

Brownsbank Bulletin

*Promoting creative writing in South Lanarkshire from the poet
Hugh MacDiarmid's last home, Brownsbank Cottage*



Brownsbank Broadsheet Needs Your Work

One of the good things about this job is that you never know where it will lead or what's coming next. One of the drawbacks is shortage of time.

As you'll see, we've started a column in the Bulletin where members of a South Lanarkshire writers' group introduce themselves. Strathaven Writers' are leading the way. Others will follow.

I know many groups across South Lanarkshire have been in touch over the years and it would be good to extend these contacts so that groups could meet socially and eventually organise events that could be mutually or even collectively beneficial. At the very least, we should be able to read each others' work and see what other folk are doing.

With this in mind, we've started the Brownsbank Broadsheet, two broadsheet pages of work by South Lanarkshire writers which will be distributed across the region and beyond.

The Broadsheet will be edited, which means not everything submitted will be included. But if a story or poem isn't used I am perfectly prepared to explain why to

the individual concerned and do a workshop at the group. I'm already booked for a few workshops, but since improving individual skills and extending techniques is a vital part of this job and because there will be other issues of the Broadsheet, the aim is individual and collective improvement.

The response has been great. My desk does not yet resemble the dark side of a bookie's counter – full of hopeful white slips – but it's getting that way. So send your stuff to me at Brownsbank

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**AND PLEASE NOTE
MY NEW NUMBER**

07519 113 178

The Brownsbank Writing Fellowship post is collaboration between The Biggar Museum Trust Brownsbank Committee, South Lanarkshire Council and The Scottish Arts Council. The Fellowship began in 1993

GROUP NEWS

Firstly, many thanks to my predecessor, Tom Bryan. It wasn't long before what I suspected turned out to be true: Tom is a hard act to follow. Every group speaks fondly of him and, responding to an early visit of mine, someone told me Tom would be missed.

Maybe not the best of starts, then; but I am glad to be here. I enjoy working with new people and have found my visits to the South Lanarkshire writers' groups rewarding.

So be sure to let me know what your group is doing. If you are hosting or planning an event, launching a book, visiting other groups or having visitors, then please tell me. I may not be able to feature it in the Bulletin beforehand, but as this issue shows, reports of events that have already taken place are very welcome.

And let us know what you are up to. The last few months have been important for Chris Ross of Strathaven Writers Group. She won last year's South Lanarkshire Writing Competition, wrote, read and broadcast a piece for Radio Scotland's and performed with Word Factory at Glasgow's Aye Right Festival. We've highlighted some members of her group this issue and will highlight another group in the next bulletin.

STRATHAVEN WRITERS

Brownsbank Open Day, one Sunday afternoon in October,

2005 was the sounding board of a two page story I'd written for Strathaven Group homework. I recently revamped that story, and in 2008 I am pleased to say, my "Craignethan Duet" won the 2008 Biggar Short Story Competition.

My internet short story "Over the Invisible Bridge" was one of several picked by some celebrities representing BBC Radio Scotland and The Scottish Book Trust for the "Days Like This" competition. There were an amazing 800 entries. I thought at first Siobhan Redmond was going to read it, but no, it was to be the writer.

One freezing day in December, the BBC's Helen Wolfenden came to my home. We warmed up our vocal chords with lentil soup, and I completed my light-hearted story in four takes. It was a pleasure to work with Helen and quite painless.

This success has encouraged me to enter more competitions and submit to various magazines. Presently I am involved with projects in the Tramway's "Word Factory" Writer's Group, Glasgow. We meet weekly at 25 Albert Drive, and write and perform our own work at various venues. My Tramway installation, a Treasure Island made is of fabric plus cloth characters, I recently used in storytelling activities with P1 and P2 classes at Stonehouse Primary School. Pirate flag and map colouring-in rounded that off quite nicely.

On Sunday 8th March, several of us performed at the Aye Write festival in the Mitchell Library which was an exciting venture for me. It pushed us all in new directions, and despite a little stage fright, I did learn a lot about myself and my writing from doing it.

Word Factory is unlike any other group I've been to as we incorporate, art, music, song, costume and installations with writing. We performed at the Tramway Café in March and again in early April for Easter celebrations. Strathaven Writer's Group and Larkhall Writer's Group have encouraged me to try new work, and support from members and various writers-in-residence has been a boon over the last five years..

CHRIS ROSS

I am an early retired primary teacher who now does supply teaching. I attended a previous writer's group in Strathaven when my children were small and have a poem in *Behind the Lines*, and two stories in *Original Prints, Volumes 1 and 2*. I have been a member of the present Strathaven Writers' Group for five or six and am interested in drama and art and draw and paint at times. I am a keen runner and keep fit freak and have just been given a lovely present of a little grand daughter.

JANE STRUTH

I have always dabbled in writing, but it wasn't until I won a runners up prize in a National Poetry competition in 2004 that I started to write seriously, as well as for fun. I joined the Strathaven Writers' group in 2005 and have met some amazing writers who have been something of an inspiration to me. My strength in writing is in poetry and I have had eight poems published to date. I have just completed an Open College of the Arts course in poetry and am about to embark on another course, this time attempting a story for the 5-7 age group! I am working towards a BA in Creative Arts, but with a partner, 2 daughters, aged 13 years and 4 months respectively, and three cats in the house, I often have to lock myself and my

laptop in the bathroom to get some peace and quiet!

MANDY LAIRD-ROBERTSON.

Before I joined Strathaven Writer's Group, I had already done quite a bit of writing. I had sold several articles and short stories to *Scottish Home and Country* magazine. Then I became interested in longer pieces requiring more research. *Scottish Memories* has published some of my work. At the very beginning of my writing "career" I adapted two titles for Collins E.L.T. which involved cutting text to approx one quarter of the original length, whilst limiting the vocabulary to words on a given list. I enjoyed this very much but the series was discontinued. I'm a great believer in writing about "what you know" and also "research your market." I have tried to follow these rules. After two stories appeared in "The Guiding Magazine," I was asked by the Guiding Association to write a short history of the Movement. I do not write (nor do I read) poetry! I do not have ambition to write the "great Scottish novel!" However, I do write in "oor mither tongue" in some stories. At present, I'm researching family material for an article about an uncle who served in the Canadian Black Watch in the First World War. Interestingly enough, several family co-incidences have emerged along the way and I am considering submitting this to a Canadian periodical.

ANNA SHEARER

I am a pupil at Strathaven Academy. I have always liked writing stories even in primary school and when I moved up to the Academy I was encouraged by my English teacher. This gave me hope. I write fantasy stories and read a variety of books which fire my imagination. I now go to a Creative Writing class within the School as well as Strathaven Writers' Group, which is on every month. I always look forward to the Groups because you are always learning new techniques.

KELLY BROWNLEE



AROUND THE COUNTY

Anita John writes:
Award-winning writer Des Dillon recently ran a full-day radio workshop for the Pentland Writers Group which attracted members of the Biggar Writers Group as well, and proved a great opportunity for the two groups to meet each other. The day was funded by the Scottish Book Trust's Live Literature programme. In the morning we discussed aspects of writing specifically for radio and looked at how to use sound, dialogue and silence to best effect. Des emphasised the importance of sub-text and the fact that people (characters) rarely say what they really mean – how, as a listener, you have to read between the lines. Armed with this knowledge, we then split into pairs with the task of drafting a short radio script to be performed and critiqued in the afternoon. Not that the pressure was on! But listening to, and critiquing other people's work was as valuable as getting feedback on our own material. All in all a very productive and informative day. Radio Scotland – watch this space

Jim Kearney writes:
Camphill Writers, a new group who meet each Monday afternoon in Bothwell Library, are progressing well. They are still finding their feet with diverse projects such as poetry in Doric and tales of fairies and sea creatures. Poetry in general is well represented as is Reminiscence and Memoir. One aspect we have developed is for members to work in pairs. This synergy is

providing some interesting work. There is room for new members. Those who wish to try creative writing for the first time and those who would like to return after a lay off will be made welcome.

Rita Little writes:
Larkhall Writers started last October and has a dozen members. We meet every Monday in the Fire Station in Academy Street. The group received a start up grant of £250 from South Lanarkshire Council, so I think you can safely say we are now up and running and are hoping to go on to wonderful things. Seeing our name in your Bulletin will be our first bit of publicity. With other local groups, we took part in International Women's Day at Hamilton Racecourse and are hoping to write some short sketches for Machan Trust Drama Group, which is a fairly new group of nine to thirteen year old children who attend St Machans church in Larkhall.

Edith Ryan writes:
Over the winter Lanark Writers have been putting together personal collections of their work. Some of these have been more ambitious than others, some concentrating on poems or on stories and, for one writer, in 'Case Notes', some traveller's tales. Everyone has found the experience hard work and very interesting. For each of us, it was a relief to get the project off to the printer and a pleasure to finally see the finished product and to be able to offer it to friends. Because this has been time-consuming, the group has not considered any other group initiative but a number of members have submitted pieces of work for publication. As there has been a positive response for many of them, this encourages writers to keep trying. At this time about a dozen people are coming

regularly to the Monday night meetings and the membership remains very active. The meetings will stop for the summer about mid-June.

Ethyl Smith writes:
Over the past few months the Kirkmuirhill writers have met on a regular basis, talked, occasionally listened, laughed a great deal, enjoyed several lunches, and sometimes even written a few words to share. We consider ourselves to be in an incubation period. Goodness knows what we might hatch.

Jim Kearney writes:
Hieton Writers, who meet each Wednesday afternoon in The Town House, Hamilton, have just produced their *Book of Stories* to coincide with their tenth anniversary. They are now working on their companion book of poems. Both will be completed in time for their Summer Solstice celebrations at Chatelherault. At present the group are working their way through two elements. The first is the understanding of Drama with a view to improvements in all of their literary outputs. The second is an in depth understanding of Poetry. The reading of poetry especially where differing poets tackle the same topic has proved to be stimulating. The recent submissions of 'Hietons' was on display in the Poetry Garden at Biggar.

When the Sun Turns Green in Biggar

Poetry makes use of all the qualities of language, its sounds and rhythms, the shape words make in your mouth, how they feel and taste. This is why poetry is better heard and spoken than read silently to oneself.

And this was the idea behind the poetry reading that Biggar Writers held in Atkinson-Pryce bookshop last Friday evening. Thirteen folk attended (which was three more than attended the reading at which the Beat poet, Allen Ginsberg, unleashed his epochal poem 'Howl' on the world), and this respectable number were treated to an eclectic range of poems from local wordsmiths and special guest Jane McKie.

Biggar Writers were represented by Anne Armstrong, Darren Gray, Andrew McCallum, Rochelle Pitcher and Trish Reith, in whose poems language danced and sparkled and resonated with wit and sensitivity. Andrew also read two of his favourite poems by Alex Laird, who missed the evening due to ill-health.

Jane McKie read from her award-winning debut collection, *Morocco Rococo*, and treated her listeners to a preview of her forthcoming collection, *When the Sun Turns Green*, which is due to be published in June by Polygon. Jane's poems are concisely distilled and written with verve and lyrical precision, and are imaginative, poised and invariably arresting. Her second collection is sure to confirm her as one of

Britain's most exciting emerging poets.

Spoken word - poetry and storytelling - has always been about 'community' rather than 'audience' to an extent that other media are not. Atkinson-Pryce's intimate and informal space was the ideal venue for this kind of event, where the traditional distance between 'performer' and 'performed to' is diminished. Chris and Sue proved excellent hostesses and the atmosphere was relaxed and convivial.

Biggar Writers are already planning future reading events; possibly including a return visit to Biggar of the Edinburgh based spoken word performance collective, Writers' Bloc. Watch this space!

Cambuslang Writers have disbanded. If anyone is interested in starting a new group in Cambuslang or the surrounding area, please let me know.



Writers' Groups in South Lanarkshire

Writers of whatever interests or abilities are very welcome to join these groups. Please contact the person listed for more details.

Biggar Writers' Group

Contact: Andrew McCallum 01899-221743. The group meets fortnightly, Mondays, in the Biggar Municipal Hall from 7:30-9:30.

Dolphinton Women Writers

Contact: Amanda Maclean 01968-661657

Hieton Writers' Group

Contact: Jean Livingstone at: jeanliving@hotmail.com This group meets weekly, Wednesdays, from 1-3 p.m. in the Hamilton Town House.

Kirkmuirhill Writers

Contact: Maureen King at 01555-893870. The date is usually Wednesdays, 10:30-12 noon and this may be the normal meeting date after the summer recess.

Lanark Writers' Circle

Contact: Brian Laidlaw 01555-666201. The group meets every Monday from 7-9 p.m. at the ALVO Centre in Lanark.

Larkhall Writers

Contact: Rita Little rita.little2@btoopenworld.com (Phone 01698-883133) The group meets Monday nights at the Community Fire Station in Larkhall, from 7-9 p.m..

Strathaven Writers

Contact: Jane Struth 01357-522638. The group meets in the Strathaven Public Library on the last Wednesday in each month, from 7-9 p.m.

Writer's Inc. (East Kilbride)

Meets monthly at the East Kilbride Arts Centre, first Tuesday of each month. Contact: Kirsty Campbell kirstycampbell@blueyonder.co.uk mobile: 07990843613.