

## Wainwright for Kids

### Non-fiction publishing success for VWC member, Jean Gardner.

Summer's here! School's out! Your ears and nerves begin to quiver and jangle. Six weeks of serious grief is on its way, courtesy of your bored and frustrated kids and their World Cup vuvuzelas.

But it doesn't have to be that way. *Kiddiwalks in Hertfordshire* (Countryside Books) by Verulam Writers' Circle's own Jean Gardner is the perfect antidote. A true 'Wainwright for kids' it bursts at the seams with walks and countryside activities, all designed to capture young imaginations and burn off pent-up energy.

All the walks are circular and just the right length for kiddie-sized legs. Clearly written directions make sure you don't get lost and each walk has a section crammed full of 'Fun Things to See and Do.' In Cassiobury Park Jean recommends a bridge which is ideal for playing Pooh Sticks. Lee Valley has the Royal Gunpowder Mill where kids can learn about the big bang theory. Other walks offer Hertfordshire puddingstone, splash pools, water buffalo,

David Beckham's rooftop, a Roman soldier carved from oak and the opportunity to 'tightrope walk' fallen trees. Need refuelling? On the Grand Union Canal Jean thoughtfully recommends a pit-stop selling real Swiss ice cream.

Nor is this just a book for children. Jean's photographs and well-researched 'Background Notes' highlight fascinating facts about each walk. The crystal clarity of her writing brings the countryside to life:

'Ash and willows shade bulrushes, nettles and flowering plants. Cress grows in the water...'

Jean's previous two books, *Aviation Landmarks and Houses of the Art Deco Years* cover the whole UK, but she confesses that Hertfordshire is her real muse. Over the years, she has translated her love for this part of England into a stream of articles, making her one of the most published writers in Verulam Writers' Circle.



Nick Cook

### News in brief...

- Reporters spy on special agents
- Smashing time for Crystal Decanter winner
- Kids told to take a walk
- Does science fiction have a future?

### EVENTS CALENDAR

The full programme of events can be found on the VWC website [www.vwc.org.uk](http://www.vwc.org.uk).  
Venue - St Michael's Church Hall. Time - 8 pm.

14/07/10 – Party at St Michael's and last formal session before the summer break.

08/09/10 – AGM, member renewal and welcome, setting of the David Gibson Competition and MSS evening.

*Informal MSS sessions will be held throughout the summer in the Six Bells. Check website for details.*

## 2010 Crystal Decanter Short Story Competition Results



Oscar Windsor-Smith (2nd), Janet Baldey (winner), Steve Barley (judge) and Dave Weaver (3rd)

### Janet Baldey won VWC's 2010 Crystal Decanter Competition with her short story, *Harry's Game*.

'Child's Play' was the theme for this year's competition, and I was looking for stories with a child as the central character, and writing that conveyed a real sense of what it's like to be young.

Entries included an endearing snapshot of a school carol practice that didn't quite go to plan; fictionalised diary extracts from the daughter of Adolf Hitler's personal secretary; a dreamlike encounter between a man and his younger self; and a little girl's perfect day that truly was 'heavenly'.

*Harry's Game* by Janet Baldey was the overall winner. Written in a series of flashbacks, this story followed Harry as he grew from a boy into an adult, and was observed through the eyes of his doting Auntie May. Although of a gentle nature, Harry's youthful enthusiasm for war games resulted in him joining the army.

The poignant end to this story involved some clever misdirection and there was an emotive thread throughout. A well deserved winner.

Second place went to *This England* by Oscar Windsor-Smith. Three siblings being evacuated during the Second World War were the subject of this story. It's dialogue and short descriptions were deceptively simple, yet revealed much about the children's physical and emotional upheaval.

Third place went to *Sunshine City* by Dave Weaver. A cleverly constructed piece of science fiction, this post-apocalyptic, global warming story had humankind living into domed cities and resorting to radical methods of food production. It maintained a real sense of intrigue throughout.

Well done to the winners and a big thank you to all those who took part.

*Steve Barley (Competition Judge)*

### Member Interview – Jon Pinnock

Jon Pinnock runs his own software company and says he joined VWC in 1993 to 'meet writers and see if I could be one too.'

Since then, he has more than proved himself by becoming one of VWC's most prolific and successful members. He has had over fifty short stories and twenty poems published including nine short story prizes and several commendations.

Jon says he is proudest of the two stories he has had published in *Litro*, as well as one that was recorded for *Short Story Radio* and two more that were read by actors from the *Liars' League*. He is also a 'preferred author' at *Every Day Fiction* and was author of the most-read poem at *Every Day Poets* last August. At the time of writing (it's hard to keep up with Jon's successes!) he has been short-listed for the 2010 *Bristol Prize* for his short story, *rZr and Napoleon*, and has had another accepted for broadcasting by the BBC.



Not content with short stories and poetry, Jon also writes non-fiction, and is working on a full length novel called *Mrs Darcy vs The Aliens* - a humorous sequel to *Pride and Prejudice*, but with added aliens of course! Episodes can be found at [www.mrsdarcyvsthealiens.com](http://www.mrsdarcyvsthealiens.com).

Jon is represented by VWC's home-grown agent, Kate Nash. Examples, not just of Jon's writing but his output of music and cartoons, can be found on his website at [www.jonathanpinnock.com](http://www.jonathanpinnock.com).

*Cheryl Alleyne*

## Science Fiction Authors On Writing



‘Writing, to me, is simply thinking through my fingers.’

- Isaac Asimov

‘Anything one man can imagine, other men can make real.’

- Jules Verne

‘In general, I don't know when inspiration will pop up.’

- Larry Niven

‘New ideas pass through three periods: 1) It can't be done, 2) It probably can be done, but it's not worth doing, 3) I knew it was a good idea all along!’

- Arthur C. Clarke

‘I do not fear computers. I fear the lack of them.’

- Isaac Asimov

‘A reader is not supposed to be aware that someone's written the story. He's supposed to be completely immersed, submerged in the environment.’

- Jack Vance

‘The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns, as it were, instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink.’

- George Orwell

‘I respect my limitations, but I don't use them as an excuse.’

- Stephen R. Donaldson

‘I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by.’

- Douglas Adams

‘It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters in the end.’

- Ursula K. Le Guin

‘Writing is not necessarily something to be ashamed of, but do it in private and wash your hands afterwards.’

- Robert A. Heinlein

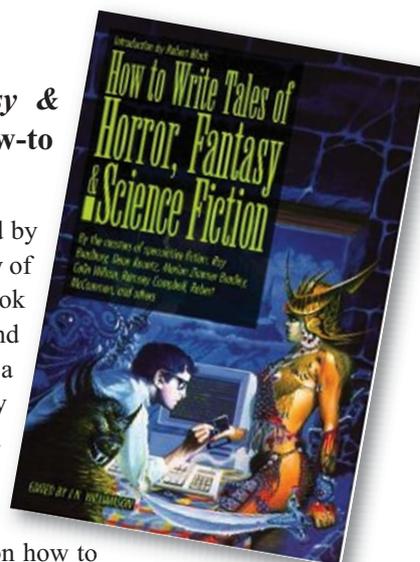
## Book Review - *How to Write Tales of Horror, Fantasy & Science Fiction*

*How to Write Tales of Horror, Fantasy & Science Fiction* was one of the first how-to books I ever read.

Coming back to it after ten years, I'm impressed by both the names on the contents page, and the quality of advice provided. Edited by J.N. Williamson, the book includes articles by Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch and Ramsey Campbell. Stephen King even provides a reading list. Articles are generally of high-quality and only a few are genre-specific: the lesson learned from many is that good genre fiction is good fiction full stop.

The advice on how to write is better than that on how to sell, as the book was originally written in the early '90s and to my knowledge hasn't been updated since. Almost no mention is made of the internet, and the short fiction market seems to have been stronger then than now. It is also slanted toward the American market, although that doesn't seem to have been fundamentally different to the UK. The reading lists don't deal with recent stories, but they do provide a good background.

None of this stops this being a very strong collection of how-to articles, some inspirational, others pragmatic, that would be of use to any aspiring writer. 8/10.



*Toby Frost (Guest Reporter)*

## A Little Humour

Orbit ran a competition last year to come up with the worst cover title for an imaginary sci-fi novel. The overall winner was, *Across a Trembling Sea the Cyborg Fairies Dance*. The shortlist was just as impressive:

- *The Thing with the Glass Buttock*
- *Rise of the Fallen, Book Seven, The Pre-Antepenultimate Battle*
- *A Stain Upon the Vastness*
- *An Old Dragon, A Dead Witch, and a Fat Guy: The Third Book of Stories that Go Nowhere*

These days it's almost impossible to get a novel published without having a literary agent, but what do they actually do? And more importantly, how do you get one? This trio of articles may help. (Ed)

## Why Do I Need a Literary Agent?

Okay, you've written a cracking book and all your friends love it. So why hand over 15% of your potential earnings to an agent, when you're sure the book will sell anyway?



There are several reasons. Many publishing houses won't even look at unsolicited manuscripts. By limiting yourself to those that do, you are cutting out a huge chunk of the market.

Also, although you may think that what you've written is cracking stuff, maybe you're biased?

An agent reads for a living, they specialise in certain genres, horror, crime, romance etc. and keep their ears close to the ground. They chat and fraternise with commissioning editors, they know exactly what's selling and may very well be able to suggest changes to your manuscript that will increase its marketability.

Then, there is the paperwork. Let's face it, most authors haven't the time, energy or aptitude to negotiate complicated contracts, foreign, movie, audio and e-book rights that their blockbuster will surely generate. A good agent will secure the best deal in all those areas for you.

A few words of advice: choose an agent who is hungry, really likes your work and wants the best for it. Avoid agents who charge a reading fee as they're likely to be vanity publishers or 'professional editors' flogging a service. Although legitimate agents are not required to be members of the Association of Authors' Agents, many are – meaning they've sold a minimum number of books and abide by a canon of ethics. So get a good agent and sleep at night.

*Janet Baldey*

**Special  
Literary Agent  
Edition**

## Beware of Scams

It's tempting for a writer to jump at the first literary agent that takes an interest in their work. But it's important to be aware of scams.

Literary agents should always operate in their clients' best interests. Most do exactly that, but a handful have their own interests at heart. Here are a few things to watch out for:

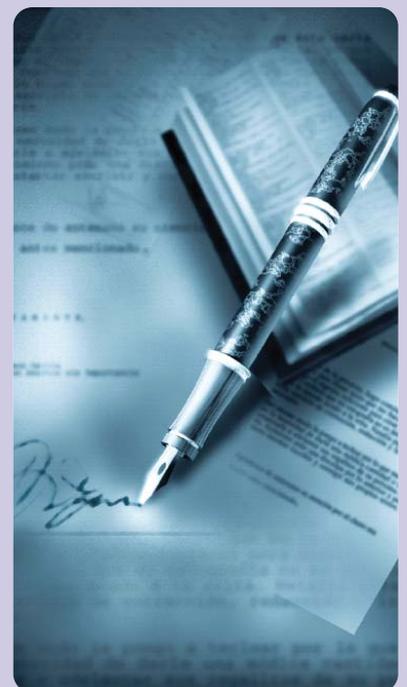
**1. Do they charge fees?** Manuscript reading fees, marketing fees, retainers, administration charges – a reputable agent won't charge a penny until *you* make money, and even then, they take an agreed percentage.

**2. Poor track record.** If an agent hasn't sold any books commercially on behalf of a client, or a previous publishing employer, then you should be asking, 'Why not?'

**3. Hidden clauses.** Watch out for contracts that ask for commission on future work even if the agent isn't involved in selling it, or include unusual expenses, or are heavily weighted in the agent's favour.

**4. Conflicting business interests.** Agencies that work closely, or have shared ownership, with vanity presses, print-on-demand or editing services should disclose that information. Some agents are simply fronts for those businesses and have no intention of selling your work.

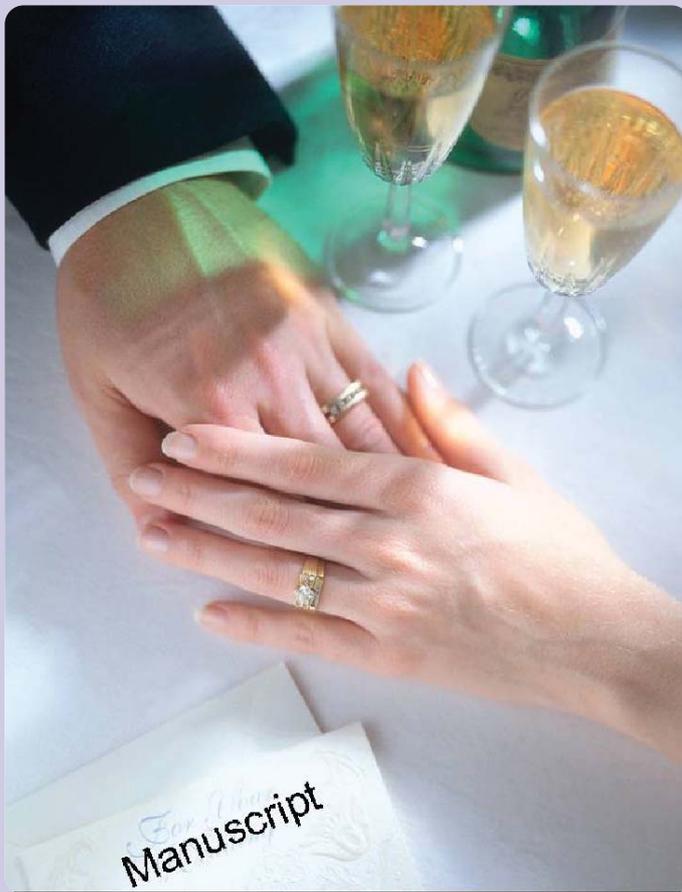
*Steve Barley*



## Finding An Agent Is Just Like Dating!

**Finding a literary agent isn't easy. Treat the process like dating and you'll significantly improve your chances of meeting the right partner...for your writing, that is! Here's what to do...**

**Get in shape** - Make your writing irresistibly gorgeous! Put it on a strict word diet, have a good workout at your local writers' group, consider getting your stuff toned and honed by a reputable editorial consultancy. In short, buff, polish, and perfect!



**Dress to kill** - With a body of writing that good, it deserves to be clothed in something stylish. Match with a bespoke covering letter that is immaculately presented, exudes confidence, and shows off your literary glamour - prizes are a great accessory! Think attention-grabber but in an elegant, understated fashion.

And don't forget, what lies beneath is just as important. Your synopsis should be as appealing and sensuously close-fitting as possible. The pacier it is, the more of a turn-on it'll be.

**Be selective** - Why settle for second best? Search the

writing agencies listed in the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook*, but don't stop there. Check website profiles, and the Association of Authors' Agents. Shortlist all those agents that are eligible and compatible with you - are they into romance or do they have a record of crime? Should you go large or small? Large agencies have VIP passes to all the right places, but smaller agencies have that personal touch and are more likely to stick around should your relationship hit a rocky patch.

Once you've a list of possibilities, ask your friends for their help. Blind dates can be daunting, but personal introductions and recommendations can prove invaluable. Use all your connections, personal and professional, to find out what you can about your potential suitors. When did they last do a deal, and for what? Are they 'hands on' with editorial advice, or more 'arm's length'? And are they able to commit to new relationships at the moment?

Worried you still have five or six possibilities? Don't be. Speed dating is normal these days which means you can approach them all at once (in moderation!).

**Get out there** - It's time for that first date. In your approach, be polite and alluring without coming on too strong. Be friendly and upbeat, but don't drone on about yourself. Hook with your panache and engaging ideas. If an agent isn't for you, be patient - eventually you'll find 'the one'. It'll take persistence and determination, together with great writing, but somewhere there'll be an agent offering the sort of commitment you deserve.

And remember, you don't have to jump into bed with the first agent who shows interest...not unless you wish to of course!

*(Jenny is represented by the Jonathan Pegg Literary Agency, her website can be found at [www.jennybarden.com](http://www.jennybarden.com))*

*Jenny Barden*

**Special  
Literary Agent  
Edition**

**Want to be added to our mailing list or propose ideas for future writing articles and themes? Perhaps you'd like to be one of our guest reporters? Then let us know at**

**[writer@stevenbarley.com](mailto:writer@stevenbarley.com)**