

# SCRIVENS –

the Occasional Magazine  
of Tyne and Esk Writers



## SCRIVENS WINNING ENTRIES 2020

There were 52 entries for the 2020 Tyne & Esk Writer of the Year award, 28 prose and 24 poetry all of which provided a positive cornucopia of creative talent for our judge, Claire Askew, to consider.

Below are the winners' entries as well as the runners up. Because the event was held by Zoom, there are no presentation photographs this year.

### The first Prize for prose went to Lorna Dixon, with – ON THE BEACH

Quick! Ah'm needin'!

A hoarse cry from the other room dragged Mattie from contemplation of the rain battering the cracked window pane. She sighed, turned and tripped over the enamel bucket placed where it would catch some of the water dripping through the patched roof.

'Want to go out to the dunny then?'

She paused in the doorway of the tiny bedroom. The old man had struggled to push off the coarse grey blanket and was sitting on the edge of the iron bedstead.

'Whit? In this wet? I'd catch ma death. Gie me the chantie.'

Mattie groaned but pushed his dangling feet aside to reach under the bed. Soon an orange stream was drowning the rosebuds that decorated the inside of the chipped chamber pot. Mattie turned her back, hoping his aim was good today.

'Aye, that's better!' The old man collapsed back onto the stained mattress.

'Gie me a lift up, there's a good lass. Ah'm needin tae sit up for a bit. Ma chest's that tight.'

Mattie helped the old man into a sitting position and pushed the ticking pillow under the small of his back. His head banged against the tattered velvet headboard – one of many bits of incongruous junk he'd rescued from the stony beach outside the hut. It was balanced precariously at the head of the bed but it did give him something to lean against.

'Aye, this storm'll blaw itself oot soon. It'll have mebbe brought some guid stuff onto the beach. How about a cuppa? Hae we got ony tea bags left?'

'A few, but there's no sugar. At least there is a bit in the bottom of the jar but it's solid from the damp. We need supplies.'

'Weel, you'd best get yer boots on then.'

Mattie didn't need him to tell her. She'd known since yesterday that it was time for her to climb the cliff and take the path into the village.

'Listen! The rain's stoppin'!

All Mattie could hear was the competing roars of the wind and sea. But Old Hector could tell the weather from the slightest changes in sound and light even in the dim interior of the shack. Mattie looked around her. The hut must have been quite attractive when it was first put together but now it was the only one left of a small row of two-roomed holiday chalets. The others had been deserted some time ago and what remained had been demolished by the wind and the tides. All that was left was a few piles of wood and lumps of concrete. Hector had scavenged planks and hardboard and bits of plumbing from the others to fix up this one when he'd first started squatting here. And that was a long time ago.

Mattie heaved herself up the steep rocky path that led to the village. She was sweating in her fleece and anorak. In one of those miraculous changes in the weather that were so typical of western Scotland and so different from her native Australia, the sun was blazing down and the wind had dropped to nothing. There was a slight haze over the rolling surf and the rocks and the pebbles of the beach below her were steaming. She stopped halfway up the cliff and surveyed the mess below her. Yes, the storm had brought in an ugly collection of flotsam. It was mostly plastic but some bits of lobster pots, lengths of orange and blue rope, fishing floats rusted in interesting patterns raised the aesthetic level a little. So did a small tree trunk bumping to and fro on the rocks

that littered a stretch of gravel and sea pinks. But mainly the seashore looked as though the contents of a refuse lorry had been tipped over it.

‘Matilda Mackenzie, why do you stay here?’

It was a question that she’d asked herself several times before. During her wanderings in Scotland she’d come upon this beach by chance. The junk strewn over it had intrigued her and given her the idea that she could use it. Her inspiration for solid sculpture had been running out and she’d begun toying with using recycled materials. And here there were plenty – spread over the boulders of the inhospitable shore. It was while she was picking up some interesting driftwood that a shout from an old man had made her realise she wasn’t alone. He was standing at the doorway of a derelict-looking hut and shaking his fist at her

‘Get aff that! It’s mines!’

When Mattie looked again at the pile of wood she had realised the haphazard heap did seem to have a purpose. That had been a fortuitous moment. The old man and rootless artist had made a bargain. They had agreed that Hector would let her stay in his hut and make her artworks. He was finding it increasingly difficult to make the long trek to the village so she would go once a week to visit the post office for money and buy food and fuel. For Mattie, living like this would make her dwindling funds last out. She suspected Hector had money, but if he did, she’d never found out where he kept it. So far he’d expected her to buy the bread and tins of food, the candles and paraffin for the stove, out of her own cash. Much of Hector’s past life was still a mystery to Mattie but tales of his own wanderings around the world had created a link between them and they had become surprisingly close. But now Hector was ill. How long could this go on? He probably needed proper medical treatment and somewhere decent to live.

These thoughts were still bothering Mattie as she trudged back from the shop. The cliff path was slippery after the rain and parts of it had been damaged. The heavy rucksack was making it difficult for her to keep her balance and the daylight was beginning to go. As she struggled up to the highest point on the path she was looking forward to catching sight of the shack on the beach that, for now at least, she called home. She reached the top and stopped in confusion. Where the path should start its long zig-zig down to the shore was a great raw gash in the cliff face. And where was the hut? It had vanished! Mattie headed inland across the fields to avoid the crumbling landslip. She stumbled over ruts and boulders and plunged through mud.

She had a vague memory of a farm somewhere inland and beyond the huts. Perhaps she could reach it and raise the alarm. She was aware of cows staring at her and sheep running away bleating as she bounded her way in panic across the grass and thistles and thrust through clumps of gorse ignoring the stabbing thorns. The ground ahead started to fall away downhill and soon she was plunging into a dip and tripping over ruts made by a tractor. She paused for breath. Was it the track leading down to the beach? She remembered exploring it once but it had led her away from the village towards the farm so after that she’d always taken the cliff path. She could hear the sea growling below her. Perhaps if she followed it down she could find out what had happened to the hut.

What seemed like hours later she found herself among the boulders on the beach. The sun was setting in a lurid glow. She could see the broken down fencing that marked what had once been the garden of the last hut in the row. Beyond it was a dark mass of loose rock and shale. As she stumbled nearer she could just make out the side of Hector’s hut but the roof and doorway were hidden by debris from the rock slide.

“Hector!” she called. She raised her fist to bang on the wall but stopped. What if she caused the rock to move? But she had to get in there and find out if Hector was alive. A faint noise gave her hope. She moved warily along the wall looking for a way in. Then she remembered that when she’d first arrived Hector had been patching a hole in the wall on this side. He’d been using some very rotten-looking hardboard. If she could find out where it was..... A few minutes of gentle prodding and she felt it. It was soft and spongy. Could she make a big enough hole to climb through? All the time she was aware that any movement might cause the debris to slide or the walls to cave in. The roof was creaking ominously but she carried on gently widening the gap she had made until it was big enough to get through.

‘Wha’s that?’ The glow of a paraffin lamp, a feeble croak and the noise of shuffling feet greeted her. A vision wrapped in a long overcoat, several scarves and a blanket over its head appeared.

‘Out, out!’ Mattie stifled her urge to scream and it came out as a whisper. She grabbed the lamp from him and pushed him through the hole in the wall.

‘Ma mattress. Ah need ma mattress!’

Mattie hesitated, surprised at his quick thinking. Certainly if they were going to spend the night in the open it was a good idea for an old sick man to have something to lie on. But was there time? She made

her way cautiously towards his bedside, setting the lamp on the crate that served as a bedside table. Her own sleeping mat and bag were rolled up in the corner of the other room but she could see that part of the hut had been damaged by the rock fall. She couldn't risk fetching them out. A loud creak made her start. She grabbed the mattress off the bed and thrust it through the hole widening it even further. A wrenching, tearing sound signalled imminent danger. She dived through the gap herself and turned to watch in horror as the roof collapsed. A tongue of flame leaped into the night as she dragged Hector and his precious mattress out of the range of the imploding building.

'Aye, a grand bonfire, that!'

Hector is stretched out on his mattress, propped up on one elbow. Mattie sits on a rock near the sea's edge and admires the reflection of the burning shack in the now glassy water. Showers of sparks shoot up into the darkening sky matching the pinpoints of stars. The surf ripples gently and soothes them in a lullaby of rattling pebbles.

'All your worldly goods, Hector, gone up in smoke. All the sculptures that were going to make my fortune being consumed in a glorious inferno. It's a work of art in itself.'

'Aye, weel. Mebbe it was time for a change.'

'You know, in the South Pacific they have a phrase for people like us. If you're a non-native who is homeless and destitute and sleeping rough they say you are "on the beach."

'Aye but we're no, lass. No yet!'

'What do you mean?'

'We may be homeless and on this beach but we're no destitute. ....'

A bout of coughing interrupted the old man. Mattie waited for him to catch his breath.

Hector gave her a big toothless grin and banged on the bottom of his mattress. It gave a dull clang. He sat up straight and in loud voice addressed the night and whatever creatures might be lurking there.

'I, Hector Mackenzie, right noo of nae fixed abode, but o' sound mind, and sound siller, tak' ye, Mattie Mackenzie, as ma next o' kin - so whit's mines, yours. It's time tae find another beach. Tak' me tae Tahiti!

**The poetry first place was taken by Stella Hervey Birrell with –**

### **I AM RADICAL SELF CARE**

Fed by

dwindling hours

dawdling over seasons

one to three snoozing waking

cat curled in the curve

of my leg. No devil

could make work for me.

Cast off,

I make these

hours of self-enforced solitude

into daisy chains of survival.

I am a falling,

an indulgent person of privilege:

I'll never make anything of myself.

I am not contemplating

a point in the middle distance.

I am holding the broken

pieces of myself together

so that later I can

feed wash read

climb stairs make fortune tellers play with paper  
aeroplanes tie it all up with string.

Salving the anxious paralysis

of 'I cannot do this anymore –'

not 'being kind to myself.'

Enduring.

The only way I can be here now,

is to promise myself a tomorrow of

cat in curve of leg –

season 2, episode 5. Season 2, episode 6.

## Second prose place was for George Cunningham's story –

### THE BATTLE O' THE BUNNET

'Keep yer hat on,' said the auld wife, sotto voce like.

'It's no' a hat, it's a bunnet.'

'It's a hat: keep it on.'

'Naw.'

'Dae as I tell ye,' her voice now more voce than sotto.

'For why?

'I've good mind to skelp yer lug.'

'Listen hen, if you skelp ma lug I'll skelp yours back twice as hard.'

'Folk dinnae want tae see yer scabby heid while they're at their tea.'

'It's no that scabby; its mair scratched.'

'It's scabby. Keep yer hat ON.'

'Naw. I need it to dicht ma tea. Ony road – it's a bunnet.'

'You'll no' be dichting any tea in here, my man, in the Co-operative tea rooms. Have ye no manners?' Others turned and looked.

Her husband deliberately and carefully decanted tea from the Co-operative Association's china cup into his saucer, wafted his hat over it and delicately raised it to his lips.

'Slurp. That's better I've had a drouth on me aw through the service.' And with that he replaced his bunnet.

'Yer a heathen,' declared the auld wife, a note of disgust in her voice. 'I dinnae ken why I married you.'

'Aye ye do,' smiled her husband. 'Ye were up the duff.'

'By you, ye dirty bugger. Ma faither was goin' tae kill ye if we didnae get married quick.'

'Aye, only after he'd killed you.'

A banging from the top table cut through their conversation.

'For Airchie McGuire,' said the minister, 'a moment for personal reflection.'

'Get yer hat aff,' whispered the auld wife.

'You've just telt me tae pit it on. An its a BUNNET.'

'Will ye dae as yer telt? It's a mark of respect for Airchie.'

'Did we no dae respect in the kirk?'

'Aye, this is mair respect,' said the auld wife grabbing at her husband's hat.

A short silence fell across the room followed quickly by waitresses placing plates of sandwiches on the tables. 'There's scrambled egg and cress, salmon – it's tinned I'm afraid – cucumber and some with meat paste. Sorry aboot that but we're still experiencing war-time austerity,' said the waitress, 'Mair tea?'

As the husband stretched out to help himself, the auld wife smacked his hand. 'Manners,' she said, picking up tongs to serve him. 'One of each and dinnae eat them as if you'd never seen food before.'

'They're afa' small,' said her husband as he peeled back the bread from the neat triangle containing meat paste. 'This looks like shite,' he said putting the bread back together and pushing it to the edge of his plate before picking up the cucumber. 'Whit did the lassie say this was?'

'Cucumber.'

'It tastes like shite and aw.' And again it was pushed to the side of the plate.

'Watch your tongue,' snapped the auld wife, 'here's the minister coming.'

'He's got a face like a smacked arse,' observed her husband.

'It's high blood pressure,' whispered his wife.

'Aye frae chasin' aw the young mothers. I ken, I've heard the stories.'

The auld wife kicked her husband hard under the table.

'Aw Minister that was a lovely service. Airchie would have enjoyed it.'

'Thank you,' smiled the minister piously, 'but Airchie is in a better place and enjoying the love of our saviour and drinking the wine of contentment.'

'Bless you Minister,' said the auld wife. 'Ye aye ken whit tae say.'

'Are you enjoying your tea?'

'Oh aye, the Co-op tearooms aye dae a good purvey,' replied the auld wife quickly and glared at her husband daring him to utter a word.

'Airchie will be really happy, then,' said the husband smiling. 'If there's wine that is. Airchie aye enjoyed a drink. Preferred whisky to wine mind . . .' But his observations were interrupted as his wife's foot again dug into his shin.

'I dinnae ken whit yer daein wi yer fit,' said the husband, 'but that's ma artificial leg. The other half is still at Anzio.' And he laughed loudly.

Whether the sandwiches tasted like shite or looked like it had suddenly become of no consequence to the husband who had proceeded to clear the plate even eyeing up an adjoining table where the occupants had failed to make inroads into their sandwiches.

'Don't you dare,' said the auld wife observing his eyes and reading his mind.

'They'll go tae waste.'

'No they'll no, the staff will eat them.'

'The staff didnae ken Airchie. This is for his pals.' The husband sat back in his chair and burped loudly.

'Yer a pig,' observed the auld wife.

'Aye I probably am,' replied the husband contentedly.

'If ye were a child I'd tan yer backside.'

'Oh goody,' said the husband, 'it's a long time since I've had any fun doon there . . .'

'Stop that filth,' cried the wife, suddenly conscious that people were looking round.

'Filth, that's all ye have between your ears. Now we're goin' home so keep yer hat ON!'

## The second place for poetry went to Mary Johnston –

### TULIPS

That morning

in the Supermarket

fen she bocht them - *when bought*

they steed up stracht *stood straight*

held in aboot wi elastic bands;

she loused them -

steed them in a joog o waater

afore the windae -

sun shinin doon on them:

ilky een opened up - *every one*

raxed oot tae the licht - *reached*

flaffin an fluchtit - *flapping excited*

I sweer ye cud hear them shoutin,

"We're free! We're free!"

Later, a neebour cried in by, *paid a visit*

shook her heid an tutted -

Fit wye did ye nae tak a preen *why pin*

an brob them jist ablo the heid - *prick*

stops them flaaffin about

an they'll bide stannin up stracht. *stay*

That's right! Know their Place!

## And taking the 3<sup>rd</sup> prose place was Billy Graham –

### GRAINS OF TRUTH

"Haven't seen you here before."

"No. I don't get down here much. Too busy." Ian thought it sounded too much like an apology.

The old man nodded. "You young folk are all the same now, Lemming people, rushing through the world as if there was no tomorrow." He sighed, and took a step towards the waters edge. "It has

to be an instant world for everyone now. Instant credit- instant food, and mummies with not enough time to cook a meal as they are too busy watching cookery programmes on the telly. In fact." the old man chuckled, "sometimes I don't know whether I'm watching TV or a microwave!"

Ian smiled. It was the first time he had done so since wee Sarah went into hospital. "Do you watch much on the box?" he asked. "That's if you're retired, I mean," he added hesitantly, afraid he may have offended the man.

The old grey head shook. "Retired from the telly maybe, but not from life. There is always something to live for. You're never too old- or young to see what's round the next corner."

Ian thought of his daughter again and how right the old man was. He bent down and picked up a shell or two. "For my wee girl," he smiled, "she's in hospital. This might help to cheer her up."

"Och, I don't suppose the Council will have them counted. I'm sure your wee one will be all right.

Ian smiled back. "You'll have seen a good many changes in your time, I expect, and not all for the better?" determined to take his mind away from the image of his daughter lying in hospital.

"Folk mainly." The old man stared out to sea. "Folk change, the Good Lord's world doesn't. It doesn't matter when you hear folk say, 'in the real world' as if they were not to blame for the mess we are in. We've all helped to make it this way." The old man's eyes twinkled. But you have to laugh just the same."

Ian looked bewildered. "What do you mean?"

"Well, the price o' things! You nearly need a credit card to buy a fish supper. And they charge like the Light Brigade for a cup of tea."

Ian laughed, already feeling much better. He wondered if he would be as philosophical when he was this old man's age- thirty or so years from now. What further changes would there be by then?

"But they have made a lot of scientific discoveries. They say that people will live longer," Ian said hopefully, his mind returning to his daughter.

"Oh aye, that they have. Folk will probably live longer- that doesn't necessarily mean happier- or better. Some folk don't look after themselves, so, maybe in years to come they'll take even less care of themselves. Maybe even think they can go into a place like a store and buy replacement parts over the counter! Can you just see that?" the old man's eyes twinkled and he began to mimic. "Can I have a medium size kidney, please?"

"Is it for yourself sir?"

"Yes."

**Mike Davenport took a 3<sup>rd</sup> place in poetry with the following verses –**

### **JAPANESE GARDEN**

On an arched bridge, we cannot see  
the other side at the start of our journey.  
Connecting to an island, a curved bridge  
and its reflection form an eye.  
Matsuo, knowing the protocols of stones  
and water, forages in the Ochil Hills.  
In a stream, leaves whirl round stones  
placed with appropriate etiquette.  
At the lake's edge, rocks, with patience,  
bear the wind and beat of the waves.  
Verandas for moon-watching. Stone lanterns.  
Beauty in a blossom's transience.  
Matsuo rakes sand to patterns  
of rippling water round a stone.  
Dry garden: waterfall, stream and sea,  
without a single drop of water  
Matsuo meditates on grief, never  
far from the lake's surface.

*Shinzaburo Matsuo, who had lost his entire family in an earthquake, was gardener from 1925 till his death in 1937.*

**Julia Graves story gained a Highly Commended –**

### **A DIFFICULT DAUGHTER**

'You're a blimmin' awkward shape.' Mum said.

My new white tights were in a fankle: all twisted and wrong. I've got my father's legs. We're late and alone in the cloakroom. The pink slippers aren't made for the wider foot, and the scratchy tutu pinches my middle (I'm not fat just broad).

Mum looked me over. 'You'll have to do.' No time to wish me luck or scrape my unruly red hair into a neat bun, I'm pushed out into the waiting class. I expected more, but Miss Sylvia's dance studio had all the glamour of a white-paint Baptist hall. But how pretty! How similar! How alien the other girls look. Only I'm the alien.

'Chop, chop, new girl.' Miss Sylvia is bony and mean.

Her woolly hat is the colour of innards and as bumpy as a warty toad. Had she forgotten to take it off? Or was she bald? I never found out.

'We haven't got all day,' she told me because I'm still dawdling.

At the barre, the other girls greet me with cattle-like suspicion.

'Not there, new girl,' Miss Sylvia instructs. 'Between Sharon and Bernadette.'

Sharon was the girl that every other girl wants to be and Bernadette was the girl you never wanted as an enemy. As I take my place, Bernadette can't help rolling her big blue eyes. Even with my back to her, I knew she's doing it. Miss Sylvia claps sharply. Tucked away in a far corner, the grumpy, phlegm-chested pianist stubbed out his cigarette. He thumps out what passed for a tune.

'Point,' barked Miss Sylvia. 'Point. Point. New girl, new girl, copy Sharon. And jeté. Lovely, Sharon.'

I wanted to be put out my misery.

'And third position. Stop looking at the new girl. And jeté. Stop that giggling, Bernadette. First position. First! First! New girl, new girl, you're a graceful swan not a stompy hippo.'

Standing up straight, pointing my toes or lifting a straight leg were not hard to master – not when I could already ride a bike with no hands – they just seemed stupid and boring. I hated ballet. Five minutes in, and I really hated ballet.

The class finally ended and Miss Sylvia gives us a little clap. Most of us have worked very hard, Sharon got a special mention, of course, but on their dainty, weightless feet everyone ran back to the changing room - their heads held high and their flat chests puffed. Everyone but me.

'You're rubbish,' said Bernadette as she mimicked my heavy-hoofed dance moves. The other girls giggle. I try to ignore them. I try to get out of my grubby, torn tights.

I find Mum in the dance studio talking with Miss Sylvia. 'I think she's beyond hope,' Miss Sylvia was telling Mum. I watched the ballet teacher take two pound notes from her purse, she handed them to Mum. We wouldn't be back, and I should have been happy.

**And from Jock Stein – a Highly Commended poem –****LISTEN TO THE WIND**

*'Round and round goes the wind . . .'* Ecclesiastes 1:6

We've gone this dismal way before.  
 The flu that swept across the world  
 snuffed out the cries of millions weakened  
 by that war to end all wars.  
 The minds and knees that crushed George Floyd,  
 Sheku Bayoh, revolving queues  
 of roughed up coloured folk belong  
 to fellow humans, not to droids.  
 Our eyes are weary with TV,  
 our lungs are choked with news that blows  
 us gossip, breezy jokes, the latest  
 bit of data. Zapper, please.  
 So comes that red band needle blight,  
 honey fungus, ash dieback,  
 sudden death for ancient oaks,  
 and people say their last good nights.  
 Listen to the wind. You know  
 its breath, its songs of something older,  
 something wise; it says enough,  
 Preacher, as it goes.

**A Highly Commended was awarded to Moira Cormack for her story –****LEAVING**

Her hands shook. Her eyes, in their effort to flee, were blind. The objects in the house blurred. She had time. She knew it but her heart didn't. She was breaking a pact: betraying everyone's expectations of where she belonged, cracking open her own understanding of her place in the world.

What to take?

She moved in slow motion from room to room, a witness to her body's traverse, while inside she felt

as if she was racing.

What to take?

The small voice beside, which had been chattering endlessly, penetrated her thoughts.

'Lucy pinched me this morning, Mummy. I don't want to go back to school.'

'Hmm, there, there.'

Engaging with the child felt enormous, impossible and also like a life line. She bent down and drew the child into an embrace: too firm an embrace, too hard an embrace.

'Stop it, Mummy! That hurts.'

And the child burst into angry tears. Wailing. The wailing was the exact sound she wanted to make but was unable to as it was buried so deep. The noise flipped a nerve inside her.

'Be quiet!' She thought she said, but her voice resonated in her ears, so she knew she'd shouted. The wailing intensified with her name Mummy interjected through it. Every nerve in her body was electrified. Above all else she wanted the noise to stop. She pressed her hands to her temples in an effort to steady herself. Deserting the child and the contents of the room she walked out of it.

She went back into the bedroom. Her jewelry was gone. Her clothes were gone. His hung forlorn on his side of the wardrobe like a man with one leg about to fall over. The room was unbalanced. She felt her absence as blame. 'I'm not to blame,' she told herself, 'he is.' It made it easier for her to leave. Although she knew that he'd wield the blame word when he found her gone. A clock ticked on the side of the bed. A lone item, on a previously cluttered, bedside table.

It was time to go.

The child had stopped wailing. The car was loaded. There was nothing else to take.

She took the child by the hand, spoke gently to her, managing the effort to sound, and be more herself, her reassuring, patient self.

She locked the front door, weighed the key in her hand before posting it through the letterbox.

'Come on,' she said, 'let's stop at a service station and I'll buy you something new. It's an adventure.'

She didn't look back as she drove away.

**And a Highly Commended also for Jeff Kemp with  
this poem –**

**TIME SPACE-CONTINUUM**

Iona, Lindisfarne:  
islands thinly divided  
from the next world.  
The simple act of  
walking their shores  
forms a pilgrimage  
but time, not place,  
now shrinks the space  
between separated realms.  
Every morning,  
we find the mundane  
and unprecedented  
waiting hand-in-hand  
to lead us through  
an inner landscape of  
habit and hazard,  
drab and beguiling as  
bog-pitted moorland sprawling  
around a sacred location.  
Maps now replaced by a clock –  
stopped? slow? unreliable? –  
our only guide across expanses  
hiding the threat of annihilation.  
Each of us an island  
of tidal breathing.  
We inhale belief  
that endurance redeems  
then exhale exhaustion.  
Guess-work ghost walk toward  
vague shapes caught  
between chaos and order,  
with each day,  
more eroded from  
our shores.