

In praise of poets

featuring Ben Ramm

'Beauty is Truth. Truth beauty, that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know'

Poetry is never far from our daily lives. Tucked away in leafy Hampstead, amongst charming coffee houses and antiquarian bookshops, lies the home of one of England's most brilliant and tragic figures. John Keats composed some of the most remarkable verse in the language before dying of consumption at the devastatingly young age of 25. For Keats, as for all great poets, poetry was more than a profession: it was a drug, a passion, 'a way of happening' a unique perspective upon the world.

In many ways, Keats' world is not so distant from our own. As the popularity of organised religion has waned, and the great political ideologies have failed, poetry has found a space in the public sphere in which to articulate our most sacred human emotions. Matthew Arnold ambitiously proposed that poetry replace organised religion as the spiritual and moral food of the nation. If his suggestion resonates with us now, it is because we increasingly turn to verse as a solace, particularly in times of despair and loss. It is no coincidence that the two most popular poems of the last decade, 'Do not stand by my grave and weep' and 'Stop All the Clocks', both composed in the 1930s, deal with personal grief.

Yet poetry is more than a 'healing fountain'. Three of the great elegists of the twentieth-century, Yeats, Auden and Brecht, were also intensely political. Poets are, in the words of Shelley, "the unacknowledged legislators of the world". Indeed, politics and art are at times inseparable in the work of the Romantics. This political engagement should not surprise us: great poets have an astute understanding of the world they inhabit, for they analyse and record as well as create. Sometimes though, this world is not enough. The visionary poet, if a dying breed, is an increasingly attractive one, with his ability to envisage the new Jerusalem; an alternative to the troubled world in which we live. He is a prophet, a libertarian firebrand.

The task of a modern poet is no less fraught

than that of his predecessors. Few societies have undervalued their poets more than ours does today. Yet more than ever we need the poet's imagination, inspiration and guidance. He is the candle bearer of the finest sentiments of humanity, for though he has seen the darkness, he responds with light.

*Follow, poet follow right
To the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice*

*In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.*

Ben is in the final year of an English degree at Cambridge University. Although he has grown up in the Suburb, and went to school in Hampstead, he spends much of his time travelling and teaching abroad, particularly in Latin America. He relaxes by reading and writing poetry, acting, listening to music and following Crystal Palace FC.

SUBURB

Rants & Raves

featuring Terry Rand

Well known as the scourge of the Dept of Transport, Terry has been at the forefront of battles to save the Suburb from damaging schemes for Falloden Way and Henly's Corner. A retired photographer he now enjoys his children, grandchildren and allotment, as well as doing his bit for the Suburb.

Rants

Pavement Cyclists: Falloden Way is plagued by cyclists on the footways. Because they do not feel safe pedalling on the road they are perfectly prepared to make pedestrians feel unsafe on the pavements. Even a polite request for them to push their cycles instead is invariably met with abuse or even threats of violence. Having been struck four times by cyclists outside my house, once being knocked to the ground, I would really like to see some action by the police. Fat chance.

4x4s: The proliferation of the vehicles so many mothers seem to feel essential to ferry their offspring around in betokens a serious lack of confidence in their own driving skills. Given the fact that they cannot summon up the energy to walk their children to school, a need to be behind the wheel of an armed personnel carrier suggests they have deep-seated doubts about their own skills at avoiding accidents and/or parking.

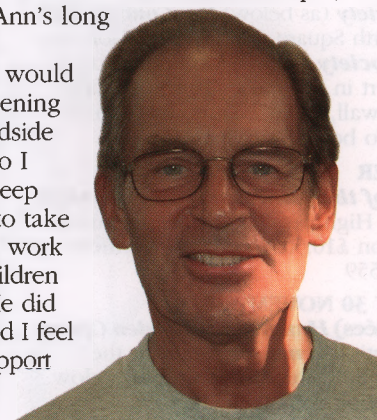
Overgrown hedges: It's a great pity that many Suburb hedges have been allowed to overlap so far over the footways. While it is so pleasant to walk side by side with a friend, on many Suburb streets this can now only be accomplished if one person is prepared to walk on the verge.

Raves

Space and greenery: We are indeed fortunate in the Suburb to be able to enjoy such space and greenery. When I go to other areas with their cramped and sterile streetscapes, I bless the memory of Dame Henrietta and her planners for their foresight and imagination.

Architectural variety: In a five minute stroll one can go from being outside a modest cottage to an imposing mansion. The wealth of changing types of home that surround us is enriching and a constant stimulation.

Neighbourliness: We are lucky in the part of the Suburb in which I live to have a wonderfully close neighbourhood spirit. Everyone knows there is ready help at hand if needed. As an example, during my wife, Ann's long illness my retired neighbour, Frank would come in every evening and sit by her bedside the whole night so I could get some sleep and still be able to take her for treatment, work and see to the children during the day. He did this for months and I feel that this sort of support is a very 'Suburb' characteristic.



Deborah Warland

Suburb
Style editor
Deborah Warland,
talks to
residents
about some
of their
favourite
things

Resigning member attacks Trust

(continued from page 1)

the RA in urging residents to be vocal in opposition.

MAJOR DIFFERENCES

It was after the ordinary business of the AGM had been conducted that the sparks began to fly as David Iwi addressed the meeting at some length. He had resigned he said because of major differences with the council which refuses to amend its constitution, is not democratic and outsiders, who cannot be removed and can block any constitutional change, are appointed by outside bodies.

COWARDS AND BULLIES

David Iwi went on to list failings in the handling of planning applications such as members voting where they knew the applicants; acting on the basis of defective reports; not having read documents; failure to carry out inspections; failure to deal fairly with applicants. "The council's policy," he said, "is that of cowards and bullies, to give in to those who are rich and determined but to bully the others." He complained that the

report to members made no mention of its problems "as if there has not been a cloud in the sky." He said, "in fact the period has been one of the most turbulent in the Trust's history."

"Radical steps are needed to put matters right," he said, "the constitution should be amended to make the council accountable and fully elected. The present council should be replaced. There should be open meetings to deal with planning applications. The Trust needs to get realistic about its consent criteria."

Teddy Bourne, also a retired lawyer and the Law Society appointed trustee, making an eloquent rebuttal of the criticisms made by David Iwi, said "Mr. Iwi has made a number of accusations against the other members of the Trust Council. Mr. Iwi lodged his substantive complaints with the Charity Commission. They subsequently confirmed to the Trust in writing that there were no issues which they wished to take up with the Trust arising out of Mr Iwi's complaints, with one exception.

"That exception arose from an allegation by Mr Iwi concerning the state of the tennis courts leased to the Institute; as a result, the Charity Commission recommended that the Trust should take steps to procure the maintenance of the tennis courts.

"The Charity Commission did not see fit to raise with the Trust Council a single one of the extremely serious allegations made by Mr Iwi.

"Mr Iwi made several of these allegations, and others, to members of the Trust Council during his period of tenure as a trustee. The other Trustees have been advised by solicitors that some of those allegations may

be defamatory. The Trust Council utterly refutes all Mr Iwi's serious allegations on matters of substance.

"The Trust Council does not claim to be perfect. Errors are occasionally made, and when they are identified, the Trust Council does its best to rectify them.

"During his period of office Mr Iwi made several proposals which were agreed by the rest of the Trust Council to be constructive. There were, however, a number of occasions on which all the other members of the Trust Council disagreed with Mr Iwi's views. For example, when, at the insistence of Mr Iwi, the Trust Council took leading Counsel's opinion on a number of matters (at considerable expense), Counsel upheld on all material points the views of the members of the Trust Council who disagreed with Mr Iwi, thus establishing that the legal basis on which the Trust Council had proceeded was correct.

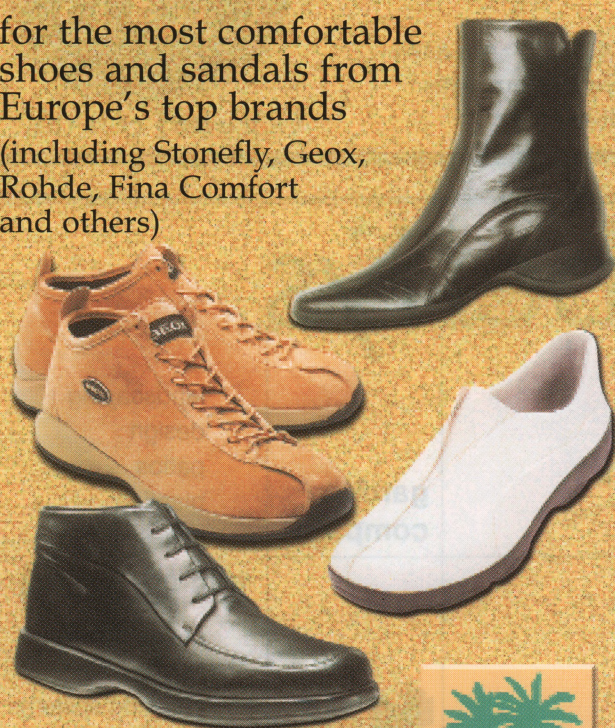
"The Trust Council does not favour the changes proposed by Mr Iwi to the constitution of the Trust, which was carefully designed by Kit Ikin and the other founders of the Trust in order to give all residents the protection of the presence of four independent non-resident trustees appointed by professional bodies, thus ensuring that the Trust can never be dominated by special interest groups."

The meeting ended with a number of members supporting the Trust and echoing Michael Max who said "the founders of the New Trust such as Jean Henderson and Kit Ikin had been very wise in formulating its constitution in a way that precluded small particular interest groups from taking over."

RICHARD WAKEFIELD

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