

# FLOOD AND DROUGHT POETRY

Experiences of Weather Extremes in  
Staffordshire

Various Authors

Edited by

Mel Wardle Woodend, Dr Alice Harvey-Fishenden

and Professor Neil Macdonald

## **FLOOD AND DROUGHT POETRY – EXPERIENCES OF WEATHER EXTREMES IN STAFFORDSHIRE**

Copyright © 2022

All copyrights to written pieces within this volume are held by the individual authors contributing their work.

Flood and Drought Poetry - Experiences of Weather Extremes in Staffordshire © 2022 by Dream Well Writing Ltd is licensed under Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/?ref=chooser-v1>

This license requires that reusers give credit to the creator. It allows reusers to copy and distribute the material in any medium or format in unadapted form only, even for commercial purposes.

First Printing: 2022

ISBN: 978-1-7397105-7-6 (DREAM WELL WRITING LTD)

DREAM WELL WRITING LTD

STAFFORDSHIRE

UNITED KINGDOM

[www.dreamwellwriting.simplesite.com](http://www.dreamwellwriting.simplesite.com)



A Dyslexia Friendly Publication



Staffordshire  
History Centre



STAFFORDSHIRE  
STOKE-ON-TRENT  
• Archive Service •



Flooding at the Green, Stafford, February 1946 (Image courtesy of Staffordshire Record Office and Peter Rogers)



# CONTENTS

Foreword	Page 10
Note from the Staffordshire Poet Laureate	Page 12
<b>'When the Rain Came' Flood Workshop 1</b>	Page 15
A Water Droplet – Neil Macdonald	Page 16
Blithfield in Drought and Flood – Daralyn Hammond	Page 17
Climate Change 'I Am Flood' – Dawn Pope	Page 18
Doxey Road Long Stay Carpark – Alice Harvey-Fishenden	Page 19
Flood on the Dove – Joanna Smart	Page 20
Freeflowing – Jan Hedger	Page 22
Lichfield (2018) – Daralyn Hammond	Page 23
Moorland Monsoon – Mark Johnson	Page 25
Oceans Rise – Patricia Pope	Page 27
The Drowning – Kathy Dowling	Page 28
The Trent Flooding – Christine Shaw	Page 31
<b>'When the Rain Came' Flood Workshop 2</b>	Page 32
Astonfields Balancing Lakes – Dawn Pope	Page 33
A Diary of Water – Dawn Pope	Page 34
A Sad Change in the Weather – Alice Harvey-Fishenden	Page 35
A Terraced House, Bolebridge Tamworth 1884 – Jan Hedger	Page 36
A Thief in the Night – Claire Hughes	Page 38
Rain – Patricia Wardle	Page 39

The Turn of Day – Claire Hughes	Page 40
<b>Other Flood Poetry Haiku and More</b>	Page 41
A Lovely Cup of Tea – Dawn Pope	Page 42
Catchment Area – Mark Johnson	Page 43
Cows Lie Down – Christine Shaw	Page 45
Historical Poem – Neil Macdonald	Page 46
The Reservoir – Daralyn Hammond	Page 47
Vicarage Flood – Beryl Metcalf	Page 48
Water Gushing Down – Patricia Wardle	Page 50
<b>'When There Wasn't Water' Drought Workshop 1</b>	Page 51
A Bow of Promise – Neil Macdonald	Page 52
A Hot Desert Wind – Christine Shaw	Page 53
Drought – Kathy Dowling	Page 54
Drought – Beryl Metcalf	Page 55
Drought Walsall (1976) – Beryl Metcalf	Page 56
Inexhaustible – Alice Harvey-Fishenden	Page 57
Lightning Reaction – Christine Shaw	Page 58
Water Tap Splutters – Mark Johnson	Page 59
<b>'When There Wasn't Water' Drought Workshop 2</b>	Page 60
Do People Think Heatwaves Are Un-British? – Alice Harvey-Fishenden	Page 61
Drought – Jan Hedger	Page 64

1995 Drought Diary – Jan Hedger	Page 65
1995 Drought Diary – Helen Johnson	Page 66
Redacted Poem based on Siegfried Sassoon’s poem ‘Haunted’ – Daralyn Hammond	Page 67
<b>Other Drought Poetry Various Forms</b>	Page 68
Drought – Alice Harvey-Fishenden	Page 69
Drought – Patricia Wardle	Page 70
Mother Earth – Yvonne Ugarte	Page 71
Reservoir – Claire Hughes	Page 72
The Desiccated Engineer – Mark Johnson	Page 73
Commissioned Poem: Deluge – Mel Wardle Woodend	Page 75
UK Climate Resilience Programme	Page 77
Dream Well Writing Ltd	Page 78



## FOREWORD

The poems in this volume developed from a series of workshops organised by Mel Wardle Woodend on behalf of the 'Building Climate Resilience through Community, Landscapes and Cultural Heritage' (CLandage) project, in partnership with the Staffordshire Record Office. The poems were inspired by stories of past floods and droughts, from archival and newspaper sources, which were presented during the workshops.

The original research plan for the CLandage project was to develop a touring exhibition that would travel around the local archives and libraries of Staffordshire, from which public understanding and memories of the weather would have been gathered. However, the COVID pandemic of 2020 prevented this from happening, with many archives, museums and libraries closed or operating under limited access because of restrictions. This presented a challenge for the project in how best to engage with the people and communities of Staffordshire, when many were unable to leave their homes. A series of online poetry workshops, small creative workshops and outdoor creative writing and walking events were organised. This poetry book is the culmination of the online poetry workshops held through the period of COVID pandemic restrictions.

We thank all those who attended and contributed to the workshops, and other events, and whose work is presented within these pages. We would like to express our gratitude to the Arts and Humanities Research Council whose funding through grant AH/V003569/1 enabled this research to take place, as part of the UK Climate Resilience programme.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mel Wardle Woodend for adapting, developing and running the poetry workshops. With special thanks to Helen Johnson and Matthew Blake from the Staffordshire Record Office; without their efforts CLandage and this poetry book would not have come about.

Professor Neil Macdonald and Dr Alice Harvey-Fishenden

School of Environmental Sciences,  
University of Liverpool,  
August 2022

## **NOTE FROM THE STAFFORDSHIRE POET LAUREATE**

As soon as I received the first email from Helen Johnson at the Staffordshire Record Office telling me of their work with the University of Liverpool and the CLandage project and met with Professor Neil Macdonald and Dr Alice Harvey-Fishenden from the university on Zoom to learn more about the project, I knew this was going to be an exciting and engaging venture to be involved with.

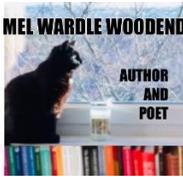
I thoroughly enjoyed the research aspect of the preparation for the workshops: two of which would be on the theme of flood and two on the theme of drought, during which I learnt a great deal about Staffordshire history in terms of extreme weather events. Some of the events I drew on were from my own lifetime, and involved incidents I clearly remember, and some from decades or centuries ago with resources and materials provided by Dr Alice Harvey-Fishenden to help inform my poetry workshops.

The workshops themselves were a joy to deliver – and it was excellent to work with participants on Zoom who might otherwise have been unable to attend face to face workshops.

I feel the poetry that resulted from the workshop exercises, research materials and prompts is of an excellent quality and it is an honour to publish a selection of these poems in *Flood and Drought Poetry – Experiences of Weather Extremes in Staffordshire* through my small press Dream Well Writing Ltd. This poetry collection will enable others to read and learn about Experiences of Weather Extremes in Staffordshire through the voices of those who interpreted the workshop materials, resources and exercises to inspire their own poetry, and / or drew on their own experiences to create personal pieces of Flood and Drought Poetry.

Thank you to Helen, Neil and Alice for inviting me to deliver the poetry workshops and publish this anthology and for all the support you have given me in both preparation for the workshops, your attendance and participation at them, and your poetry contributions. Thank you also to all the participants of the workshops for their engagement and enthusiasm and for the beautiful poetry created, that has made this book possible.

Mel Wardle Woodend  
Staffordshire Poet Laureate 2019-2022  
Director of Dream Well Writing Ltd



# FLOOD AND DROUGHT

## WEATHER EXTREMES IN STAFFORDSHIRE



Poetry Workshops with  
Staffordshire Poet Laureate  
Mel Wardle Woodend  
In Partnership with Staffordshire  
Archives and Heritage Service and  
Liverpool University - CLandage Project



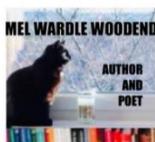
'When the Rain Came' - Flood Part 1 23/6/21 10.00 - 12.00  
Exploring flood through visual images, shared experiences, and  
poetry examples to inspire Choka poetry or a shape poem.

'When the Rain Came' - Flood Part 2 30/6/21 10.00 - 12.00  
Using visual images, written records, and personal experiences  
to inspire poetry on flooding in Staffordshire from a variety of  
perspectives.

'When There Wasn't Water' - Drought Part 1 7/7/21 10.00 - 12.00  
Exploring drought in Staffordshire through visual images, written  
records, own experiences, and poetry examples to create  
haiku poetry on the theme of drought.

'When There Wasn't Water' - Drought Part 2 14/7/21 10.00 - 12.00  
Exploring a variety of written records of drought in  
Staffordshire and creating redacted poetry from these.

Free to attend. Please contact [melwoodendwriting@gmail.com](mailto:melwoodendwriting@gmail.com) or  
07581 244393 to book a place on Zoom



# **'WHEN THE RAIN CAME'**

## **FLOOD WORKSHOP 1**

Exploring flood through visual images, shared experiences, and poetry examples to inspire Choka poetry or a shape poem.



## **A Water Droplet**

A small  
autumn raindrop falls,  
soaking the ground, the soils take their fill,  
quenching its thirst, excess waters begin to flow, plants  
bend and release their hold, the silt rich waters begin to move,  
water gurgles brown and coarse, building energy soon dispersed,  
upon reaching road or path, releasing hold its grainy grasp,  
casually dropped to be clasped again, when rains refreshed

*True representation of a raindrop*

**Neil Macdonald**

## **Blithfield in Drought and Flood**

Deep-fathomed blueness  
all consuming; runs its course;  
legalised drowning  
centuries swallowed up, whole.  
Now; scorched earth searing.  
In stillness, Yeatsall Hollow;  
Blithfield Lodge - asleep;  
its mill wheel bearing witness  
to lives once lived here.  
Then, quicksilver lightning flash;  
vanishing card trick,  
the wheel turns, and - poof! - is gone  
as dark skies rain down their wrath.

**Daralyn Hammond**

## **Climate Change 'I Am Flood'**

Relentless raining  
incessant drip, drop, drip, drop  
I slap the bare soil  
racing home to my river  
the hungry water swells  
I roar, I roll and erupt  
devouring the land  
I stretch out and slow my pace  
sated I stop now  
landscape consumed by water  
I reflect the sky  
at peace now I drain away  
my silty print stays  
the sun warms me, and I float  
upwards to the cloud  
I wait, I grow, now heavy  
cycle completed  
I am ready drip, drop, drip  
relentless raining – are you?

**Dawn Pope**

## **Doxey Road Long Stay Carpark**

Lapping flood water  
creeping across the carpark.  
I search for dry ground,  
avoid permanent puddles  
(a flood plain does not  
work well covered in tarmac)  
I find a high point,  
park on a ridge of pavement,  
where water won't reach, today.

**Alice Harvey-Fishenden**

## **Flood on the Dove**

Calm green meadows gone  
a dim prelude to the town  
lay still, sweet field, though  
silent bird song resonates.

No melodic muse.

Buzzing insects' absence make  
pillows for my woes.

Soundless skies speak by gone verse –  
senseless, abstract - mine.

Peeking through my half-closed eyes  
a coal pit lagoon  
beckons, caressing my wounds  
it's there I must go  
yet eye lid wings flap open  
lo, a golden moon  
shining defiantly and  
wind swept grasses join  
to show me the light, right way.

But no half bitten  
moon can brighten my doomful days  
halting these dark skies  
so vulgarly pretending  
it could care for us.  
You look down from your tower.  
Warm now distant love  
you gave then took away, yet  
mine survived the storm  
only to float away, covered  
by God's midnight cloak.

You watch from your fortress high  
as I share my soul  
with the land that made me man  
I doff my cap to  
flood, field, forest and you,  
who survived the storm – adieu.

**Joanna Smart**



## Lichfield (2018)

Wet pavements; cold feet;  
so, lovely weather for ducks  
but not for humans  
huddling; shiv'ring in doorways.

And it does not stop  
the rain; into Wetherspoons  
fingers round hot drinks.

The bar is very crowded.  
Babbling man, gin-soaked,  
drowning in glass of amber.

Wet as the weather  
maybe inwardly ponders  
'sober' soon; I am  
stone cold, but not hostile, though  
don't speak his language.

No-one, no man, an island.

Let him be 'no threat'

I tell the waiter, smiling.

The man, he drinks on.

He needs firm ground; safe harbour;

thirst slaked - by a different cup...

**Daralyn Hammond**

## Moorland Monsoon

The rain came early  
that year the monsoon wind tore  
from the South the West  
Doxey Pool's cellophaned lid  
stripped to tearing air  
the raked hills the high moors next  
water wall crashed hard  
against Axe Edge's charred flanks  
cascaded Chrome Hill's ridged ribs

supple bamboo groves  
of Goldsytch Moss warned me first  
the calm had stilled me  
just cicadas snapped the hush  
I drunk in the hush  
smelt a crackle in my veins  
electricity  
tremble gentle then urgent  
I looked up it had begun

long miles of bruised sky  
a hare nosed the swelling sky  
over Wales a war  
high above the plain the same

gulls white refugees  
ozone came in galleon holds  
the gulls on currents  
topaz clouds gunmetal too  
horizon danced liquid flame

I was alone now  
bamboo swaying in voodoo trance  
ten thousand shamans  
chanted ultramontane charms  
green whipped stalks dancing  
in the fields the sighs sighing  
moaning yearning for  
in the fields wired sheep churning  
drumming rainfall full coming

**Mark Johnson**

## **Oceans Rise**

I have seen my oceans rise through global warming.  
I have seen the resulting devastating flooding.  
I have seen my water ways contained and diverted  
leaving arid lands and famine, the end of all life.  
All done to feed the greedy wants of man.

My arteries are clogged with waste.  
My waters polluted.  
I have nowhere to go in man's concrete jungle.  
So I must rail and fight against man's destructive force.  
Death now to ensure life survives-to show the way.

Man rails and fights against the coming of the flood.  
Rails against its mighty power.  
They do not see the destructive power of greed and selfishness.  
Men, do not fight and rail against the coming of the flood.  
Rail and fight against the ignorance of man.

Heed my hard lessons. Learn before it is too late.

**Patricia Pope**

## The Drowning

---

A  
rib  
bon  
rib  
bed  
in  
f  
l  
o  
w  
i  
n  
g  
lines  
so neatly  
s  
e  
w  
n  
on to  
banks  
of bottle  
green

---

grass  
h p e  
o p r  
meadows  
flush with  
fine filaments of fauna  
threaded through.  
Where larks  
e  
s  
i  
r  
in  
melodius  
song  
from surface nests  
and a rich  
s  
e  
a  
m  
of life

lays  
buried  
beneath.

From afar  
swamped soil sobs,  
its tears  
torrential  
t  
u  
m  
b  
l  
e  
towards this peaceful scene.

Slow, the silent, seeping, creeping fingers  
of fraying ribbon rivulets onto sleeping fields  
and small life, seemingly safe in secretly tunnelled homes,  
is  
*quietly quenched.*

**Kathy Dowling**

## The Trent Flooding

When winter cloudbursts  
of freshly wept tears rained down  
rivers rose, water  
swirling and bulging their banks  
until they overflowed  
bursting, releasing torrents  
rushing across land  
tilled, toiled and laboured over  
all to no avail  
fish hid in hollows, tree roots,  
underneath eddies  
for self-protection from harm.  
Bracken breaks away  
tench, perch, carp, roach, pike, dace, bream  
young Sargasso Sea eels  
swimming against the onslaught.  
Freshwater sponges  
shudder, clinging on to rocks.  
Muddy flood waters  
exert ferocious power  
causing disorder  
boats from their moorings are torn  
cars are abandoned  
but the mighty Trent moves on  
carrying driftwood  
wellington boots, old bicycles  
travelling through shires  
until it joins the river Ouse  
and spills into the Humber

**Christine Shaw**

# **'WHEN THE RAIN CAME'**

## **FLOOD WORKSHOP 2**

Using visual images, written records, and personal experiences to inspire poetry on flooding in Staffordshire from a variety of perspectives.



## **Astonfields Balancing Lakes**

Once I was a flood meadow seasonally grazed by cattle.  
Then the saltworks came, they drained my groundwaters and  
dumped their briny wastes upon my soil  
neighbours planted trees to block their view of my blighted  
landscape  
hidden between railway lines, housing and industrial estates I  
languished  
winter came, I flooded. Summer came, I drained  
vegetation caressed my soil once more  
not ordinary seeds but specialised species that tolerate my salty  
soils  
plants usually associated with the seaside thrive here with me.  
The birds that brought these germs of hope now reside here  
within my brackish habitat  
heron, teal & reed warblers.  
I feature in bird guides now.  
My north lake is glistening open water, home to luminous  
dragonfly and prattling ducklings  
my south lake shyly hides her shimmering splendour being  
shrouded in saltmarsh flora.  
I have survived exploitation and pollution and now I serve  
Stafford as a flood defence.  
When rainwater rages, I smooth and buffer the torrent, releasing  
the manic surge only after it has rested and calmed.  
I am Astonfields balancing lakes.  
I am survival.

**Dawn Pope**

## **A Diary of Water**

At almost the beginning of time I was gifted to you when the meteors rained down upon this pitiful parched proto planet. Soon I shrouded this thin earthly crust, encasing that throbbing magma heart with my mighty oceans creating a truly blue planet.

I am water, the bearer of creation,

Life was sparked within me, simple single celled organisms. I provided both the medium for life and the reactant for photosynthesis that creator of oxygen.

This energy enabled organisms to grow and develop, creating wonderous and multifarious lifeforms, the descendants of which inhabit this planet today.

I am water, the bearer of life,

I stretch and layer forming fibrous fingers of frost which gripped this planet within my frozen fist. As I melted and shifted, I shaped the land beneath me.

I am water, the bearer of landscape.

Much time has now passed, and man has emerged, ancient civilisations have formed in my fertile crescents and now you pray to me that I should continue to nourish this land and replenish your potable reserves.

I am water, the bearer of hope.

Now it is the Anthropocene age and mankind has exerted its influence. You have drained my aquifers, dammed or diverted the flow of my mighty rivers and mutilated the soil so I cannot percolate homeward. When I break these puny confines, you fear me and call me flood.

I am water, the bearer of destruction.

**Dawn Pope**

## **A Sad Change in the Weather**

*From the diaries of Elizabeth Hervey (1748-1820)*

It blew hard last night, and I slept ill, was unwell.  
I heard the watchman at 4 o'clock, crying a fine morning  
and when I rose, not a cloud was to be seen.  
Yet if I had not walked early, I should not have got out at all  
for as I walked clouds by degrees spread over the sky.  
The wind cuts like a knife, a deplorable, doubtful day.  
The late floods have done much mischief,  
carrying away the gravel and a small rustic bridge  
melancholy consequences must be expected for the harvest.  
I am quite tired of such repeated rain,  
although all weather seems alike to me  
for scarcely one hour do I pass free from pain.

**Alice Harvey-Fishenden**

## **A Terraced House, Bolebridge Tamworth 1884**

Martha lifted the guttering candle  
as if in lifting it, she lifted herself  
from the sepia sewage water  
circling her heels, like a rabid dog  
in high state of fever.

Biting cold as sharp as a rat's bite,  
guttersnipes with black eyes,  
she feared rats above anything else;  
feared rats even more than the filth  
at her laced booted feet.

Martha pinched her nose with  
her free hand, mouth shut tight  
trying to curb the stench from  
flooding her aged lungs,  
the Tame on her tongue.

Shouts, cries from the street,  
a bell ringing 'unclean, unclean'.  
'Evacuate! Evacuate! All tenants to leave.  
Evacuate! All tenants to leave.  
Bring no possessions!'

Martha tied in her woollen shawl,  
as if tying it in would keep her safe,  
extinguished the candle, hitched  
up her linen skirt and tip-toed  
through the rising menace.

*Poem based on article accessed at  
<http://www.patrickcomerford.com/2016/06/guys-almshouse-tamworth-legacy-with.html>*

**Jan Hedger**

## **A Thief in the Night**

Rain sweeps in,  
blows out the lamplight -

a thief in the night takes a chance  
runs free

                  black bellied and cold  
it runs through the streets  
swells and spews  
through doors  
eats its fill of concrete and cobbles

and life  
falls into the pits  
of its belly

it sits  
bulging  
unmoved  
a swamp at the ankles  
of houses.

**Claire Hughes**

# Rain

Raging torrents of water, falling from the sky.

Aiming towards the ground, filling rivers and drains spilling over fields and towns.

Innocent people terrified moving belongings, mortified.

'Never again' they cry, feeling heartache at ruined treasures.

Next season they hope for better defences to be rid of their plight.

**Patricia Wardle**

## The Turn of Day

I stand at the bedroom window,  
watch the clouds  
darken, as if they are soaking  
up an ink spill;

watch the sun  
retreat          fear sodden;

watch the rain  
fall and scatter          slow at first  
then the sky splits and spits water  
out like bullets.

My land          the Earth  
buckles under the strain,  
bleeds brown mulch,  
the flood          an open wound.

I watch  
as my flock are carried off,  
one by one,  
to a distant dream.

I watch  
the harvest fall  
into the mouth of the gods

And I watch  
the tyrannical hand of nature  
reclaim what is hers.

I watch  
my life melt into the overgrown river  
and wonder how to swim.

**Claire Hughes**

## **OTHER FLOOD POETRY**

Haiku and More



## **A Lovely Cup of Tea**

*Factual Haiku water footprint of black tea*

One cup of tea needs

thirty litres of water.

Anyone want milk?

**Dawn Pope**

## Catchment Area

How neatly mapped  
the watershed.

How clean the lines  
that dole responsibility  
from one authority  
to the other.

And oh! How  
omniscient  
the force  
of gravity  
that rules all  
from high to low.

It *shall* go down:  
water *will* proceed  
according to the law.

But what if  
that law  
does not fit  
the lie  
of the land?

Or if by  
man's hand  
the lie

of the land  
is altered;  
old watercourses  
falter  
and new arise?  
Perhaps  
the defendant  
has an alibi.  
Perhaps he  
acted without  
ill intent –  
did not mean  
to commit an  
offence. But  
ignorance of  
the law  
is no defence;  
will make  
floodwaters  
no less intense;  
will prove  
as powerless  
as a sandbagged fence.

**Mark Johnson**

## **Cows Lie Down**

Cows lie down chewing,  
a sign that weather beckons.  
Rain sweeps over them.

**Christine Shaw**

## **Historical Poem**

Carriage rocks, horse whinnies in worry,  
waters surge, rising higher,  
ford's centre nears, whinnies now a crying,  
pushing forward, load unmoved,  
waters lower, whinnies now subsiding,  
breathing deep, dry land, relax.

**Neil Macdonald**

## **The Reservoir**

Under deep water  
unknown fathoms; the bells toll  
lost Sundays at church

**Daralyn Hammond**

## **Vicarage Flood**

In 1999

deep water inundated  
the Vicarage garden.

The Forebridge drain rose.  
It flooded our garden room  
to a foot or so.

The water was clean  
because we discovered we  
had a flood barrier.

Thankfully not mud  
and mess and raw brook sewage.  
Neither smell nor stinks.

The barrier kept  
the water out so that it  
seeped up through the ground.

When the waters left  
things returned back to normal  
after drying out.

Our neighbours had planned  
daughter's wedding reception  
in a big marquee.

The waters fell back  
and the event was unharmed.  
A joyful result.

*Based on personal experiences*

**Beryl Metcalf**

## **Water Gushing Down**

Water gushing down.

Firemen rushing to rescue.

All is calm at last.

### **Patricia Wardle**

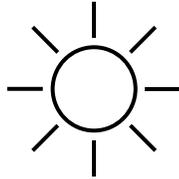
*Note: My Mum wrote this haiku for me a couple of weeks after the workshops when a pipe burst on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor of my building and torrents of water flooded down the internal airvents and outside of the building.*

*Although a different cause of flood than the extreme weather events discussed in the workshops, when the firemen attended I explained the irony of having not long delivered a set of poetry workshops about floods! – Mel Wardle Woodend*

# **'WHEN THERE WASN'T WATER'**

## **DROUGHT WORKSHOP 1**

Exploring drought in Staffordshire through visual images, written records, own experiences, and poetry examples to create haiku poetry on the theme of drought.



## **A Bow of Promise**

Heat unrelenting,  
a Bow of Promise glinting,  
fresh relief envied.

*A 'Bow of Promise' was an alternative name for a rainbow in the Victorian period, associated with the biblical context (Genesis 9:13) as a promise never to send a flood again.*

**Neil Macdonald**

## **A Hot Desert Wind**

A hot desert wind  
the Sirocco from Africa  
blows oppressively.

**Christine Shaw**

# **Drought**

Scorched riverbed lies  
like a withered, fissured tongue  
in death's gaping mouth

**Kathy Dowling**

## **Drought**

Dirty dry doldrums  
heat halving hotting harvest  
heralding hunger.

Clay cracked the brickwork  
when the sun shone seamlessly  
on the dry earth. (1976)

In the caravan  
stifling heat and closed windows  
to exclude biters.

Bewildering worries  
wrack wondering wanderers.  
Do we have a home?

Berkshire gear breakdown.  
Brother rescues family  
A34 help.

*Our house cracked right down both side walls in 1976 due to clay shrinkage. We took the children round Europe for 6 weeks in the summer of 1983 while it was underpinned.*

**Beryl Metcalf**

## **Drought Walsall (1976)**

Clay cracked the brickwork  
when the sun shone seamlessly  
on the dry earth.

**Beryl Metcalf**

# **Inexhaustible**

Water exhausted  
by selfish green grass addicts  
and a long dry spell

**Alice Harvey-Fishenden**

## **Lightning Reaction**

Lightning reaction  
striking Earth like Thor's hammer  
makes heavy weather

**Christine Shaw**

# Water Tap Splutters

water tap      splutters

a   s t a c c a t o   t y m p a n i

– oh! Dry summer cough...

**Mark Johnson**

# **'WHEN THERE WASN'T WATER'**

## **DROUGHT WORKSHOP 2**

Exploring a variety of written records of drought in Staffordshire and creating redacted poetry from these.



## Do People Think Heatwaves Are Un-British

\_\_\_\_\_ un-British?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ a small boy ran into the street and started to dance.

After weeks of hot, dry weather, it had begun to rain \_\_\_\_\_ plump droplets splashing on to the pavement \_\_\_\_\_.

People walked \_\_\_\_\_ with shiny faces upturned.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ the nation rejoiced.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Day after day after day of the same blue skies is foreign to us. \_\_\_\_\_

[redacted] The default is grey, a neutral backdrop  
[redacted]

We are famous for our greyness. [redacted]  
[redacted]

[redacted]

Are we the product of our weather?

[redacted] the British climate  
(rain and fog) [redacted] the British temperament (simple and barbaric).  
[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] Does precipitation dampen enthusiasm?  
[redacted]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] no

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

There is no correlation

[REDACTED] And yet.

[REDACTED] when a watery  
sun sparkled on puddles [REDACTED] colours brighter  
and senses [REDACTED] keener, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Don't tell me that is not real.

It is not the heat [REDACTED] that is un-British. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] it is the invariability. When  
we pull back the curtains at the start of a new day, we need to be  
kept guessing [REDACTED]

Redacted from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45020144>

**Alice Harvey-Fishenden**

## Drought

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] bones [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] white and dry [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] as breathless [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] dust. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] oil and butter  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] singed.

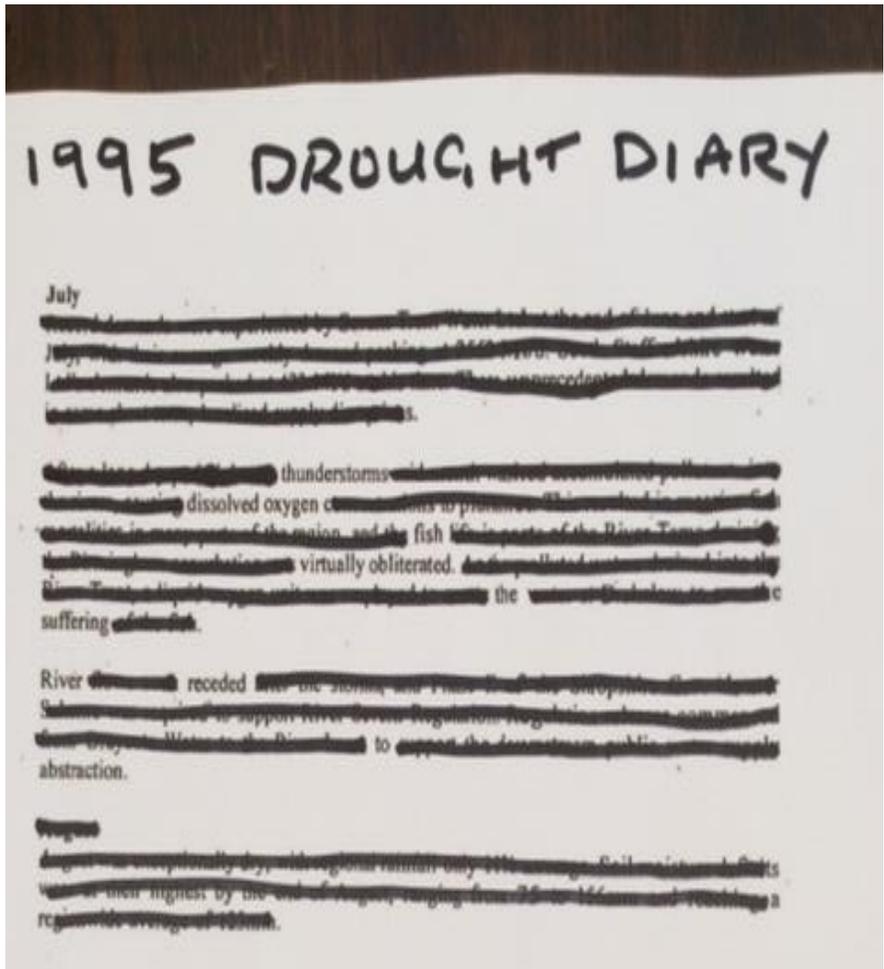
Redacted from: 'Drought' by Annette Volfing - First published in 2013 A Commended Poem of the 2013 Stanza Poetry Competition on the theme of 'Drought', judged by Neil Rollinson.

Retrieved from:

<https://poems.poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/drought/>

**Jan Hedger**

# 1995 Drought Diary



Redacted from: Spence, R. (1996) Environment Agency 1995 Drought Report – Severn and Trent Catchments

Retrieved from:

[www.environmentdata.org/archive/ealit:250/OBJ/19001086.pdf](http://www.environmentdata.org/archive/ealit:250/OBJ/19001086.pdf)

**Jan Hedger**

# 1995 Drought Diary

## 2.2 1995 Drought Diary

Previous Winter

[redacted] refill  
and [redacted]  
[redacted] recharge.  
the

Spring

[redacted] river flows  
With increasing abstractions [redacted]  
[redacted] the [redacted]  
[redacted] Reservoir  
restricted [redacted] irrigation  
the [redacted]  
Public [redacted] demands [redacted]  
[redacted] garden sprinklers.

Redacted from: Spence, R. (1996) Environment Agency 1995 Drought Report – Severn and Trent Catchments

Retrieved from:

[www.environmentdata.org/archive/ealit:250/OBJ/19001086.pdf](http://www.environmentdata.org/archive/ealit:250/OBJ/19001086.pdf)

**Helen Johnson**

## **Redacted Poem based on Siegfried Sassoon's poem 'Haunted'**

... louring  
drought sucked  
baked  
brooding  
ugly sorrows  
shake off dread  
sweat of horror  
scent of tired men  
fading  
far-off  
churring  
night-jar's note  
confused  
wretched  
choking  
barbed  
clawed  
baffling  
looping  
terror  
zigzag  
squat  
bestial  
headlong  
roaring agony  
groping  
strangling

Redacted from: 'Haunted' by Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)

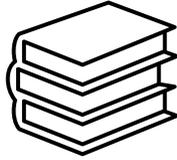
Retrieved from: <https://poets.org/poem/haunted-0>

*Sassoon's poem speaks to me of a shrivelled, crushed spirit - the only moisture to be had, perhaps, his own sweat - in a barren landscape - a nightmare; dead trees, charred earth in which he stumbles blindly, looking for life; for meaning. For sustenance. For redemption. Whatever form it takes.*

**Daralyn Hammond**

## **OTHER DROUGHT POETRY**

Various Forms



## **Drought**

The reservoir has been drained  
of purpose, of life, of water.

Revealing the past land surface  
where once people walked  
pooled with stagnant water  
where dormant grass resurges.

The water flows to far away  
where, safe in their homes  
sheltered from the weather,  
people pump out water  
to pool on their green lawns.

**Alice Harvey-Fishenden**

## **Drought**

Clouds missing.

Blue skies again

red hot sun burning like chilli peppers.

Crying children that cannot sleep, restless through the night.

Tempers lost with fractious children.

'Sun cream! Hats!' you shout out all the time.

Outside pavements burning hot bring blisters to bare feet.

Grass hard and prickly like a hedgehog's back to bare feet.

All animals hide away from heat.

Plants droop like aging people.

The ponds smell like dirty feet.

Roots of plants in ponds show like long thin toes stretching out.

Goldfish lie at the bottom, gasping for water, is this the end?

**Patricia Wardle**

## **Mother Earth**

I can see and hear Mother Earth clutching at her dry throat  
fish dry-drown in death throes, their mouths gape and gasp in our  
waterless rivers and streams.

Seas no longer ebb and flow.

Creatures paw the parched soil, frantically pulling up withered  
brown grass stalks in a futile attempt to retrieve moisture from  
them.

Insects patiently await the arrival of dawn, yearning for the life-  
sustaining droplet of dew on the dry, dead branches above them,  
but it does not come.

Their broken bodies creak like old rusty gates as they scuttle  
around in their desperate search for life-giving sustenance.

The blue skies are cloudless and there is a bleakness on the  
horizon as it foretells the stark improbability of any rainfall and the  
world fades to grey.

**Yvonne Ugarte**

## **Reservoir**

Bones

bare

breathless

gasp for water

last reserves

of rain

gifted

to man

but now

man attaches

hosepipes

to syphon

of the marrow

whilst Mother

lies parched

and burnt

**Claire Hughes**

## The Desiccated Engineer

He had not thought of this:

a drought.

Had not believed

that his canal

could run out

of water.

Where once

a smooth passage

lay; now clay,

baked dry

and cracked,

the boats

laid up

and backed

all the way

to Milton.

Transport

by means

of water

had been

his dream;

now, it seemed

he must

navigate  
his way  
to transport  
of water  
itself.

Wearily,  
he turned,  
reached up,  
shook off  
the dust  
and took  
his plans  
from off  
the shelf.

**Mark Johnson**

## Commissioned Poem: Deluge

An indigo sky threatens: overcast, foreboding.  
We batten down the hatches in readiness for weather forecasters'  
warnings.

Night falls, sky dances darkly,  
storm clouds gather – an eerie congregation in grey.

The first cloud drips a tentative few drops, others erupt - burst  
open  
as if waiting for the signal, and a deluge descends  
battering car windscreens, window panes, late night dog walkers  
caught in the rain.  
Rivulets run along road gutters racing to drain.

As Earth rotates, night turns to day,  
the dawn breaks into grey and rain continues to c

a  
s  
c  
a  
d  
e

like sharp arrows plunging into skin where wet faced commuters  
peer from cagoules  
and overnight rainfall closes schools.

Met Office announces a 'red alert' and emergency services dive  
into action  
rescuing a bus driver trapped in his bus in a metre deep water in  
a lane near Gayton,  
rescuing drivers from car roofs as if standing on half sunken tin  
cans,  
guiding terrified sheep tiptoeing on hooves to dry land.

The Trent and Mersey canal overflows

creating a swirling moat around a first school in Stone  
where children are carried carefully in strong arms  
over streaming rivers of water, away from harm.

Rivers burst banks and meadows of water taunt; tapping and  
lapping at doors  
of homes where residents have moved to upper floors,  
placing their faith in sandbags against doorways and gates,  
over basement grates.

They can only wait - and contemplate the cause...

Fields turned to housing estates - concrete houses and roads,  
not enough natural drainage remaining to absorb the rain's flow?  
Litter and man-made debris blocking drains?  
Climate change?

It's easy to blame 'the weather'  
and grumble ignorant remarks from under umbrellas  
but 'the weather' is a natural phenomenon:  
nature purely cleansing Mother Earth - responding to rising and  
falling pressures and weather patterns.

What about our patterns of behaviour, our damaging ways?  
We must take responsibility, make a change before it becomes too  
late.

Respect the Earth and nature's power.  
We are merely visitors - the Earth is not ours

to claim,  
to  
abuse,  
to ignore its beauty.

Overhead, a Bow of Promise appears.

*Based on the Staffordshire Floods of July 2012*

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-stoke-staffordshire-18737376>

**Mel Wardle Woodend**

# UK CLIMATE RESILIENCE PROGRAMME

Clandage: Building Climate Resilience Through Community, Landscapes and Cultural Heritage

## Background

'Historically, landscapes, communities and people have coped with, and adapted to, environmental change, and continue to do so. This happens both through barely perceptible incremental changes, and also through rapid adjustments to abrupt environmental changes, for instance through landscape loss and gain.

Understanding how communities have adapted to changing circumstances in the past sheds light on how future changes might be managed and communicated, as well as how the resilience of people and their places can be enhanced, at a range of spatial and temporal scales.

However, as past community adaptation is often not well recorded or inaccessible, it is not part of decision making on how to respond to current and future environmental change. This project intends to address this gap.'

For more information, please visit:

<https://www.ukclimateresilience.org/projects/clandage-building-climate-resilience-through-community-landscapes-and-cultural-heritage/>

## **DREAM WELL WRITING LTD**

Dream Well Writing Ltd are Staffordshire based publishers of dyslexia friendly books – with worldwide distribution and an environmentally conscious ethos – founded in 2017 by Mel Wardle Woodend Staffordshire Poet Laureate 2019 – 2022.

Find out more about Dream Well at

<http://dreamwellwriting.simplesite.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/dreamwellwriting/>

[dreamwellwriting@gmail.com](mailto:dreamwellwriting@gmail.com)

