



SHAGGY DOG NEWSLETTER

Fourth Edition MARCH 2007

SHAGGY DOG BRINGS STORYTELLING TO THE COMMUNITY

Paul Degnan club Chair writes:



In recent months the club has broadened its scope of volunteer work to coordinate various storytelling projects in the Calderdale area. Grant funding received from national and local organisations has enabled the club to invite reputable national and international professional storytellers to come to Calderdale and work with a wide range of community groups. These "tellers" have shared their knowledge and skills on the use of storytelling in Education, Youth Offending and within Youth and Community Groups including vulnerable adult groups. The names of Brett Dillingham, Peter Chand, Jasna Held and Mary Kippenburger, spring to mind.

In this issue two of our committee members reflect on how this input has impacted on their own work in the community, in the workplace and in the voluntary sector. This richness of influence has given the club confidence to apply for further grant funding for the year ahead. Recently we have been successful in receiving

funding for a **Storyteller in Residence Pilot Project** in Calderdale and there is news in this issue on how this project is progressing. We will continue to build on this work in the year ahead to promote and enable storytelling in the wider community not only as an effective artform but as a vehicle that can transcend generational and cultural barriers.

Keep on telling those stories!

THE LAST NIGHT OF A CLUB SECRETARY

It was a chilly wet November night that we gathered at The White Lion Inn in Hebden Bridge to hear **'The Twisting Field'**, an Irish mythical tale performed by a storytelling quartet of Simon Heywood, Amy Douglas, Nick Hennessey and Shonaleigh. Feeling bereft of our cosy **'Tales from the Wharf'** upstairs function room (that we had double booked!) we nevertheless made the most of this opportunity to thank our outgoing **Secretary Robert Johnston** for all his hard work and leadership qualities over the past 3 years. Some folk wondered how we were going to manage without him! At the end of the telling Robert was presented with a rather large bouquet of flowers (for his beloved Irene), a bottle of whisky, a beautifully worded card (by Christine) and a gift voucher of £10 (Shaggy Dog pounds) to be spent at the famous second hand bookshop in the Piece Hall in Halifax!



(the picture proves it really does exist!)

Robert needless to say, said he would spend his voucher "wisely" and with a big grin on his face told us a story from the East centred in Scotland. That's our Robert!



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The **3rd AGM** on the 23rd October 2006 was tinged with sadness when Robert Johnston gave notice that he was resigning as Club Secretary after three successful years at the helm. Robert however was quick to reassure the meeting that he would continue to be our "Master of Ceremonies" on club nights at The Stubbing Wharf! Robert's last report as secretary reflected on an active club year and included details of "grant funded storytelling projects in the community", the "continuation of lively monthly club nights with high quality storytellers" and "a high standard of stories from the floor nights". Richard Hemingway was elected as Club Secretary, Rod Dimpleby as Treasurer and Paul Degnan as Chair.

Footnote: We are pleased to announce that The Stubbing Wharf Pub has a new landlord and landlady who have redecorated and turned the pub round and we have booked our club night's a year in advance!!

STORYTELLING in the COMMUNITY



TELLING STORIES TO AN OLDER AUDIENCE

Rod Dimbley writes:

After taking early retirement a few years ago, I began doing voluntary work, one day a week for Age Concern.



Basically, I was employed as a driver, collecting old people from their homes, taking them to a day care centre for dementia sufferers and spending the day with them.

About four years ago, Age Concern offered volunteers a beginners' course in storytelling. This was run by our own Alan and Christine. The idea was that storytelling would be an aide to reminiscence work. With the re-organisation of mental health care in Calderdale a few years ago, the numbers able to attend the centre fell considerably. Today there will be no more than a dozen in the group I still go to every Monday. Half of these will be volunteers or Age Concern staff, the other half, people in the early stages of dementia.

Why tell stories to people who have a poor short-term memory, don't know what day it is or can't even remember the name of their children? I wouldn't want to claim too much for my storytelling. It has been said that it can help to slow the advance of the disease by

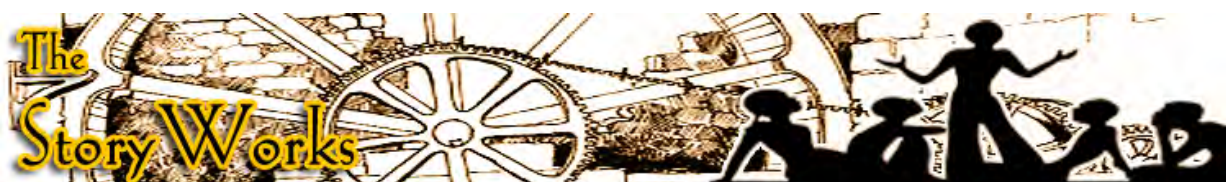
stimulating memory and encouraging communication, which is often badly impaired.

The 'clients' will certainly not remember the stories. Some may fall asleep and Alzheimer's sufferers can be quite disruptive by talking, getting up and wandering about or wanting to leave. However, all can enjoy the telling and the comforting feeling that being told a story gives. They can join in the laughter and, hopefully, the whole experience promotes a feeling of well-being. If this is the case, then something has been achieved, as they are generally uncertain, anxious and fretful about what is happening to them.

What sort the stories do I tell them? Any really, though I avoid long stories, stories with unhappy endings or stories with violence, as this would have just the opposite effect to what one hopes to achieve. Short, punchy stories with humour and stories which remind them of their past always go down well.

Telling stories to older people generally can be rewarding but not always easy. Deafness can be a problem. On some occasions, I have used a lapel mike with a small amplifier. At a different centre one day, one old lady was complaining she could not hear. So I placed the amplifier directly in front of her. She still could not hear. I turned up the volume to no avail. Finally, one of the staff told me that she was just awkward: she was too stubborn to put in her hearing aid! On another occasion in a nursing home, there was one typical old Yorkshire lass who just was not with me. I could tell by the look on her face and her body language that she was just not into storytelling. As I started my second story, she exclaimed out loud: "Oh, he's not off again is he?!" I politely asked if she had had enough and she was promptly wheeled out. The best solution for all, I feel! As any storyteller with any experience will tell you, never hold eye contact with someone who is not with you. You do not want the negative feedback.

On the whole, the older audience can enjoy stories just as much as any other, though reactions can be slow or muted: expect a chuckle, where at the Stubbing Wharf you'd get a belly laugh!



STORYTELLING in the COMMUNITY

STORYTELLING WITH A YOUNGER AUDIENCE

Richard Hemingway writes:

I have long believed that a story is more than mere entertainment. The stories we hear help to shape our lives and determine who we are. I came to realise that through my involvement with the Shaggy Dog Storytellers Club.

As a Police Officer in Calderdale Youth Offending Team (YOT) I work with disaffected children and young people whose lives have no structure and are struggling to find their identities. Storytelling has become an integral part of the work we do and I am in the fortunate position of being able to take part in and evaluate some of these projects. Some were organised by Shaggy Dog, some by the YOT.

There is value in one off storytelling sessions, especially those performed by skilled tellers who can win over sometimes reluctant and bewildered audiences. It is my view however that maximum benefit is obtained only through sustained exposure to the art.

This can be illustrated by the experience of one group of teenagers from the Acorn Centre in Todmorden. Over a period of months, storytellers such as **Jasna Held** from Croatia, **Brett Dillingham** from Alaska and **Peter Chand** from Wolverhampton, told stories to the group.

I must admit I had my doubts; these were kids who everybody said were bored, uninterested, discipline problems. Unteachable in mainstream school. Yet there was never any trouble and interest and involvement grew with each session. The group is now clamouring for more stories and tellers. They are writing and performing their own stories.

I'll never forget the time when two boys were creating their own stories. A boy with a reputation as a foul mouth was outraged when the other used a mild swear word in a story. In the past this would have led to verbal aggression or even physical fighting but something had changed within the boys. The situation was resolved by the two debating censorship and the power of language. The swear word remained in the tale.

That is the power of story.

STORYTELLER IN RESIDENCE PILOT PROJECT

We are pleased to announce that we have been awarded £4970 from Awards for All (Lottery Grant for Local People) to conduct a pilot project to explore the interest and need for a community storyteller in residence in Calderdale. Two professional storytellers **Shonaleigh** and **Peter Chand** will visit community centres and ethnic minority groups around Calderdale February through to May to perform and discuss the potential for a storyteller in residence. The project will be evaluated and culminate in two separate performances at The **Stubbing Wharf Public House** in Hebden Bridge. Peter Chand will perform on Friday 23rd February and Shonaleigh on Friday 25th May 2007. Community Centre members will be given free tickets to attend these performances.

Update: Peter Chand Indian Storyteller made visits to community centres in Halifax, Brighouse and Todmorden during the period 29th January to 1st February 2007. Peter led "taster" storytelling sessions at venues including the Acorn Centre in Todmorden, Raven Street Youth Club in Halifax and Aire Street Youth Club in Brighouse.

Quotes from Raven Street Youth Club:

"Just this way he was telling us the stories, he made them really interesting and I really enjoyed listening to them." *Mohammed*

"Most felt it was a good experience, the story was engaging and we had a good laugh." *Naj*

"I would love to do some storytelling myself because its quite interesting and also you get to share your own family stories with the people around the place." *Mohammed*.

Peter Chand will be returning to Calderdale in mid March for two days and again in late April for three days.

Shonaleigh will be visting in May.

If your community group is interested in joining in with this project please contact via the website address (postmaster@shaggydogstorytellers.com).



Cock and Bull Stories - Men Talking Masculinity

Members of the Shaggy Dog Storytelling Club were among the performers at the premiere performance of this men's alternative to the Vagina Monologues in December 2006 at the Hebden Bridge Trades Club (3rd December) and at the Hebden Bridge Little Theatre (6th December).

The performance, real life stories told by local men on the theme of "What makes a man", was the culmination of a 6 months Arts Council England funded Project coordinated by Rachel Loise. Over 50 narrative pieces that included poems, monologues and anecdotes were sent in anonymously by local men covering a number of themes including first love, intimacy and war. A "men only" editing panel devised a programme of performance material that lasted one and half hours.

The two "premiere" performances were well attended with the audience treated to men's perspectives on a range of topics including adolescence, fatherhood, loneliness in later life and more controversial topics such as paying for sex and paedophilia. Watch this space for Cock and Bull stories 2!!

Club performers included **Rod Dimpleby, Peter Findlay, Paul Degnan and Tom Croft**

Beyond the Border North International Storytelling Festival West Yorkshire Playhouse 11th - 14th April 2007

Following the feasibility study conducted by the **Shaggy Dog Storytellers Club** in 2006 we are pleased to announce that this festival starts on the 11th April. Superb storytellers from the four quarters of the world are descending on Leeds' West Yorkshire Playhouse bringing with them hilarious and magical folktales, fairytales and myths.

This rich extravaganza includes two of the oldest stories in the world, *Gilgamesh*, the ancient epic of Iraq, and the *Mahabharata*, as still told in villages of Central India today. We present a rare opportunity to hear the tales and legends of the Cherokee and Sioux First Nations: we'll dip into Sheharazade's Thousand and One Tales; hear stories of the Russian Steppes, Yarns of the Yorkshire Moors, and accounts of Ananse's Caribbean mischief-making.

Performers include Ben Haggerty, Gayle Ross, Jan Blake, Robert Greengrass, Eddie Lennihan, TUUP, Chirine El Ansary, Punaram Nishad with Ritu Verna and Jory Baesecke with Hedwig Reist and many more.

Our very own Christine McMahon will be one of the artists in "Northern Voices" on Thursday 12th April at 7:45pm - 10:00pm in the Courtyard Theatre.

Christine is also performing "Leeds Legends", the story of Leeds on Saturday 14th April at 1pm.

Adults and families with older children are invited to join us for extravagant stage performances, delightful encounters at the tea-table and much, much more. There will be a story and a performance to satisfy every generation and mood.

Outreach - many performers are also performing family shows at other venues in and around Leeds.

For more information visit www.beyondthebordernorth.org.uk

To book visit www.wyp.org.uk or telephone 0776 085 467

Storytelling Cafe Tours - Traditional Arts Teams

The club is included in this national tour this year. Organised by Storytelling Cafe Tours based in the Midlands, there will be three performances on club nights at **Tales from the Wharf**. These are:

30th March 2007 Michael Dacre and Steve Yates "The Haunted Inn and other excerpts from the Saragossa Manuscripts."

29th June 2007 Jamie Crawford "As a Sword from a Lake" - an Arthurian Tale.

30th November 2007 Ishmael Hope and **Lily Hudson** Stories from their native Alaskan culture.

Society for Storytelling Annual Gathering 2007

"Out of the Hidden Country"

Friday 30th March to Sunday 1st April 2007

This years **Gathering** is at Pocklington School near York and features keynote speeches by **Benedict Allen** and **Sally Pomme Clayton** as well as workshops with some of the UK's best storytellers.

Shaggy Dog Storytellers will be performing on the opening Friday night ceremony at Pocklington Arts Centre 8pm - 9-30pm.

For more details contact **Ingrid Barton** by email at: gathering2007@yahoo.co.uk or the SFS website www.sfs.org.uk.

Shaggy Dog Online

Annual newsletter not enough for you? Don't forget that details of the clubs activities are always available on the internet at www.shaggydogstorytellers.com

You may wish to consider joining the club. The advantages of membership include: -

£1 off club night entrance
free regular newsletter
reduced fees for workshops and other club projects
this year's membership entitles entry for a friend for 1 event free!

All this for an annual subscription of just £5!

THANK YOU for all your support in the past and we hope to continue to see you in the future.

www.shaggydogstorytellers.com