society becomes, the less we are likely to know those around us. In simple societies and modern villages, people naturally greet each other when they meet face to face. Contact with others online is no substitute for real time interaction. When you are out walking, smile and greet those you pass. Even driving, smiling and raising a hand in thanks for a kindness is easier than an angry response when things don't go your way.

Being nice costs nothing, but how easy would it be to enshrine this in law?

Clearly, there are some drawbacks to this idea which the law would need to write into the small print.

There is a potential difficulty of legal enforcement with its attendant costs. If a complaint was made that someone failed to smile and greet you, how could this be proven? The law would need to be applied in a realistic manner. A good parallel would be the law applied to the smacking of children. How could a complaint be proved? Only by evidence, by corroboration, by witness statements. Thus, the reality would become that only the most serious cases ever reached court. The important message of the law would be what was most significant in the changing of human behaviour. The message would be given out that smiling and greeting others was what was expected of us all.

There would too, need to be exemptions for people with certain mental or physical disabilities. For example, those with a speech impediment, or certain types of autism would need to be issued with a certificate of exemption.

How to deal with the situation in crowded streets, or large gatherings where greeting everyone would be an impossibility would also need to be recognized as exempt from the law. However, greeting the person next to you on a train, or a gathering such as a football match would still be the expected behaviour.

Different rules would need to be developed for those few societies where smiling has a different social connotation to the majority of cultures. Whatever means that culture employs to convey a positive greeting would need to be substituted for a smile.

In summary, passing this law has the potential to make the world a better place for us all to live in. By making smiling and greeting people positively the norm, by entrenching it in a worldwide law, we can help to reduce the sum of human misery. It is such a simple thing to do. Showing that we care about other people will make us feel cared about too, and by giving back what we have just received we will feel happier and more content with ourselves.



Verulam Writers 2019/2020 Competition Winners

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	GNOME	
David Gibson Cup				
Topic: The Revelation of a Secret Adjudication Date: 2 nd October 2019	Wendy Turner	<i>Four runners-up with equal votes:</i> Suzanne Stanton, John Spencer, Robert Paterson and Tina Shaw	Richard Bruckdorfer (aka Tanya Hyde)	
Lisbeth Phillips Plate Competition				
Topic: For the Betterment of Mankind Adjudication Date: 27 th November 2019	Tina Shaw	Richard Bruckdorfer	Ben Bergonzi	Philip Mitchell (aka Ewan I. Makepeace)
President's Competition				
Topic: TBC Adjudication Date: 4 th March 2020				
Crystal Decanter Competition				
Topic: TBC Adjudication Date: 13 th May 2020				
Howard Linskey Competition				
Topic: TBC Adjudication Date: 8 th July 2020				

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on



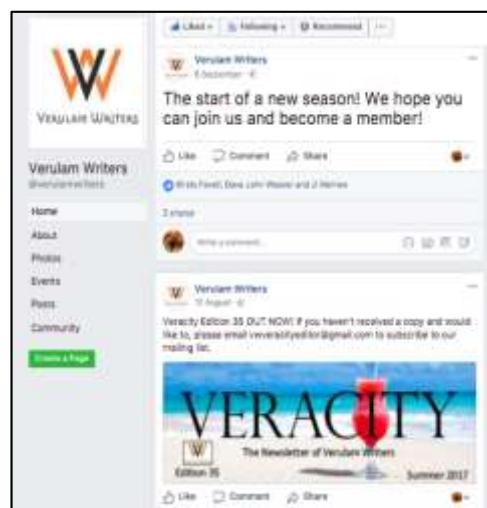
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Do you have some news to share about writing such as an event or publication of an article or book?

- **Visited a website that could be a good resource for other writers?**
- **Seen a good quote?**
- **Like to find out more about the VW?**

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We'd like to encourage all members to visit and use our Facebook page. It's full of news from the VW and a great way to stay connected! As long as posts are writing-related and appropriate, we'd love you to post too!





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VERULAM WRITERS
W
Verulam Writers
@Verulam_Writers
Writers group dedicated to supporting writers in and around St Albans, Hertfordshire, UK.
St Albans, United Kingdom · verulamwriterscircle@gmail.com · Born September 1, 1952 · Joined October 2010
1,892 Following · 1,216 Followers

Tweets · Tweets & replies · Media · Likes

Verulam Writers @Verulam_Writers · Nov 10
This Wednesday at Verulam Writers - Rachael Brok, author of the St Albans-set Maarten Janzen crime series, will answer questions on the process, and talk about those all-important pitch letters - bring yours along for feedback.

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The Verulam Writers' Block *The Verulam Writers Showcase*

Barbara Cooper is a part of the VW furniture, having been a member for about twenty years. She has always enjoyed writing and have spent much of her life scribbling away. Barbara's particular passion is writing about and for children, but says that despite the fact that her dreams of becoming a best selling children's author have faded she still hasn't stopped writing, but now regards it as a fascinating hobby.

This is a scene from a chapter from a novel for older children, aged 9 – 12, a ghost story, in which Theo has been requisitioned by her Grandad to collect a family portrait from her aunt's office. She has encountered the boy the previous day.

Theo pushed a big chair across to the fireplace and climbed onto it, reaching for the corners of the picture frame to take it down but it was heavier than she'd expected and she nearly dropped it.

'Oi, you, girl, be careful. Are you trying to kill me?' demanded the boy in the picture. 'It was bad enough before but now I'm lopsided as well.'

Theo jumped off the chair and left the portrait dangling from one hook. He was scowling at her and his dark hair flopped over his forehead.

'Get me out of this thing immediately,' he said. 'I've got pins and needles in my feet.'

She didn't know he had any feet. All she could see was his head and shoulders. But she knew he was more than just a painting because he had talked to her yesterday and she knew who he was because the inscription on the picture frame read: 'Sebastian Edward Quinn, Died in the fire of 1807, aged 12.'

He was glaring at her so she glared back.

'I can't do that,' she mocked. 'I'm talking to a painting. That really is stupid.'

'I'm not a painting,' he said. 'I'm real and I'm me and I've been stuck in here far too long. Get me out.'

'How am I supposed to do that?'

'You pull me out, of course.'

'I'm not touching you,' she said. 'You can stay where you are.'

'You can't leave me like this.'

'Yes, I can,' she said, folding her arms and sticking her chin out. 'I can leave you there, all lopsided with sore feet. I can go out and lock the door and never see you again. You can't make me.'

He looked away from her and sighed. He took a deep breath.

'You wouldn't do that, would you, after all this time I've waited to get out?'

'I could, so there.'

'But I need to get out. There's something I have to do when I'm out.'

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'I don't care.'

Theo turned her back on him and sat in the big chair. What could he possibly need to do? He was dead, wasn't he, and dead people don't do things. She refused to look at him.

Then she heard something moving behind her. She stood up and turned round and clapped her hand in front of her mouth to stop a scream from coming out. Something was moving inside the picture frame. Bit by bit some fingers appeared, then a hand, and a wrist. The hand tried to brush his hair out of his eyes.

Theo felt shaky and her mouth was dry. She was so scared she could hardly breathe. Then the hand broke through the canvas, ripping it with a tearing sound as it came out into the room, towards her, the fingers spread wide. She clutched at the big chair, afraid she would fall.

'Stop – stop doing that,' she gasped. She felt her heart banging in her chest.

But the hand moved further out into the room, a real, live hand and an arm in a blue sleeve with a white lace cuff, moving stiffly towards her as if it were trying to reach her. It was the scariest thing she'd ever seen.

'Take my hand,' he ordered, 'and pull.'

She daren't touch it. It was too weird for words. If she did touch it, what would it feel like, this hand that wasn't real?

'I can't do that,' she said in a squeaky voice.

Then his other hand appeared, first the fingers spread wide like the first one, then the hand and the wrist and the arm and the canvas ripped some more until there were two arms stretching out of the picture frame, reaching for her, trying to touch her.

She stepped back but she couldn't take her eyes off him.

'Stop snivelling and pull me out,' he said. 'It won't take a minute.'

She took a deep breath and stood up. She stepped back away from him.

'You're only a painting, that's all.' she said because it was hard to believe what was happening 'You're nothing, you're not a person and you belong in the picture frame not out here with me.'

'You've got to pull me out. Everything's beginning to hurt. Can't you at least straighten the picture frame, you stupid girl.'

Theo sat down again. He certainly looked very uncomfortable, all lopsided with his arms dangling out into the room. She had two options – to pull him out or to leave him there and she didn't want to do either of them. If she pulled him out, what would happen next? But if she left him there, half in and half out, she knew she'd feel bad about him and have to come back and help him anyway.

'Okay,' she said and stood up.

She took another deep breath and held out her hands to him. He took hold of them. She was surprised that

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they felt quite normal except for the rough skin on his palms. He gripped her hands and she pulled and pulled and as she pulled, the boy came slowly out of the picture frame, his shoulders and body, his legs and his feet, until a whole complete boy, a bit taller than Theo, skinny, straight and strong, dressed in blue satin and lace, was standing in front of her.

'Here I am at last,' he said.

'Yes, here you are, but what am I to do with you now?'

Theo looked at him and wondered how she was going to explain this to Grandad, now that the painting that he'd asked for had become a real, live boy.

And Finally... Some Festive Humour!

What did Adam say the day before Christmas?

It's Christmas Eve

What did Cinderella say when her photos didn't arrive on time?

One day my prints will come

What do snowmen have for breakfast?

Snowflakes

What do you call a train loaded with toffee?

A chew chew train

How did Mary and Joseph know that Jesus was 7lb 6oz when he was born?

They had a weigh in a manger

Why did Santa's little helper go for counselling?

He suffered from low elf esteem

Who is Rudolph's favourite singer?

Beyon-sleigh

What do reindeer put on their Christmas trees?

Hornaments

About Us

Verulam Writers meet fortnightly on Wednesday evenings at 8pm in St Michael's Church Hall, St Albans, AL3 4SL. Informal gatherings are held every other week in a local pub. To find out more and for a full list of events, visit the VW website at: www.verulamwriterscircle.org.uk

Get Involved

If you would like to write for VERACITY (we'd love to have you!) or have any comments or feedback please email the editor Sam Ellis at VWVeracityEditor@gmail.com

Publicity

If you have anything you'd like to publicise (a new publication, an event etc.) then we'd love to hear about it at VWPUBLICITY@gmail.com

Events

Events are always in the works so if you'd like to volunteer or read at a future event please email Phil and Gerwin at verulamwritersevents@hotmail.co.uk

The editor would like to thank all of the contributors to this edition of VERACITY.

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Wishing all Verulam Writers and VERACITY readers a



Merry Christmas!

See you next year!