



Makeover book signed at makeover store

 **BARBARA HUDSON** showed that improvements at WHS made a natural home for her new book.

Barbara Lorna Hudson's second novel *Makeover* won first prize in the Oak Tree Press annual novel contest and was long-listed in the Flash500 novel competition.

As part of the promotional activity, Barbara sat down for a book-signing in central Oxford's WH Smith branch. The store had a coincidental link with her title, for the shop was itself in the process of having a comprehensive makeover.

An Oxford story

Barbara's book is set in Oxford, providing another link for publicity purposes. Local interest is a useful tool for any publisher's promotions department.

See also book reviews, page 7

WiO WEBSITE'S NEW FEEDBACK PAGE

 **A NEW FEATURE** on the WiO website aims to be a powerful writing tool for all members.

Send us your work to the new WiO page, where you can share your writing – prose, poetry, or non-fiction – with other members. You might even be looking for some useful feedback on your latest chapter, even help on a tricky villanelle that's keeping you awake at night.

Share and help

The WiO Feedback page is the place to share your work and get help from a trusted set of eyes. Email us with your piece and (if this applies) what kind of feedback you are looking for. We will then get your work up on the new page to share with other WiO members.

Add weight to your words

Also making useful reading on the WiO website are Robert Bullard's 'Add weight' feature: handy choices for what works when you are giving a speech, delivering a talk, or making a presentation. Definitely worth taking in for your must-do action plan.

Visit: www.writersinxford.org/members/wip

BUSY TIMES FOR OUR NEW WRITERS

- **Jake Kendall** ran a support group in Oxford, and has now gone on to take an MA in Creative Writing, at Edinburgh University.
- **Lindsey Cohick** now works for Marvel Studios on graphic novels.
- **Tess Little** has her first novel coming out soon.

Highlights on other pages

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The Eagle and Child public house was a relaxing Oxford venue for members of JRR Tolkien's Inklings group.

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Email me: Send information on your new project or title, with publishing details, and a hi-res photo. Article suggestions are welcome. 400 words fills a column.

Note: Views in this newsletter are those of the writers concerned, not of Writers in Oxford.



WiO members are welcome to join our Facebook group. You can visit the WiO page, which is open to anyone, and is a good way to promote your work.

Group: www.facebook.com/groups/writersinxford

Page: www.facebook.com/writersinxford

Events diary

BOOK LAUNCH PARTY

For *Testimony of Flight* by Jane Spiro (Palewell Press)
Friday 26 July 7-9 pm

Common Ground Oxford, 37-38 Little Clarendon Street
Jane Spiro's collection recounts stories of migration, of leaving home and acclimatising to a new one.

The texts act as 'haikus' of small moments in disrupted lives, revealing the intimacies and momentary consequences of change. The pieces reach back in time to expulsions in 1291, and forward in history to the Hungarian Revolution and World War II.

Told through the imagined and actual voices of its actors in poetry, short stories and plays, this extraordinary collection is a symphony of the human condition.

Venue: <https://coffeeride.co.uk/common-ground>



WRITING IN TIMES OF CONFLICT

15 July - 14 December

Senate House Library, Senate House, London WC1 7HU
Exhibition on exploring the power of words used to strive for peace and reconciliation over the last 100 years, from the 1919 Armistice to the present day.

View online: <https://www.senatehouselibrary.ac.uk>



AUTUMN EVENTS

There are plenty of WiO activities being planned. The events diary will be posted to you in good time.

Michael Pickwoad

CHERRY MOSTESHAR presents this tribute to a popular WiO member.

It came as no surprise that there was standing room only at Michael Pickwoad's funeral last September, as childhood and new friends

gathered in disbelief to say a final farewell. Sitting there I recalled the amazing Christmas parties Michael and his wife Vanessa would throw, packed with the most interesting mix of people that so clearly took great pride in being friends with the Pickwoads. I remember at the age of nine being very excited to meet my



brother's new friend, the son of the great actor William Mervyn, but Michael soon emerged from the shadow of his famous father and made all those around him feel at ease.

Production set

Sitting in The University Church of St Mary the Virgin, magnificent as it is, listening to the director and playwright, Stephen Poliakoff, give his eulogy, one could not help but feel that if this was the set of one of Michael's productions, and not his funeral, he would somehow have managed to improve on it – as he did the iconic Tardis of BBC TV's Doctor Who.

Michael achieved a great deal in his life and rubbed shoulders with the rich and the famous, but he was always the same person I met all those years ago, with his sparkling, smiling eyes that made all feel he was more interested in hearing about them than talking about his own many achievements.

Creativity from Michael He gained a big following for his work on the 21st-century reinvention of Doctor Who, the cult sci-fi series. His creativity and what he described as "cunning" compensated for the lack of a blockbuster-film budget!

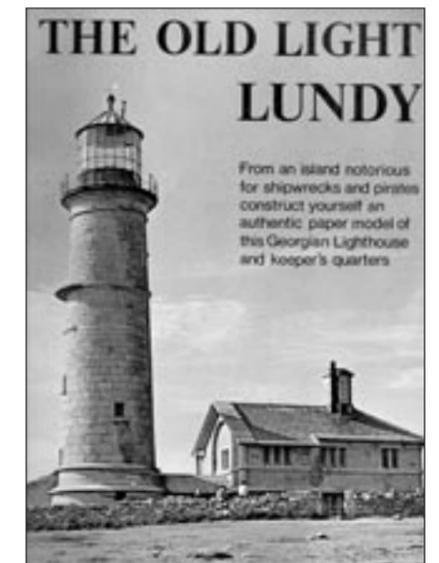
My abiding image of him is at the side of his wife Vanessa, walking hand in hand like newly weds even after decades of marriage. Michael was so obviously a devoted husband and loving father. He was also a loyal and supportive friend.

Iconic screen presentation

Perhaps best known as production designer on the iconic 1987 film *Withnail & I*, starring Richard E. Grant and Paul McGann, he later acquired a whole new generation of fans as Production Designer on *Doctor Who* from 2010 to 2017.

Michael worked on some of the most iconic TV series, including taking on the task of creating the village for the 2009 remake of *The Prisoner* which was lauded as the best part of the production. His work on *Longford* in 2006 earned him a long overdue BAFTA nomination for best production design.

Michael created this paper-model book for the Landmark Trust.



Michael did everything with a sense of fun, always enjoying the work despite the long absences from his family that it sometimes entailed, and that he obviously regretted. His achievements in film and TV are far too extensive to list in full here, but his kindness, his charm and his loyalty are qualities that have left their mark on all who knew him.

View The Old Light Lundy online:
<https://tinyurl.com/y3b8u42v>

WiK: Writers in Kyoto

 **JOHN DOUGILL writes on English-language authors in Japan's old imperial capital.**

Few WiO members will be aware that in a sense they have helped to hatch another writers' organisation thousands of miles away – Writers in Kyoto (WiK). Not in any formal way, but simply as a source of inspiration. The links go back to 1993, when I had returned to Oxford after a six-year spell in Japan and heard of an organisation for writers which had started up the year before. Since I'd published textbooks and a couple of guidebooks to Oxford, I signed up and was flattered to find myself among such luminaries as Philip Pullman and Brian Aldiss.

During a year in spent in Oxford, I attended several functions,

including a dinner talk with an agent, an informal open house, a quiz and a punting party. The emphasis was on friendly socialising and writerly camaraderie. I got to know novelists like Sara Banerjee and non-fiction writers like Jennie Hampton, both of whom I believe are still active members of WiO, some 26 years later.

Regular get-together

After returning to Japan, I spent a few happy years researching and writing a cultural history of Kyoto, and subsequently wrote books on other aspects of Japanese culture. Then one day in 2014 a friend mentioned over a game of chess that several of his acquaintances were writers and that it would be good to have some kind of regular get-together. My mind immediately went back to Writers in Oxford, as I'd enjoyed the sense of community it brought to what is often a lonely activity.

For a while half a dozen of us met in my university office to discuss matters related to writing. We took it

in turn to give presentations, but pretty soon it became evident that we were running out of steam. Something needed to change, and so we tried an online grouping instead. The idea was to keep it loose and commitment free, so that members could participate as little or as much as they wished. Most people in Kyoto have busy lives, and on any given day there is sure to be something special going on in the city, so flexibility was a key part of the set-up.



Happy WiKkers at their 2017 end of year party. From left, garden expert Mark Hovane, Kyoto Journal editor Ken Rodgers, Japan Times journalist Eric Johnston, pottery expert Robert Yellin, and Competition Organiser/blogger Karen Lee Tawarayama.

We were given a huge boost in our first years thanks to Eric Johnston, a leading journalist with the *Japan Times*, who not only provided us with contact to famous authors in Tokyo but also to those willing to visit Kyoto. In addition, he single-handedly took on the editing of our first Anthology (see next page). In this way we were able to host such illustrious writers as Robert Whiting and Karel van Wolferen.

WiK's first Anthology party

There were magical evenings too, such as the Allen Weiss reading at Robert Yellin's gallery, with candlelight and shakuhachi flutes to enhance the atmosphere. Another very special event was our poetry reading on 1 July 2016, in commemoration of the centenary of the Battle of the Somme. Along with readings of 11 poets by 11 different readers was a singalong of World War I songs, led by Felicity Greenland. As for book launches, two outstanding events were those of *Another Kyoto* by Alex Kerr in a stunning old machiya in the geisha district of



Eric Johnston contributes to the Japan Times.

Kamishichiken and a photo exhibit, *Zen Gardens and Temples of Kyoto* by photographer John Einarsen.

Other events in the past couple of years have included Robert Yellin on Japanese ceramics; a Basho symposium with invited speakers; Justin McCurry of *The Guardian*; Mark Richardson reading his poetry and sharing his encyclopedic knowledge of Robert Frost; a dinner talk with famed translator Juliet Winters Carpenter; and meetings with Eric Oey, head of Tuttle, a premier English-language publisher for East Asia.

WiK Anthology

Along the way we've published an Anthology of members' writings and run a competition, aimed at representing Kyoto in a fresh way in 300 words. The winning entries have been posted on our website as well as being published in our Anthology.

On 22 June this year, WiK held the official launch party for the 3rd Writers in Kyoto Anthology, called *Encounters With Kyoto*. About half of WiK's members came all the way to Umekoji Park's Midori Building, where Jann Williams had set up a room full of food, drinks, and books, of course.

We know we'll never be as big as Writers in Oxford (220 members to our 42), and in comparison to its 26 years we are but a child of four, but let us hope that in some way we have achieved something of which our parent organisation may be proud. After all, unlike the dreaming aspirers of Oxford, we strive to make the English language flower within the rock gardens of Japaneseness.

Visit WiK online: www.writersinkyoto.com

LiterArties update

 **DENNIS HAMLEY discusses a year of action by the LiterArties words and pictures group.**

Well, Oxfordshire Artweeks have come and gone and the LiterArties group has completed what is in effect, the first complete chapter in its history

Nobody can deny the group's ambition and activity, with four exhibitions since its inception in 2018. The first was a rather tentative effort in the West Ox gallery in Bampton – but we'll be back to make a bigger mark.

Exhibiting in Oxford

Then came a month-long exhibition in the Jam Factory's Boiler Room. The event enjoyed good footfall and much appreciation but not much selling. The gallery's size meant that artists were limited to six or so paintings, unless they were very small. The gallery at the Old Fire Station (OFS) is also relatively small, but better suited to our activities, where Rosie Phipps gave workshop sessions and Karen French offered a Meet the Author/Artist occasion.



Then Kamal Lathar announced his KFL pop-up gallery in Summertown (picture above), behind the Spice Lounge restaurant. A yard at the back was temporarily filled in and given a transparent roof, enabling artists to have space and light. Visitors praised the KFL, and also liked the art – and at last the selling started!

Now Literarties looks to the future. Didcot and Wantage beckon, while the KFL has been taken down and stashed away to live and fight another day.

Visit LiterArties online: www.literarties.com

WiO members' new books

SEND DETAILS of your latest book to be included on these pages. We start with Nick Smith's account of the background behind his saga of famous poets and the game of Bridge.

Bridge and the Romantics: still wouldst I sing...

 **NICK SMITH is an expert bridge player, and has written several books on the subject.**

Wordsworth, Keats and Co did not play bridge – indeed, bridge hadn't been invented then, and there is no great evidence that any of the Romantic poets indulged in card games at all. But I haven't let that stop me writing a book called *Bridge and the Romantics*.



Exceptional yet reckless

It's set in the 1810s and features the card-playing exploits of a host of familiar figures (Byron, Coleridge, etc) but it focuses on the Shelley set. Mary Shelley is in there, playing some stunningly brilliant bridge while writing *Frankenstein*, bearing numerous babies, and putting up with her husband's antics. But Shelley is also an exceptional, if reckless, player. This is bridge as it might be played in heaven, pyrotechnic declarer player matched by astonishing far-sighted defence. I hoped to put together some of the most dazzling and difficult deals ever seen in print.

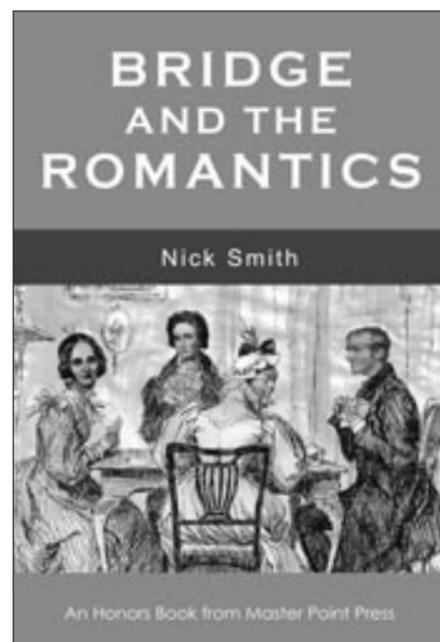
The bridge spectacular is played out against a psychodrama of black farce and occasional tragedy. It is a golden age of bridge (and poetry) and yet the protagonists have a sense of a world that is disappearing in front of their eyes. Shelley and Byron sense their own obsolescence. My book finishes with a bridge-version of Shelley's 1821 essay *A Defence of Poetry*, a celebration of the joys of the game at a time when its future feels most threatened. Today, the standards of play at the top level of the game are higher than ever, and yet fewer and fewer young

people are taking up bridge. The zenith of the game as a social phenomenon was in the USA of the 1920s – its history since then has been of gradual effacement.

Perverse pleasure

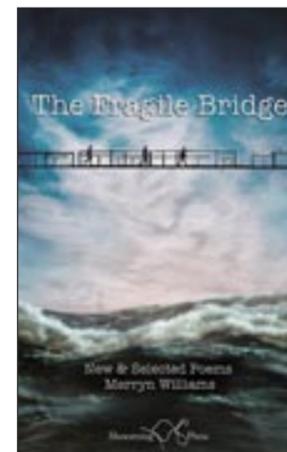
My ideal reader is one who can follow the sublime beauties of the most complex of bridge deals and yet also read *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* or *The Revolt of Islam* for pleasure. Worldwide, the number of readers fluent in *both* arcane, disappearing languages is probably in single figures. So it is like writing in Cornish or perhaps the language of the *Gawain*-poet, and yet there is a perverse pleasure in compiling a narrative that is uncompromisingly *sui generis*. The poets themselves provide numerous analogies.

These edifices of bridge brilliance are like the crumbling remains of Ozymandias on the desert sand. *Still wouldst I sing, and you have ears in vain.*



Bridge and the Romantics
Master Point Press, the Bridge publisher

Visit Nick's ebook online: <https://tinyurl.com/y5r5bftl>



THE FRAGILE BRIDGE

Merryn Williams
Shoestring Press

This is a substantial publication of new and selected poems from Merryn Williams' previous publications, *The Sun's Yellow Eye*, *The Latin Master's Story*, *The First Wife's Tale* and *Letter to My Rival*. Many of the poems

seek to give voices to those, frequently women, who are not usually heard and to explore the aftermath and effects of those hidden voices.

"Overall *The Fragile Bridge* demonstrates Merryn Williams' exacting, attentive concern for voices that are normally unheard. She uses craftsmanship to skilfully build poems with integrity that are readable and easy to identify with."

Emma Lee, *London Grip Poetry Review*.

View online at: <https://londongrip.co.uk>

MAKEOVER

Barbara Lorna Hudson
Fantastic Books Publishing

Set in Oxford, *Makeover* is the story of a personal shopper who sets her cap at a rich widowed professor. Part romantic comedy and part deadly serious, it deals with the question: "Can people change?" and the barriers set by social class and educational difference.

"A classy, fast-paced but insightful novel about a woman's search for security after many brickbats in her previous life. The psychotherapeutic scenes are believable and accurate."

Brian Sheldon, *author and Emeritus Professor of Applied Social Research, University of Exeter*.

Visit online at: <http://www.barbaralornahudson.co.uk>



WiO NEW MEMBERS: A TREASURY OF TITLES



● **Jack Briggs (pen name Parker Foye):** speculative fiction, including (left) *Mage of Inconvenience*.

● **Anna Britnor Guest:** writes books about business and sales, such as *Guide to Selling IP Communications*.

● **John Daniel:** his poetry includes *No Man's Land* and *Missing the Boat*.

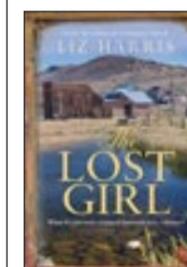
● **Rachel Edwards:** writer of literary fiction such as *Darling* (left).

● **Sue Eves:** writes illustrated children's fiction including *The Quiet Woman* and *The Noisy Dog*.

● **Ray Foulke:** an architect, environmentalist, and rock music festival promoter/organiser, whose books include *Betty Joel: Celtic Spirit from the Orient* (2017).

● **Liz Harris:** writes mainly historical fiction such as *The Lost Girl* (left).

● **Mary Hoffman:** children's author whose books include *Smile* (2018) and *The Ravenmaster's Boy* (2017).



● **Vina Jie-Min Prasad:** science fiction and fantasy writer (right). Finalist for the Nebula, Hugo, Campbell, and Sturgeon Awards.

● **Alan Kestner:** artist and writer. *Story Telling Revisited* (2018) explores the interplay between story and image.

● **Jake Lynch:** his debut novel is *Blood on the Stone*, a 17th century detective story, set in Oxford (right).

● **Valerie Mendes:** YA and historical fiction author, whose books include *Where Peacocks Scream* (2017).

● **Jane Spiro:** also a poet, whose works include *Playing for Time* and *Is a Gateway*.

● **Gerald Vinestock:** writes children's books such as *Crib* and *the Labours of Hercules* (right).

● **Mariah Whelan:** a poet and academic writer whose latest work is *City of Rivers* (2019).



The view from my desk

 **TIFFANY WILLIAMS** reflects on an outlook that takes in a famed Italian river.

From my desk I have a view of the River Arno, which lies across the landscape like a discarded ribbon, its water the light blue of a sunny day in winter. One sentence was probably the longest I could pretend not to be in Oxford: it's a map, with features drawn, more for imagination than practicality, on paper the colour of clotted cream. Printed around it are advertisements for 'fancy articles,' 'chocolate in tablets,' and 'the most highly finished bicycle in the world.' It's Paperchase 2016, not Florence 1908, but I love it no less. This is a desk with a view.

Forster character

My desk doubles as our dining room table, and it's in the corner of the living room. The poster is the only thing above my wall and above sitting eye level, and so whichever way I face, my desk doesn't have a view, not one that any Forster character would appreciate.

Our house is petite. What I hear as I type this is the fridge ticking like the Doomsday clock to be de-iced, and occasional bursts of dialogue from the TV Hannah is streaming over our wi-fi, temperamental with the rain. "We are on Love Island – to find love."



The Ponte Vecchio spans the Arno in Florence.

I'm OK with distractions. I have the famous Asperger's focus, but more importantly I get plenty of practice. On other nights, the lads next door drunkenly bellow rock ballads. I like to write romances, so this suits me better than other genres – not that they invite me to make requests.

Connect and beware

Even so. Writing is a battle, against time, against obligations, against the inner voice saying "Is this worth it?" Forster said "Only connect" but he also said "Beware of muddle." With all this and more in my mind, a corner and a poster is enough of a view for me.



A nautical crew from WiO (left to right): Martin Stott, Angela Burdick, Brenda Stones, Gabriele Dangel.

All aboard!

May 24 saw the WiO river boat trip depart from Salter's Steamers, at Folly Bridge. Salter's has been going since 1853, and continues to be popular with locals and visitors alike. Our enthusiastic team (*left*) included Angela Burdick, who wore an 'official' peaked cap!

Next issue highlights

- > News about WiO members
- > Winter events diary
- > New books for fireside reading
- > Marketing your titles
- > And more...