

# SCRIVENS –

the Occasional Magazine of  
Tyne and Esk Writers



Happy New Year	Sheila Thacker	1	Euphemistically Speaking	Elizabeth Moodie	7
All our Yesterdays	Arthur Greenan	2	Two Ekphrastic Poems	Mary Johnston	8
Campbeltown No More	Martin White	2	Chin on Chest	Jock Stein	8
An Old Navy Blue Serge Suit	George Masterton	3	Scotland Lost	Kenny Gilchrist	9
Ghost	Margaret Beck	3	The Artist	Hannah Faiolean	9
Lonely Hours	Lea Taylor	3	Sex in the Sunset Years	Ruth Gilchrist	9
December	Diana Stevens	3	Tam and God	Isabel Abbott	9
Dry January	Penny Hext	4	The Butcher	Anne Jones	10
Meeting Dr White	Lea Taylor	4	The Dark	Andy Strachan	10
I Changed by not Changing	Jeff Kemp	5	The Gift	Jane Patmore	10
Pinched	Lorna Dixon	5	Leave Me Alone	Anne Jones	11
Market Research	Graham Leake	6	Papal Problem at the Vatican	George Cunningham	11
King, Witches and Godly State	Annemarie Allan	6	The Year End	Jock Stein	11
A Potpourri of Poems	Robert Blyth	7			

*Sheila Thacker considers celebrating every month  
as she says:*

## HAPPY NEW YEAR!

We live in uncertain times; regardless of beliefs and politics 2018 is uncharted territory. We celebrate a new year and reflect on the old one. Celebrating every month would be good, as each is full of renewed hope and anticipation.

Let me explain:

Happy New January! New beginnings, diaries with blank pages waiting for history to happen, resolutions are strong and energetic, though the weather is unpredictable.

Happy New February! Where new life starts, weather dependant, we see snowdrops and crocuses appearing through the winter soil. The commercial festivities that humans so love kicks off with Valentine's day. Pancake Tuesday: fun way to start Lent giving us space for reflection. The days' stretch noticeably into:

Happy New March! With mad hares and hatters heralding spring. The ground is awash with daffodils, the trees and shrubs start budding as the clocks go forward with promise of a long hot summer. (I am mindful that I live in Scotland.)

Happy New April! Days getting longer, earth waking up with renewed energy and hope after a long winter sleep. Easter is our next festival with Easter bunnies all gambolling amongst the new born lambs and chocolate eggs rolling down hills towards:

Happy New May! Trees blossoming, wedding bells ringing in churches throughout the land. The season of summer gala days' start, bringing the organising committees hard

work to fruition. Regardless of the weather, communities turn out to marvel at the pageants on show.

Happy New June and July: An abundance of colour as flowers and shrubs, all now in full bloom brighten our long days as we look forward to holidays. Buckets and spades at the ready. Festivals and sports aplenty. Swimming, tennis, golf, cricket, Olympics and world cups it all happens during the summer. The academic year has ended, so hope and anticipation for next year adds to the excitement of summer.

Happy New August! Warm balmy evenings, restful days grow shorter, though festivals are still buzzing as we welcome:

Happy New September! The berry and hop picking season. Cooler mornings and evenings, with bright sunny days. The academic year begins full of hope for futures, as the days continue to decrease into:

Happy New October! When trees shed their gloriously colourful leaves. We grab last minute holidays in the sun. Then don warmer clothes as the clocks go back in readiness for Halloween, the first of the winter festivals followed by:

Happy New November! Bonfires and chestnuts roasted. Animals hibernate while humans spend cosy evenings around the fire. Smells of delicious home cooked soups, stews and puddings greet visitors at every door. Excitement and commercialism rise as we anticipate:

Happy New December! Christmas dominates this dark winter month. The shortest day is just before the two-week seasonal holiday. Bringing good tidings and joy throughout the land. The year ends with hope and expectation for another Happy New Year! Enjoy.

**ALL OUR YESTERDAYS***By Arthur Greenan*

My first memory was when I was three years of age. I stood up and tried to lift a Clydesdale horse off the ground.

In the summer of 1946, we celebrated the homecoming of Dod and Mary Scott's daughter, with her Australian boyfriend. Three weeks later, the newly-weds danced the last waltz together as they took their leave of Tranent, forever. It is my first recollection as a boy, aged five, of community sadness.

My Dad and I stole fallen fence posts. Heaped with dross they burned till morning taking the damp out of our bedclothes.

In 1975, I met Inspector Mathieson, Tranent, who explained that he and my late father had been life-long friends. Due to his trade union activity in Leith in the 1920's he was black balled by many employers.

**What of the negative memories?**

On the August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1944, I joined the infant class of Saint Martin's Junior Secondary School dressed in full length corduroy trousers which my mother had made. .

In Primary 2, I was awarded the first prize in our class. It was inscribed 'For General Excellence'. I felt for those children who, because of the lack of decent food, fell asleep with hunger. They were the earliest to die in adulthood. We were instructed, always, to salute the teacher, headmaster, priest, minister and scout master but not the Co-op milkman, postman or the dustman. Why were they not worthy of a salute?

We entered Primary 3 in 1946 with Miss Mary Kelly, an Irish spinster, as our teacher.

She conducted our first singing lesson then slammed the piano lid shut!

'Who was making such an infernal din?'

She threatened to belt the whole class if the person with the foghorn voice did not own up.

'Miss Kelly, it's him!' All pointed to me.

After she had lashed my palm with the tawse six times she screeched.

'You are a little lying basso profundo!'

I did not know that I had a deep, tuneless voice. I didn't tell lies either. I had been lashed enough. I kicked her shins until she let go.

In Primary 4, Miss McKenna would not allow any boy out for a widdle until they displayed real agony. With our spelling homework any child with only 8/10 correct got one swipe of the tawse. Those who scored only 5/10 got four lashes.

Peter Rafferty decided that I had 8/10. I protested. Miss McKenna did not check my jotter. She walloped my wrist. I exploded. I sunk my tackety boots into her shins too. The headmaster, wee, fat, Jimmy Campbell threw me over a

desk. He leathered my arse with the tawse until the blood ran down legs, through my socks and into my shoes.

Next day, my dad, a gentle soul, grabbed Mr Campbell by the neck and twisted his tie till his eyes bulged. He grabbed Miss McKenna and showed her the black and blue wealds on my bare bum.

'Do that to any of mine again and that is exactly the colour your arse will be.'

To me, all our yesterdays are a kaleidoscope of all that is good, bad, ugly and pleasurable. All are the creation of the human race. All have their own indestructible truths.

© Arthur Greenan. An extract for the original story of that name. Friday, 29 December 2017

**NOT QUITE IRISH PROSE POETRY  
(Campbeltown no more)***Martin White*

Skipped past Kip;  
Left Campbeltown down;  
Mulled Kintyre;  
Glenarm twisted;  
Bangor with anger;  
Ardglass middle-class;  
Howth one big mouth;  
Dockside Malahide;  
Arklow slow flow;  
Won't Kilmore no more;  
Floated to Cork;  
Kinsale bargain sale;  
Glandore awful bore;  
Bearhaven day unshaven;  
Derrynane quite insane;  
Fenit didn't mean it;  
Kilrush best airbrush;  
Carrigaholt brought a jolt;  
Loved Inishmhor for evermore;  
Kilkieran Bay hard to lay;  
But easier to Kilronan;  
Innishbofin best stop in;  
Awful wide was Broadhaven;  
Killybeg one long dreg;  
Less Sheephaven more dull haven;  
Portrush'ed on by;  
Then passed Port Ellen;  
Locked up through Crinan;  
Before taking one long Inverkip.

**AN OLD NAVY BLUE SERGE SUIT***George Masterton*

1944, me four years old, lying on the fireside rug, surrounded with soapy water and a shattered porcelain bowl. The rug, meticulously made by my mother from an old navy blue serge suit of my father's, now saturated and with me sobbing my heart out in pain, my mother just having removed a large shard of porcelain from my rear. How did I do it? Simply by not doing as I was told. My younger brother Edward had just been born and after he had been bathed in the bowl in front of the fire, I had the pleasure of being bathed in his bathwater as we had no hot running water or bath in the house. I was only allowed to stand into the bowl when my mother said so. On this occasion, I just couldn't wait and stood into the bowl, alas stepping on the bar of soap which my mother had left, slipping and shattering the bowl as I fell. Result, yet another accident in the home.

My father was at work on nights and it was down to our up-stairs neighbour Sandy Sharp to fetch the doctor. No anaesthetics given, stitches were to be inserted and as I was kicking so much, I burst them as soon as they were applied, even with Sandy sitting on me. Eventually, five clips were used to draw the wounds together and the nurse came in next day to apply dressings which made me look like the lower half of an Egyptian Mummy. Forgetting the fact that I wasn't a girl, no access to the 'wee man', was provided for, for which I remember I protested about, bringing roars of laughter from all females present, much to my indignation and embarrassment.

Eventually, the wounds healed and I was given the five clips, looking like some dissected spider, presented to me on a wad of cotton wool which I kept for some time before mysteriously disappearing one day. My mother's sense of humour did nothing to abate my embarrassment when she said, 'Well, if you are in an accident and we can't recognise you, we can always turn you upside down and identify you that way'.

On reflection, perhaps this was true, given the fact no DNA or other similar sophisticated forensic means were available at that time, but I think I should add that there is perhaps the only other identifiers missing...'Batch Number' and 'Best Before' date stamp.

**GHOST . . . ?***Margaret Beck*

Upset? Of course I am upset when I hear "no such thing as ghosts." I am a ghost, have been for 200 years, give or take a decade or so and I can tell you it's BORING. Not for me the thrill of turning the Yale in the lock and going through the door, oh no, I have to walk through the wall, WALK mind, not run. Ghosts don't run.

Perhaps the odd posh one may travel on horseback - the horse of course is also a ghost - but the correct etiquette is to glide through the wall. It's expected of you, you see or don't see, as the case may be.

It is definitely no fun at all being a ghost. It is always dark, always cold. I don't go on holiday, certainly not in the tourist season. My being resident here, invisible or not, attracts visitors to my castle and helps with the maintenance. Me? I'm very low maintenance--zilch, zero, no Designer wardrobe, handbags---handbags? there's a vision for you, a ghost with a Louis Vuitton. No food. A 200-year fast, without even a pizza. Silent, I don't make a sound to disturb the neighbours, don't go clubbing---Boring, Boring, Boring!

Oh, how I wish I were a Poltergeist!

**LONELY HOURS***Lea Taylor*

In such a small moment  
all will be washed up by the wind  
and truth,  
will exist only in the mind

How odd on autumn wished days  
to laugh without your laughter near  
and turn to see you  
not at all  
to walk in old footsteps  
among suddenly lonely hours

How strange to one day call your name  
and never hear you answer  
To anticipate each moment  
the warmth of you falling into my sight

How empty then  
when my smile is set  
by no-one at all  
and my hands touch yours  
only in my dreams.

**DECEMBER***Diana Stevens*

(It is set out as it is because it is based on the Fibonacci sequence.)

A  
blaze  
of logs  
scatters light  
sketching spiked shadows  
to flicker on shimmering globes,  
outside, birdsong is muted with the slow steal of dusk  
the silence of snow surrounds us  
and misty breath hangs  
suspended  
until  
sun  
rise

**DRY JANUARY***Penny Hext*

Easy making a New Year's Resolution, isn't it? The hard bit, as every Resolutionist knows, is *sticking to the knitting*. Or in my case: staying dry for a whole month. Cinch when it's the first day and you've had . . . erm, a couple over the festive season. Not so simple the day after. Or the day after the day after.

The first weekend is worst. A whole weekend of battling The Habit. Dreich outside. Skint. Mates skint. TV re-runs. Freezer full of leftovers. And . . . the temptation to swallow your sorrows in a bottle of red edges that teeny bit closer.

Water has never seemed so wearisome, tea so . . . tepid.

Resolve. This is where Resolve comes in (like that hooded character in Pilgrim's Progress). Look at the notice you wrote to yourself that's attached to the fridge. The one that reminds you why you're doing this in the first place. Hmm.

If Resolve doesn't work, try carrots.

My list of carrots goes: 1. Chocolate – 72% dark. 2. Five Star Rated Film. 3. Woodland/park walk. 4. Bake my favourite cake/pudding. 5. Buy flowers. Even just one, colourful one. 6. Read an inspirational poem. 7. Re-read your favourite novel. 8. Sing-a-long to your all-time favourite songs – even if it's in the shower. 9. Visit your favourite charity shop. 10. Talk to (and I mean TALK – not text/tweet/facebook/whatever) a friend. Or a potential friend... this is a New Year, new beginning.

If I'm feeling ornery, then it's the stick method. 1. Look at yourself in the mirror – especially at the spare tyre around the middle. And the fat ankles. And . . . You get it. 2. Remember all the starving children in Africa. They are thirsting too. 3. **STOP** and count to ten. Backwards. This will break your unthinking impulse to reach for a glass. Allegedly. 4. You are NOT thirsty. You are probably hungry. Eat something (see above). 5. Ring up your Coach. (Of course you have a Coach.) Your Coach will listen to you. Hear your execrable excuses "I've had a bad day" "I deserve it". And say No.

Sometimes, of course, none of this works. You are in excellent company. Wasn't it Oscar Wilde who declared that he could resist everything except temptation?

However. You have vixen cunning, and have broadcast your resolve Far and Wide. This is where the power of public derision comes in. Surely, surely, you can resist. Just for one wee month. Can't you?

By the time you've hit the second weekend, staying dry has become a dreary habit. The third weekend is relatively easy. By the end of the month, you feel you could almost – almost - keep this up forever.

Ah, the virtues of teetotal-dom. De-dum. I sidle past my Methodist forebears. Not a drop betwixt them. Sober as.

Every social occasion involves alcohol. Unless of course, you enjoy being the chauffeur . . . and drinking 100% non-alcoholic wine. In which case, party on.

Lent is already on the planning horizon!

**MEETING DR WHITE***Lea Taylor*

My Mother had a special drawer where she kept an assortment of secret things. The strangest were the pink balloons - my brother said they were for making water bombs but even then, my 7 year-old mind wasn't exactly buying it. We tried blowing them up and they made a distinctly odd shape.

The other unusual thing was the padded surgeon's masks, or so I thought. I remembered seeing them on some tv hospital soap and making the connection. There they were, standing over the patient, scalpel to the ready all suited up, special hats, rubber gloves and that face mask like the ones Mum had in her drawer. I resolved to incorporate them into my play.

The next day I skipped out into my street to join the other children. Drs and nurses was on the agenda. We took it in turns to hook the mask around our ears - well, that was what the hooks were for, and carry out numerous fictitious operations.

I was somewhat shocked and horrified when my Mother hurtled towards me, grabbed me by the arm and dragged me home. She was shouting so incoherently I wasn't quite sure what to make of it - and she had interrupted my operation. My patient was probably needing CPR right now. Evidently I was going to have to suspend being Dr Kildare for the time being.

In the house things got a bit ugly. My mask promptly put in the bin and my bottom thoroughly smacked. Under no circumstances should I have gone into the hallowed 'special drawer' and even worse, taken a Dr White's sanitary towel.

Towel? Dr White?

I felt indignant. It didn't look anything like a towel to me. I certainly wouldn't have used it after a bath - and who was this Dr White? I'd never heard of him before. Mum referred to him as if he was an honoured guest. It was a mystery I obviously wasn't party to and it was to be a long wait before any semblance of an explanation was to appear.

Eight years on and I became privy to the secrets of the 'special drawer'. A formal introduction to Dr. White took place. I learned that the ungainly mask was for an entirely different part of my body and came with a special belt which didn't make it any better. It all felt very uncomfortable as if I'd had a loaf of bread wedged between my legs.

Womanhood didn't hold that much appeal after that. It certainly didn't sell itself with its shame and secrecy. Mum talked about my 'time' in hushed lowered tones. Anything to do with 'downstairs' was hidden in bags and bins - an unspoken secret code

I thought there would be much fanfare when I came of age, reached that womanly rite of passage, but all I got was Dr. White in a brown paper bag and a note for school excusing me from games.

*Jeff Kemp reveals –*

## **I CHANGED BY NOT CHANGING**

Childhood  
is where I got stuck  
or before I was born

quiet before the dawn  
light before the storm  
what can't be altered  
must be absorbed.

Being human  
is making choices  
forming conclusions  
never being sure

the wavelength  
you're on  
will find an audience.

Just like a TV.  
That's me  
part of this season's  
exotic species

peering out from the screen.  
Maybe dishevelled but  
nothing frightening  
no self-inflicted bite marks

for example.  
And maybe it's autism  
and maybe it's spectrum  
or condition

and maybe it's aspergers  
which sounds like  
a vegetable.  
Ha ha ho ho

funny for some  
repetition calms  
rhythm brings relief.  
Sometimes at least.

Maybe. Maybe no.  
On-off. Remote actions  
switch channels.

Entertainers on every show  
they've learned their lines  
they earn a lot  
a credit to their bank.

They'd not have  
disappointing kids  
with minds maybe quick  
or slipping down different synapses.

Destinations aren't chosen  
by the machine.  
Wiring in your head's done  
before you give thanks.

Snap and there's no way back  
from the points made  
before you could say  
it's happened again.

People escape every corner  
they're chased into.  
We're less mechanistic  
Than mercurial

changing in ways  
maybe hidden  
maybe unknowable  
until we glimpse

reflections of how others live.  
But don't ask me  
who am I to speak.

Mute as conversations  
that never leave my head  
looking for days for doors

into rooms giving alternative takes  
back and forth.  
See me.

Staying the same.  
Changing others.  
Maybe. Maybe no.

## **PINCHED**

*Lorna Dixon*

"Give that back! You're not supposed to have it!"

Cassie grabbed her brother's arm but he was too quick for her. Off down the road he raced, bottom wagging in exaggerated glee. There was no point in following him. She knew she would never catch him. She would have to be clever, pretend she didn't care. After all he didn't really want her treasured pocket poetry book. He'd only taken it to annoy her. She tried to stay calm but couldn't help worrying that he might look inside. Her most secret thoughts, her innermost longings, were scribbled in tiny writing on the fly leaves just inside the covers. Not that Jack could ever manage to decipher her special code, but still . . . The thought of him even looking at her private writings was just too much. She had to do something.

She heard the clock strike midnight as she avoided the creaking stair. Down the hall she crept, feeling her way to where their coats were hanging on the stand by the door. Would it still be in his pocket? Perhaps he had thrown it away. No! She could feel the thin oblong shape through the lining of his anorak. She plunged in her hand. Her scream woke the house as she desperately tried to shake the mouse trap off her agonised fingers.

Graham Leake demonstrates the value of –

## MARKET RESEARCH

The menu by the door looked promising - there were three or four tempting items I could choose from. We went into the restaurant and were immediately struck by the very loud music. A strong beat backed a female pop singer with a whining, nasal voice. The room was crowded with diners almost shouting so that they could converse.

A waitress came over but, before we asked for a table, I said: 'The music is very loud. Can it be turned down a bit?'

'I'm sorry - what did you say?'

'I said the music is very loud - can it be turned down?'

'It's always like this', she said. 'I can't do anything about it, but you could talk to the manager.' 'Okay. I will please.'

She left us and spoke to a man in a suit. He came over.

'I there a problem?'

'I like music, but not at this volume. Can't you turn it down? It's obvious that people can't hear what others are saying.'

'This is the way we always play it. Our customers must like it; we're busy all the time.' 'I wonder if they really *do* like it?'

'Well, we've never had any complaints.'

'But people don't complain do they? Let's see what your customers really think.' I raised my voice and turned to the diners.

'Excuse me,' I said, 'can I ask you all a question?'

A few people looked up, frowning. Diners are, after all, not used to being addressed in this way.

My question the second time - delivered at increased volume - caused almost everyone to look up with expressions of puzzlement or annoyance.

'Sorry I have to shout, but can I ask you, please, whether you are actually enjoying the music here?' The diners looked at each other. The manager seemed nonplussed.

'This is a serious question. Would you prefer it if the music was quieter?'

'Yes ... I think I would.' said one man, looking around him to see if others would offer support.

'Me too.' said another. And more people gradually joined in.

'You could actually talk to each other much more easily', I said. 'Maybe this isn't your sort of music anyway', I added.

'No it isn't', said the first man. 'I don't like it at all.' Other diners began to nod in agreement.

I looked at the manager. 'So, the music *is* too loud; and it's not to everyone's taste anyway.'

I turned towards the bar in case the volume control was somewhere in that direction. The barman grinned and reached to the player on the shelf behind him. The music faded and many of the diners smiled happily.

'That's much better', said a woman sitting with three friends, and others nodded in agreement. I turned to the manager. 'There, I've done some market research for you. It could lead to a change of policy. Next time I'm in the town, I may put my nose round the door and have a listen. Then maybe I'll have a meal.'

## THE KING, THE WITCHES AND THE GODLY STATE

Annemarie Allan

It is late autumn, in the year 1590. The people of Saltpans go about their lives, unaware of the doom that will shortly engulf them.

Fishing boats from Acheson's Haven mingle with sea-going ships, bringing timber and iron. They will leave with their holds filled with coal and salt. Beneath the ground, colliers hack out the coal. The women and children carry it to the surface. On the shoreline, workers sweat with the effort of firing the huge pans where salt is boiled out of sea water. The Lords of Seton, Preston and Prestongrange are affluent men: salt is almost as valuable as gold and the town of Saltpans has the biggest concentration of industrial workers in all of Haddingtonshire.

Today, rumours are flying. Robert Seton, bailie of Tranent, has accused his servant, Gelie Duncan, of witchcraft. Under interrogation, Gelie has named others. Agnes Sampson's healing powers did not come from God, but from the Devil. John Cunningham, a local schoolmaster, has been chasing after women, working enchantments, even flying through the air at night when his neighbours thought him fast asleep in bed. Dark doings are reported at North Berwick – corpses raided for their bones, dancing and lewdness in the presence of the Devil himself. There is a delicious dread in repeating these accusations. North Berwick is a good distance from Saltpans.

The excitement reaches a new intensity when King James himself takes an interest. It seems the plot unearthed by David Seton is more than witchcraft: it is treason, directed against God's anointed king by that devil in the form of a man, Francis Stewart, Earl Bothwell.

Instruments of torture persuade the accused to confess their presence at a convention of witches: a hundred or more met at Acheson's Haven, where they prepared to practice their evil arts on the person of the King.

There is no more gossip, no rumour-mongering. People eye their neighbours, knowing that accusation alone is enough to condemn them. George Mott's wife, a pillar of the community, has been arrested. And Rob Grierson, a skipper out of the Haven. Women tremble at the news of their daughter's, their sister's, their mother's arrest. They know the pricklers who drive their sharp spikes into soft flesh can bend even the most determined to their will.

Burnings are public spectacles. The smell of roasting flesh fills the air, bringing a shameful response in those who rarely see meat on their table. This is the Devil's work, they tell themselves. Not hunger, but the Devil's work.

The people pray for salvation and their prayers are answered. John Davidson, minister of the Kirk is well known for his fearless confrontations with the King in the pursuit of God's law. Davidson is made welcome. A church is built. Elders are appointed. But salvation has its price. Over the next one hundred years, it is John Davidson's Godly State which hunts down those who have accepted the devil's mark and made their pact with Satan.

**A POTPOURRI OF POEMS***Robert Blyth*

The B 1377

A winding road from A to B.  
 This pot-holed, humpbacked artery.  
 A tarmacked, hedgerowed, tree-lined scroll.  
 Where combines, cars and tractors roll.  
 Farmhouse dotted, Z bend styled,  
 Traversing East coast country wild.  
 By dusk awash with headlight glow.  
 By dawn a plate for gull and crow.

**Dropping Off**

Gazing up from a makeshift cushion bed,  
 Swirling eddies of thoughts unconnected  
 Randomly come and go inside my head.  
 Leaving my consciousness uncollected  
 Beneath vortex patterned artex ceiling  
 Where wakeful sentience begins to fade  
 Amid drowsiness of languid feeling.  
 As cognizance and stupor places trade,  
 Still somnolence silently approaches.  
 For now entwined my mind enthralled will drift,  
 Though whirlpool unconsciousness encroaches,  
 Wherewithal: sleep and wakefulness may sift.  
 Wandering in a twilight maelstrom dream  
 Of swirling textured circles coloured cream.

**Willie's Tree**

He scanned me with poetic thirst.  
 He saw in me a living thing.  
 He watched my buds in springtime burst  
 And saw and heard my songbirds sing.

He watched me through long summer days.  
 He eyed my form, my every kink.  
 He watched my leaves absorb bright rays  
 And saw the bees my nectar drink

He marked my verdant leaves turn brown.  
 He saw me bend in autumn's blast.  
 He watched my twirling seeds spin down  
 And saw my leaves fall thick and fast.

He watched me, brave; dark winter's nip.  
 He spied me dressed in brilliant white.  
 He watched me held in Jack Frost's grip  
 And saw me longing for the light.

He mused upon me everyday.  
 He wrote of me, "His Sycamore!"  
 One morning they took him away...  
 My friend; I knew: was sick no more.

**Sunset: Aberlady Bay**

The Sun and Earth now turn and tilt.  
 Part day, part night, their axes lilt!  
 Sunbeams decline from star oblique,  
 As both prepare for hide and seek.

Concomitant at end of day!  
 The growing dark the dying ray.  
 The sea reflects the starlight's spin,  
 Like buttercup beneath the chin.

**North Berwick**

The view atop this ancient hill  
 Will fill your heart with awe  
 But most of all enjoy yourself  
 In these parts it's The Law.

**EUPHEMISTICALLY SPEAKING***Elizabeth Moodie*

The letter she sent me started "Dear John . . ."  
 My name's Tom, I knew something was wrong.  
 "I don't want you to think that I've taken fright  
 but your Gluteus Maximus blocks out the light.  
 It may seem to you that I'm being over fussy  
 but you're past the stage of being just "fluffy."  
 And the men I prefer (if you'd just paid heed)  
 are not built for comfort rather than speed.  
 I'm not nagging though that's how it sounds  
 but you've put on more than just a few pounds.  
 "Corpus Globus" that is what you're called.  
 You're not thin on top – you really are bald.  
 On "Fiscal Conservatism" you're always so keen  
 but you're just a tightwad, miserly, stingy and mean.  
 I won't colour the truth I'm just not like that,  
 "Gravitationally Challenged?" – put simply – you're FAT!  
 It's over between us; I think you must see,  
 But it's not of your doing it's all down to me."



**TWO POEMS***Mary Johnston*

In the first she departs from her usual Doric  
before returning to it in the second.

**Joan Eardley's Weans***(Three Children at a Tenement Window)*

Me an the twins Jeannie an Jamie  
are hingin oot the kitchen windae.  
*Mam, kin we hae anither jeely peice?*  
*Naw , ye had twa the day awready,*  
*Noo mind an look efter thay weans.*  
Mam's teemin oot the aiss in the midden  
she's coughin an splutterin -  
stoor sweelin roon her -  
that cough o hers keeps her waukent aw nicht,  
she says, she shud dae somthin about it.  
Aggie Mackenzie's oot airly the day  
nane kin bate her at skippin,  
she's swirlin an singin roon the Close-  
*Aw Willie Nicholson,*  
*ye think ye're awfie neat,*  
*skinnie an linkie lang legs*  
*an umbrelly feet.*

There's Willie noo, huds ticht his wee sister's haun  
on his wye tae the shoaps for his mam.  
Sandy Macpherson's practisin his writin,  
whit's that he's screevin the day?  
Yestreen he copied the patten  
frae mam's new kitchen blinds.  
Aw ma pals are doon in the Close,  
when mam comes back I'll jine them,  
airms roon each ither - we'll swap stories,  
play peevers -stot the baw - sing sangs-  
*One two three a-leerie*  
*I saw Missus Geerie*  
*sittin on her bumbaleerie*  
*eatin choc'let biscuits.*  
Mibee thon pentin wuman'll be here the day,  
she aye haunds oot sweeties an biscuits.  
Folk whaw see her drawins o us  
sae we're poor an no looked efter.  
Whit gies them that idea?

**Prayers in the Kitchen***(In the kitchen by Joan Eardley)*

Holy Mary, Mither o God,  
the rain's dingin doon oot by,  
I'll hae tae dry the claes on the pulley,  
Sweet Jesus, Son o Mary.

Holy Mary, Mither o God,  
mither's slumped in the chair again,  
this caald weather gets intae her banes,  
Sweet Jesus, Son o Mary.

Holy Mary, Mither o God,  
I'm half wye through the bakin,  
a scone an cup o tea 'll cheer her up,  
Sweet Jesus, Son o Mary.

Holy Mary, Mither o God,  
there's nae waater in the kettle,  
I'll hae tae gae, fess frae the well,  
Sweet Jesus, Son o Mary.

Holy Mary, Mither o God,  
heisted as the ideal wumman -  
ma feet are gye near killin me,  
Sweet Jesus, son of Mary.

Holy Mary, Mither o God  
the caald stane flair is soothin,  
ma body's broken for youse yins  
Sweet Jesus, Son o Mary.

**CHIN ON CHEST (Psalm 3)***Jock Stein*

Chin on chest, dream walking,  
still I carry disappointment with me.  
Lord, massage my eyelids, wake me gently,  
cup my chin within your palm  
and lift it, so I see another  
pair of shoes besides my own.  
Hand on heart, straight talking,  
still I ache with the familiar crowd  
who fail me, fight me or forget me.  
Lord, draw a circle close around  
my bleeding edges, so I find your  
cross-shaped failure hides my own.

*Using two Finnish sayings cited in The Icebreaker, by  
Horatio Clare, Chatto and Windus, London 2017*

**SCOTLAND LOST**

*Kenny Gilchrist*

Scotland on the outside bypassed  
once again.  
Scotland mucked about by Brexit  
by an elite playing a game.  
Scotland and devolution where  
power devolved is actually power retained.  
Scotland and the enlightenment  
burnout long ago.  
Scotland not at a World Cup for  
twenty years, SFA heads should role.  
Scotland home of nuclear weapons  
and nuclear submarines since 1961.  
Scotland being diddled as taxation  
ebbs away leaving plenty despair.  
Scotland in winter numb with  
all the wind and rain.  
Scotland and it diaspora scattered  
across the globe.  
Scotland in the 6 nations praying  
to god for a win.  
Scotland on the inside undermined  
by the EU.  
Scotland in the middle ready to strike  
a blow.  
Scotland lost somewhere in the Scotch mist.

**THE ARTIST**

*Hannah Faoilean*

She sits.  
Pen poised in fingers.  
Motionless.  
She waits.  
  
A water droplet rolls across a cheek:  
Her eyes light up, her body comes to life;  
She starts to draw.  
  
She paints.  
Colours cry emotions in her hands,  
Creating swirling moods in every tear.  
Time is turning blind within her mind.  
Speak artist's eyes, strokes rushing in her veins.  
  
She stops.  
  
She drops her brush.  
  
She never finishes.

**SEX IN THE SUNSET YEARS**

*Ruth Gilchrist*

(Jongmyo Park, Soal.- Lucy Williams radio 4 24/04/14)

In Jongmyo Park the flowers have already seeded.  
But still the ladies offer nectar of a sweet  
and artificial kind;  
a drug to stimulate the weary bee,  
encourage him to take  
an autumn visit to those painted blooms  
that would be more; typical of spring.

**TAM AND GOD**

*Isabel Abbott*

In the first world war 1914-1918 my father aged eighteen  
joined the army, was captured and spent some years in a  
German prisoner-of-war-camp. He often told us the story  
of his capture and how he prayed to be rescued from the  
horror of the trenches. He had tried signing up before he  
reached eighteen, however his father then told them his  
proper age and he had to wait.

They've taken me on  
One hurdle past  
What! Who's that?!

My Dratted Dad  
"My Son My Son  
you're not of age  
The King's Shilling  
is not your wage"  
Farewell my pals  
Until next year  
I'll see you then  
with all my gear  
I'm legal now  
My kilt swings well  
But now they say  
I'm bound for hell  
My dratted Dad is nowhere near  
I never thought that I'd feel fear  
Oh! God above please rescue me  
and get me out of this melee  
Oh! God above you heard my plea  
I thank you and of course I see  
that never do you answer straight  
and I must enter this prison gate.

**THE BUTCHER***Anne Jones*

Julian Grayson whistled as he left his shop that Sunday. It had been a hell of a day. He was tired, really tired, but not dispirited. He felt himself grow taller. He slipped his shop keys into his pocket, stretched out, vertebrae by vertebrae. His fifteen-year-old headache lifted.

He made his way along the sea front and the drizzly day shone without the sun. A dog digging up the beach made him smile and when a thirst came upon him he felt free to nip into the Diggers – no need to check his watch. He decided there and then he'd buy a fish supper on the way home and leave the greasy paper on the kitchen table. Later he would squeeze the toothpaste tube in the middle for the hell of it. 'I'll walk straight into the house with my boots on.'

The job had been no more than a normal days butchering. He'd thought of it as a fine cow on the slab. He'd kept his mind off the job, but on it too. Jamie his apprentice, who had been on holiday, would be back on Monday and he would explain that Mrs Grayson was off on that World Cruise she'd always talked about.

The chatter as he opened the pub door warmed his heart. He made his way to the bar and ordered a pint of Special, and a whisky chaser. 'Make that the malt of the month.'

**THE DARK***Andy Strachan*

1958 I was a young keen lad working in the Fleets Colliery at Tranent. I had become the youngest member of the mines rescue team for the Fleets. The captain of the team, a deputy, David approached me knowing that a bit of overtime would be welcome. Would I like to collect some air samples from the old pit on Saturday? The old pit was abandoned before my time but still useful as the main road, or tunnel was still open and connected to the new pit supplying the new pit with fresh air.

It was a simple enough job to enter the old pit through an air sealed door into the main road. So, on Saturday I set of with six glass vacuum sealed bottles, go to a specific place and open the bottles which would fill up with samples of the air. Job Done.

The roadway was about eight feet high sloping downwards with half circle girders holding up the roof. A small gauge set of rails ran down the middle. Disused now. The air was damp and cool. To one side of the road a shallow gutter carried a bit of dirty water running downhill. Drips of water trickled out of the roof above and strange ribbons of white mould hung like spiderwebs gently moving in the current of air looking ghostly in the light of my flickering carbide lamp. Further downhill the roadway squared of and was supported by old wooden

tree trunks with thick beams running across the roof. The going was wet and slippery and I began to feel quite isolated nearly half a mile underground. The water in the gulley was now rushing loudly.

Up ahead I noticed a couple of broken support beams jutting down over a heap of broken rock. However, being young and immortal I clambered through the narrow space. Not far now. The floor of the old tunnel was slippery with silt and water. Suddenly my feet were not my own and I was falling. My hard hat and carbide lamp flew off and I was in total darkness lying soaked in a couple of inches of mud and slutch. The blackness was complete and smothering. I panicked for a few moments. Where the bloody hell was my hard hat and lamp. Scrabbling round in total darkness on my hands and knees now completely soaked. No lamp no hard hat they may have fallen into the water and been washed away. At last I got control of my fear. The air was cool on my back so I knew where to go. On my hands and knees feeling for the centred rails I began a slow crawl back up hill in total blackness.

Somehow, I managed to feel my way over the roof fall expecting to be buried any minute. After an eternity I saw the bobbing lights in the distance up ahead. I was overdue an hour before they came looking for me.

**THE GIFT***Jane Patmore*

Lillian gasped as his hands tightened, exerting pressure on her windpipe. It was futile to struggle but she knew that some kind of resistance was expected, anticipated, required. Eventually, with a shudder it was over and in the dark Lillian bit into her hand to prevent her sobs from being heard.

Years later, when she left, he came after her of course, found her, begged, pleaded, brought gifts. "It will never happen again." he promised.

.....

Sitting at her dressing table Lillian looked up at her reflection. "87 years young" is how she described herself now. With shaky hands she opened the box, lifted up the necklace and placed it round her throat. She watched as her gnarled fingers fussed with the catch, frustrated at her increasing lack of dexterity. Every day for more than 50 years she had fastened the jewellery round her neck, worn like a talisman, and today would be the last time.

The gold and diamonds looked well against the collar of her black dress, Jaeger, expensive for widow's weeds. Gathering her coat and bag, Lillian walked down the hallway to where the black cars were waiting.

As the coffin was lowered Lillian stood dry-eyed. Handfuls of earth were scattered into the grave but the dust did not dampen the sound as a heavy chain of gold links clattered onto the wood. Lillian walked away. Like a thousand apologies, it was worthless.

**LEAVE ME ALONE***Anne Jones*

I'm at the back of a bus-shelter when two girls in their early teens speak to me. I say, 'Sorry I didn't catch that?' They mimic my words. I pull my wet hood back, fluff up my hair thinking this might make me look better. They laugh and thrust their mobile phones at my face. No-one in the queue turns to see what's going on.

The lanky one with black stringy hair shouts, 'She's an auld yin looking fir a man.' The smaller chants, 'Whaed want tae shag her?' Buses come round the corner but there is no number 35. I beg, 'leave me alone.' The shorter of the two pushes her badly made-up face into mine and squeals, 'Leave me alone! Leave me alone! Leave me alone!'

I grab her lapels, throw her hard against the bus shelter, and whisper, 'you fuckin wee bastard, fuck dae you think yur on?' I grab her chubby cheek and say, 'I'll huv yir fuckin eyebal oot,' squeeze hard, then let her go.

Screaming and holding her face, she runs from the shelter.

As I step on to the bus, out of the corner of my eye, I see the stringy haired one run forward swinging her umbrella. I give her the V sign, put my pensioner's pass on the drivers pad and, on shaky legs, take the seat nearest the door.

**PAPAL PROBLEM AT THE VATICAN***George Cunningham*

The Pope was angry, really angry. "Where did this ridiculous story come from?" he shouted. "It must be stopped at all costs." The Prefect of the Papal Household and Chaplain of His Holiness, remained silent for a moment as he studied the floor. He was unused to outbursts of this nature. "It cannot be true, Holiness," he said, "it is simply no more than malicious gossip."

"But," said the Pope, "if it gains currency, it will cause a shiver to pass through the Catholic church and the enemies of our faith will tear us apart. Have any of you considered the consequences if this is leaked to the world's media?"

The Director of the Holy See press office coughed nervously. "No media have contacted us to verify the claim," he said, "and, of course, we would deny it." Silence followed.

Suddenly a note of hope attached to the Pope's voice. "It is only a rumour, is it not? I mean no one will take it seriously, will they? Surely it can be left to die naturally. We've heard silly claims like this before."

The Prefect sucked long and hard through his teeth. "What you say is true, Holiness. But this story – I mean it is no more than gossip – has come from our Apostolic Nuncio and ambassador extraordinary to the European

Union. I have quizzed him thoroughly and he tells me the whisper came from a very senior source in the United Kingdom. . ."

The Pope interrupted him, "So that is it, it is no more than gossip. So, can we relax and let the matter wither as the grape will wither on the vine?" The director of the Holy See press office cleared his throat, "The trouble," he said "will be if this well-placed source happens to mention it to the media. Because of his position he will be taken seriously."

"Yes, yes," said the Prefect, "but if we deny it, laugh it off, then surely no newspaper, however outrageous its intent, will print it." The Director was more sceptical. "Nowadays the media show no respect for any organisation or person. That is the unfortunate truth and I fear if this rumour were to gain credence it would certainly make front pages worldwide."

"In that case we must alert our Cardinals across the world to be sure to deny this rumour." said the Prefect.

"No," said the Pope loudly. "Before we do anything, we must pray. The Devine hand will guide us so we must seek His blessing. If His church were rocked by scandal, it will simply be to test our strength"

So, in the privacy of his tiny private chapel, deep in the Apostolic Palace, within the secure walls of Vatican City, the Pope knelt, but before he brought his hands together in prayer he allowed himself a moment of reflection. His gender reassignment had been so many years ago, when as a teenager he had the dilemma of being a young woman but also called by the same power to be a priest in the Catholic church. And he had always thought of himself as a man – but how damming it would be for him and the church if it was ever found out that the Pope had been born a woman.

*In a rather different mood  
Jock Stein looks back to*

**THE YEAR END**

So ends this year. A vine and diary trimmed to short endeavours – one to focus energy on coming fruit, the other into blocks, tired lengths of tinsel draped round winter days which carry on as every year before them. What thing will bring my diary back to life, to bud and fruit with new-born godly purpose? Weekly tasks resumed? Engagements unforeseen? Intentions written large on empty weeks, no doubt to find themselves cut down to size and stuffed into a vacant day or two? No, Spring! In nature and in every thing.