



The Ghost of a Post

You notice a lot of strange things when you spend time cycling down back roads just to see where they lead. This gate is near Trillick in County Tyrone.

It seems here was a wooden gatepost here once, fastened to the tree with a metal strap. The tree grew round the post, and at some point the post rotted away. Now the tree has become the gatepost; it has grown far enough to prevent the gate swinging out and a loop of twine holds it in the opposite direction. This is the sort of improvisation you can see everywhere if you keep your eyes open. It was never designed to work like that, but it works well enough. It has a rough familiarity that a manufactured post, doing only the job it was designed for, can never have. You might even say it has 'soul'.

Soul is a matter of integration and history. The tree and the gate accommodate each other. This interconnectedness is one aspect of what [Christopher Alexander](#) calls the [Quality Without a Name](#)

Imagine a prefabricated window which sits in a hole in a wall. It is a one, a unit; but it can be lifted directly out from the wall. This is both literally true, and true in feeling. Literally, you can lift the window out without doing damage to the fabric of the wall. And, in your imagination, the window can be removed without disturbing the fabric of what surrounds it.

Compare this with another window. Imagine a pair of columns outside the window, forming a part of the window space. They create an ambiguous space which is part of the outside, and yet also part of the window. Imagine splayed reveals, which help to form the window, and yet, also, with the light reflected off them, shining in the room, they are also part of the room. And imagine a window seat leaning against the window sill, but a seat whose back is indistinguishable from the window sill, because it is continuous.

This window cannot be lifted out. It is one with the patterns which surround it; it is both distinct itself, and also part of them. The boundaries between things are less marked; they overlap with other boundaries in such a way that the continuity of the world, at this

particular place, is greater. . . .

The Timeless Way of Building, pp. 522-523

Connection seems to have become a theme of this issue: connection to Nature and locality in the case of [Conscious Writing](#) and the work of [Common Ground](#); connection to the Slieve Beagh community in [Forgotten Song](#) and the [Growth and Decay](#) project; or connection to the past through [Living Legacies](#).

No man is an island, and neither is a work of Art. Art makes and celebrates connection, and great Art makes more connections than even its creator can comprehend. It is not the perfect execution of a single-minded idea: there is a wonderful boat-building phrase for designs like that – they ‘smell of the lamp’.

No. If you want to make art that lasts, art that makes connections, let your first draft or sketch be something simple and humble, as humble as an untreated wooden gatepost.

Then see what grows up round it.

Jenny Brien Editor

[High Rise](#)

J.G. Ballard’s 1975 cult novel *High-Rise* is perhaps better appreciated as a metaphor for an inexplicable breakdown of social order. Long considered impossible to film, this brilliant adaptation by Ben Wheatley and Amy Jump reproduces the book’s incisive look at the social mores of the day while managing to recreate Ballard’s nightmare vision of a future world. This was speculative fiction very much of the time in which it was written; not sci-fi in the sense of space ships and imaginary planets, but a vision of our world where it takes little to tilt society into violence and chaos.

Tom Hiddleston (*The Night Manager*) plays Dr Robert Laing, the wealthy new resident of a futuristic apartment block designed to approximate a community. Occupying an apartment on the luxurious upper floor of the building, he quickly becomes aware of the tensions within this community. While those living on the upper floors enjoy all the services the building has to offer, the poorer families living in the cheaper flats below have to cope with the continual breakdown of services in the apartment block. Complaints are airily dismissed as ‘teething problems’ by the building’s architect, played by a laconic Jeremy Irons, residing in the Penthouse complete with roof garden from which he and his wife survey the world they have created.

Set in the 1970s, Wheatley and Jump refer to Margaret Thatcher in their film – but viewers may be reminded of others. The building itself, a beacon of modernism, lies at the heart of the film. It is both a prison and an escape, depending on the residents' social and financial status. As power cuts and services fail the residents on the lower floors rage against the perceived privileges of those occupying the upper floors. Soon the regimented social strata of the building begin to break down. Decadence, despair and violence are all around as this mini-society goes into meltdown. Once it emerges that service charges are the same throughout the building it is not long before class conflict in the tower is rife. With scenes of mini-riots in the high-rise grocery market and the building's previously pristine façade defaced, we are offered a nightmare-scape worthy of Ballard's novel.

'High-Rise' has been described as the social-surrealist film of the year:

'A savage and brilliant satire of the 1960s social idealism and the Thatcherite values that undermined it.' BFI review.

Cert 15, but not for the faint-hearted.

Chris Campbell retired to her native Enniskillen after working and living in Belfast and Belgium for many years. The Brussels Cinema Museum stoked her love of the art form and she is a member of the [Fermanagh Film Club](#).



Common Ground

You and I are already connected
so deeply related – bound by invisible kinship
beyond this window into which you peer.
Let's return to common ground
to walk with each other in silence
and remember together
our place in the family of things.

I have to thank you for this opportunity to share about the arts programme developing in [Common Ground](#), the new 25 acre center in Tattenabuddagh near Fivemiletown. I have taken my writing outdoors, sat with the trees and

grasses whilst planting Hazel, Rowan Birch and Willow. As a boy I used to listen to the Corncrake in these fields.

Robert Graves, in his poetic manifesto *The White Goddess*, wrote that modern poetry's function was to lay bare the results of humanity's break from the rest of nature:

Once a warning to man that he must keep in harmony with the family of living creatures among which he was born ... it is now a reminder that he has disregarded the warning, turned the house upside down by capricious experiments in science, philosophy and industry, and brought ruin upon himself and his family.

Common Ground has a mission – that the farm will be a place where people will come to deepen their awareness of their relationship with themselves and each other, with a clear primary focus on nature and the other than human beings that inhabit its spaces.

Thomas Berry, the writer and eco-philosopher proposes that we are entering the “Ecozoic Age” where we must reestablish our connection to nature and work toward sustainable lifestyles that reverse the destruction we are currently inflicting on the planet. We as human beings now have that responsibility to care for and help the ‘earth community’ developing and flourish again.

We hope to engage all kinds of people – those new to any kind of creative/artistic activity and those already established in a practice. We know there are many ways of relating to ourselves in nature through our creativity and hence we are offering a range of expressive arts – [writing](#), [land art](#), [environmental movement](#), [music](#) and [storytelling](#). We recognize that these relationships are dynamic – our sense of connection changes, yet we are always connected in nameable and unnamed ways to the nature all around us. This is a way of engaging in the biggest challenge of our time – the unfolding reality of environmental degradation and the catastrophic effects of climate change on Earth's life.

Our primary concern is that people have the experience of being part of nature as a living breathing whole, and that they embody the experience. The expression of it does not necessarily have to be in poetry, art or prose – if they walk away changed by the experience of being here, more connected and alive – then our job is done.

‘Whatever great, beautiful, or significant experiences have come our way must not be recalled again from without and recaptured, as it were; they must rather become part of the tissue of our inner life from the outset, creating a new and better self within us, continuing forever as active agents in our [becoming].’ (Goethe)

If you would like learn more or get involved then visit the [website](#) – or come to our [Annual Gathering](#) on 20th August.

Robbie Breadon has worked in complementary health for 25 years and is co-founder of [Ecotherapy Kernow](#)



[Living Legacies](#)

For two days, on the banks of the Erne surrounded by the historic buildings of the Watergate, Maguire Castle and Inniskillings Barracks, the Living Legacies team worked in intense creativity with two writers groups, the Fermanagh Writers and the Omagh Robins.

The *Living Legacies 2016 Writers' Summer School* was a new departure for the Engagement Centre. The Centre was established in January 2014 as one of five First World War Engagement Centres in the UK which work alongside community groups to explore the war period and its meaning for people today. It includes academics working at Glasgow, Newcastle, Queen's and Ulster Universities, amongst others, who have teamed with community groups, museum experts and people across the heritage and cultural sectors to produce new knowledge and understanding of the period.

The *Summer School* built upon previous initiatives events hosted by Living Legacies, including: Medals All Round Research Initiative (MARRI), which resulted in *Of Bicycles and Fallow Fields*, a WW1 drama written and performed by Omagh Robins; the event *Music and Memories* held at the Inniskillings Museum in June 2015, during which musician Tracey MacRory talked about the wartime inspiration for her music; and the visit of the Fermanagh Writers to Northern Ireland War Memorial in March 2016.

The writers made new and deeper connections with the Living Legacies team; learned from the experiences of Marion Maxwell, Bellanaleck History Group, and their Cleenish Island project funded by HLF *First World War Then and Now* scheme; and made new friends within the recently amalgamated of Fermanagh & Omagh District Council. The two days represented not only a significant time commitment from the participants, but also one that would challenge their preconceptions of the war period and why we should remember. By the end they had produced new work, learned new skills about their craft, and had greater understanding of the impact and legacy of the First World War period.

For the Living Legacies team the two days provided an invaluable insight into the multiple meanings that can be drawn from the war period and how each

person constructs that past in a way that has relevance for their contemporary lives. Collaborations were lively, the mood was one of generosity and mindfulness, and the work read on the final day was moving and deeply insightful.

Looking to the future, the new work will be read at the *Literature of Irish Exile* 17th Annual Autumn School: *The Great War in Memory, Writing and Drama* on Saturday October 15th at the Mellon Centre for Migration Studies, Ulster American Folk Park. The afternoon will be devoted to community creative response to the First World War in readings and performances of newly composed poetry, prose and drama from the Fermanagh Writers Group, the Omagh Robins WW1 Drama Group (MARRI project), and others.

The Living Legacies team of Elizabeth Crooke, Johanne Devlin Trew (both Ulster University) and Kurt Taroff (Queen's University Belfast) would like to thank all the participants who contributed so enthusiastically to the School. Our gratitude is also extended to Sarah McHugh, Curator and Manager Fermanagh County Museum, who made us very welcome on site and provided a tour of historic buildings.

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Inniskillings Museum to the School – Director Neil Armstrong spoke warmly to the group about his pleasure welcoming the Writers to Castle Barracks; he mounted the travelling exhibition *Inniskillings and World War One* in our venue and provided a First World War handling collection for the duration of the School. His colleague Natasha Martin provided the group with an impressive tour of the First World War sections of the permanent galleries in the Inniskillings Museum. We would also like to thank playwright and Director Brenda Winter Palmer who facilitated the workshops so skilfully, with a balance of creativity and thoughtfulness which forged an atmosphere conducive to high quality writing.

Elizabeth Crooke and Johanne Devlin Trew



[Forgotten Song](#)

Mullaghfad church, built in 1831 and without electricity, nestles in the heart of the forest on Sliabh Beagh. On the night of 1st July it provided the

perfect setting for *Sliabh Beagh Arts* to create an immersive arts space which would showcase the array of projects they had created over the last year.



There was an exhibition of sculpture, puppets, photography & film, and live music performances from *Sonic Lotus*, *Tully*, and *Cup o'Joe* in addition to emerging young musicians Louie Bannon and Casper McCabe. The church was lit by candles and fairy lights. Outside in the warm evening straw bales and Swedish lanterns transformed the space and provided the perfect backdrop for an evening of storytelling through song and quality community arts.

[Sliabh Beagh Arts](#) is made up of 13 community groups who reside within or near the mountain which straddles the border between the counties of Fermanagh, Tyrone and Monaghan, an area that has been disadvantaged due to isolation, social deprivation, and poor community relations.

Since 2001 they have played an active role in strengthening the arts infrastructure within the area, building partnerships and aiding regeneration through quality rural Arts provision. Through their annual programme they have animated, fostered and promoted contacts and collaboration across the community and across the border, using Visual Arts, Music, Sculpture, Environmental Arts, Photography, Literature, Digital Media, Ceramics, Performance and Exhibition to facilitate the growth of creativity within the area.

This year, the *Growth & Decay* programme is focused on a number of innovative rural initiatives including Gate Weaving, [Graffiti Bales](#), [Barn Murals](#) and Limerick Lanes – all of which use familiar features such as dirty barn walls, six-bar metal field gates, concrete lanes and silage bales to add quality art to the local landscape and the everyday lives of farming communities, encouraging not only local participation but also enquiries from passers-by.

All of the work produced relies heavily on the local artists who facilitate the projects: Lisa McCabe, Sinead Connolly, Annie-June Callaghan, Charlie Clifford, Max Carnson, Olivia Johnson Murphy, Patrick McCabe, Elaine Agnew and Kevin McHugh.

They work closely with local schools, bringing programmes of animation, puppetry, storytelling and song to the area. They are all highly talented individuals who are dedicated and passionate about making the arts accessible and available within a rural context, and about passing their skills and experience on to the participants.

The support received from local community groups and volunteers allows the organization to develop projects which have relevance and meaning to the communities involved. Welcomed by teachers, parents and pupils the workshops add creativity and enjoyment to the school curriculum in addition to introducing new skills and inspiration to the youth of the area.

Slieve Beagh Arts are supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and are recognised as a leading contributor to the quality and richness of rural arts within Northern Ireland. Now in their 13th year, they are continuously evolving. With a new Digital Media and Ceramics studio opened in Corranry last year, they are building solid foundations for future developments and sustainability.



Graffiti Bales

If you have traveled the main A4 road between Clogher and Fivemiletown recently you will probably have seen the stack of silage bales colourfully decorated by leading graffiti artist Kev Largey. They have been featured extensively in social media, on BBC and UTV, and in the local and national press.

They are part of [Sliabh Beagh Arts Growth and Decay](#) program designed to bring the Arts into the everyday lives of rural communities, and more painted bales will appear throughout the district in the months to come.

Why silage bales?

The big round bale is a relatively recent addition to the rural landscape. When they first appeared they seemed alien, like giant overstuffed bin bags left out for collection, but they are so common now that they do not often earn a second glance. It takes some imagination to see them as something that would enhance the community and the environment.

Yet they have their own peculiar character. In size and shape they more resemble the traditional hayricks than the small rectangular bales which became common in the 1970s and 1980s. And like hayricks, they may be evolving their own folk traditions.

Almost from the beginning they were adorned with strange and cryptic markings in white paint. It was rumoured at the time that this was done so that the crows would not mistake their blackness for pools of water and try to bathe in them. Yet crows are intelligent birds; surely it was more a human instinct to mark what is your own and to make it distinct from that of your neighbours.

Silage bales have also been used to communicate protest, mostly recently in the anti-fracking campaign. There is something about a row of bales that suggests painting a letter or a word on each to spell out your message. It is the same instinct that led an earlier generation to plant daffodil bulbs so that when they flowered they would read

G O D I S L O V E

Graffiti bales appear throughout the world: night-time visitors draw smiley faces on bales of sugar cane mulch in [Australia](#), bales encourage riders in the Tour de France, or form part of a Swedish campaign for [fair milk prices](#). Sometimes the message is more universal and organised, as with the pink '[Barbie bales](#)' that appeared last year in support of breast cancer awareness.

Graffiti bales may have many messages but – as with the corn dollies and other traditions associated with the old hay ricks – they are only temporary. Even Kev Largey's work will be gone in a few months as the bales fulfill their destiny – feeding cattle over the winter.

What remains is the memory. Are we seeing the evolution of a new tradition?

Jenny Brien Editor



[The Art of Observation](#)

Awareness through observation is an aspect of *Conscious Writing*, a new holistic approach grounded in cutting-edge scientific research. It draws on age-old wisdom and unifies the fields of mindfulness psychology and neuroscience.

There is a close connection between spirituality and creativity. Becoming and remaining conscious is a primary focus of all the major spiritual traditions. In spite of their differences these traditions point in the same direction and their seven core principles of Presence, Alignment, Authenticity, Balance, Simplicity, Intuition and Connection also support writers to open and deepen their conscious awareness.

These principles can be applied to any and all types of writing. Creativity is so much more than just something we do. It is a state of being that adds colour, depth and richness to everyday life. "*All things are ready if our mind be so*" wrote Shakespeare in Henry V. With conscious writing we ready the mind with an initial inner focus that enables us to write from the level of our true self and the mystery beyond – to bypass the fears and anxieties of everyday self. It is the recognition that what we write is the 10% visible tip of a vast iceberg only made possible by the 90% that is unseen. Conscious

writing explores these “invisibilities” in search of our true authentic voices and clarity about our core message.

The five core practices of Conscious Writing are:

Cultivating Awareness

Spending time in Nature

Conscious movement

Nurturing Creativity

Journal Writing

“The Art of Observation” is the first in a series of “Writers in the Woods” workshops which will be held in the grounds of Longford Demesne in Beltra, Co. Sligo. Taking place on August 13th. the first workshop will be facilitated by writer and Clinical Psychologist Olive Travers.

The aim of the workshop is to enable writers to bring their authentic selves to the desk and allow them to write from the deepest place within so as to realise full creative potential. Writers will be introduced to the seven core principles that are the gateways to the “conscious” in conscious writing.

This experiential workshop will explore each of these core practices with an emphasis on sharpening the pencils of our five senses so that we can appreciate the richness of life around and within us. The venue is a winner of the RDS Forest Service Bio-Diverse Forestry/woodlands award. Participants will have access to the natural world of over nine hectares of a magical privately owned ancient woodland. There are also paths through wild meadows surrounding a ring fort and *fulacht fiadh*.

All profits from *The Art of Observation* will be donated to [Samuha](#), an Indian centre for children with disability.

To Book or for further information please contact Eoghan Timoney at wood.series@gmail.com or alternatively telephone 00353867358044.

Olive Travers lives near Ballyshannon and writes for RTE’s *Sunday Miscellany*

Some books on Conscious Writing:

[Conscious Writing](#) by Julia McCutcheon

[The Soul of Place](#) by Linda Lappin

[Making up the Mind](#) by Chris Firth



Three Poems of Childhood

Colin Dardis recalls his early years in Omagh

Child's Tree

My tree remembers
the small child's grandeur hopes
on the day of planting:
three seeds in far left corner
of Omagh back garden, a testament
to unburdened imagination.

The last leaf that fell this winter
is unseen, the child grown, family
moved on. Only the wind
as witness, pushing back fruits
into the ground, silencing branches
with impatient nip of hoarfrost.

My fallen bough becomes
the unknown soldier, lost symbol
of once glorious dreams, never
having seen her summer treasures
picked into apple pies
and cider glasses.

No longer a tree, it has become
a cornerstone of memory
supplanted to other stations,
sustained by a home fire
still faintly trembling
inside my child's forgiven wishes.

On Brook Road

Walking pass the Concrete Trees
in the grounds of St Chomcille's,
your father, and you, all of eight.

The day, tumbling over from
late evening gloss, you hand-in-hand,

too old now really, secure at his side.

You venture a question, in awe
by the depth of paternal knowledge.
That immortal consultancy.

It is a small moment of childhood,
tender for its inconsequence,
one more visit to the great oracle.

Twin Room

I remember nothing before the bunks,
their hulk of wood and bedspring a castle
to be conquered by tiny limbs, helping
each other to the top. The higher up
you are, the more you dream. This is fact.
My sister's voice behind the mattress,
I was the monster under her bed:

*Lauren, I don't want to go to school tomorrow.
Lauren, are you asleep? I can't sleep.
Lauren, how might a car sound if it could fart?
Lauren, what would happen to us if our parents died?*
All this amid the logic of playground jokes,
or how the giant came crashing down
from the beanstalk, showing too much blood.

After the loft conversion, our bungalow,
already stationed at the top of a hill,
felt taller than before, defeating each house
that slept alongside us in Thornville Park.
She moved across the hall; my brothers, upstairs;
no arguments over who should stay or go.
As our first cells split, we had to be separated.

[Colin Dardis](#) is one of Eyewear Publishing's *Best New British and Irish Poets 2016*, and an ACES '15-16 recipient from Arts Council of Northern Ireland. He is also the founder of [Poetry NI](#).



An Unbidden Visitor

The ideas for many of the stories I write come from snippets I hear or read about past events in County Fermanagh. I first heard the tale of the Cooneen or Coonian Ghost not long after my husband and I moved to near Brookeborough, more than a decade ago. Local lore says that a poltergeist drove a widow, Bridget Murphy, and her six children from their home and across the sea to America. It happened at the beginning of the last century, a couple miles from where I live. One Sunday my husband and we went to see the cottage at Mullaghfad. At the time, it was in the middle of a forestry plantation and could barely be glimpsed from the road, but recently the forest was felled this year, leaving it starkly visible.

We jumped over a small ditch or sheugh beside the road and picked our way through the trees until we came to a greying, run-down, rather forbidding building in a small clearing. Although we saw nothing otherworldly that day, the house had an eerie atmosphere and I wouldn't have volunteered to remain there after dark.

After that visit, the story intrigued me even more. It's not difficult to find articles online, but they can be confusing. Details conflict and the tale seems to have grown as it was re-told over the years. I went back to earlier sources. I read contemporary local newspaper articles (published in 1913) and Shane Leslie's Ghost Book (first published in 1955) to get the story more or less as it was originally told.

As I delved into accounts of the events at the farmhouse, I could see the scenes and the Murphy family in my mind. I couldn't help wondering about the family and what must it have been like to live in their house, and how it felt to have their friends and neighbours withdraw from them in fear.

This imagining was the starting point for my fictional short story, *An Unbidden Visitor*. Although I have used some artistic licence in my telling of the story, I have stayed as true to the real account as I could. I wouldn't want to displease the Coonian ghost.

An Unbidden Visitor was officially launched at the Fermanagh Authors' Association/Fermanagh Writers stall during the Fermanagh County Show this month. It is available directly from the [author](#) at a special launch price (£2.50 + postage) or in print or Kindle versions on [Amazon](#).

Diane Ascroft

How to Publish an Ebook

Publishing your work as a ebook can be a cheap, simple and low-risk way of getting your work 'out there', or it can be a complement to more traditional forms. Several well-known authors – such as Amanda Hocking and Hugh Howey, as well as Irish writers Hazel Gaynor and Carmel Harrington – published their first novels as ebooks before they signed a contract with a traditional publishing house.

Good ebook sales do at least demonstrate that you can produce marketable content, and any publisher will be interested in that. But it doesn't always work that way: ebooks only sell well if their content is well-suited to the form. They are great for works that you don't want to carry round with you as print – for whatever reason: fat technical manuals, self-improvement books, cookbooks, *Fifty Shades of Grey* – as well as for good old-fashioned storytelling. They are not so good for graphic novels and other works that rely heavily on illustrations. Every new ereader, it seems, comes with a free copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to show off its capabilities, but would you really prefer that to a book you can handle?

Print books are more expensive, so a publisher may well think that a successful ebook has taken most of the potential sales from a print version. A traditional publisher will often only release an ebook version of their bestsellers several weeks (or even months) later. Many people who would never buy a print copy (or who have already bought one) would prefer the convenience of an ebook version, but going from ebook to print is a harder sell.

In short: if your masterpiece has unexpected success as a ebook it will not necessarily lead to a publisher snapping it up but it may help you to get a print contract for your next work, so why not give it a go?

If all you want is a few print copies for family and friends then there are many companies that provide a print-on-demand service. Naturally this is more expensive per copy, so if you are confident of being able to sell a sizable print run it may be better to deal with a local printer who has experience of your sort of book.

It isn't difficult to produce an ebook; all you need is a good clean electronic copy. A Word document is fine, though [Scrivener](#) is highly recommended for composing longer works. Companies that sell ebooks, such as [Amazon](#) and [Smashwords](#), provide instructions on their website about how to prepare your manuscript. It isn't difficult but it can be time consuming and attention to detail is vital. Keep it simple: remember your words will be read on all sorts of devices, in all sorts of fonts and sizes – so it is foolish to try to dictate how it must appear – but do make sure it is properly proof-read and edited before you set it before the public. It is important to make sure your document doesn't contain any formatting other than what the website asks for. The best way to ensure that, if you have a Word document, is to start from a plain text copy and build from there. If

you understand how stylesheets work then you should have no trouble, otherwise you may prefer hire someone to format the manuscript for you. [Mark's List](#) is a good place to start looking.

Now all you need is a cover image. If you are confident of your ability you may design it yourself. Several sellers have (limited) tools on their websites, but you should at least consider hiring a designer. You know the old proverb "Don't judge a book by its cover"? We all do, of course, and rightly so. If it's obvious that no one has given much thought to the cover, why would we expect the contents to be any better?

Your ebook is ready for launch and all you need worry about is publicity and marketing. This is where a traditional publisher earns their keep, but that's a story for another day.

Diane Ascroft lives near Fivemiletown and writes Historical Fiction. Her latest story is [An Unbidden Visitor](#)