# The History of Haiku in the United Kingdom

by Alan Peat

## Part One: 1854-1999

Prior to the formation of the British Haiku Society in 1990 the history of haiku in the United Kingdom is comprised of a series of false starts, initially driven by scholarly Japanologists until, in the latter half of the twentieth century, editors and poets replaced them as the key movers.

Japan officially opened up to trade with the West in 1854 and Japanese literature soon became more readily available, though mainly for the consumption of an academic audience. The earliest reference to Japanese poetry in a British newspaper came a mere six years later,

"It is said that every Japanese is fond of quoting poetry, and enlivening his conversation with verse. So far he seems to be a perfect Doctor Pangloss. But of the metre, or rhyme, or construction of Japanese poetry, he can scarcely be said to know anything. It appears pretty evident that their poets delight in point, antithesis, epigrammatic turns, and *concetti.*" \*1

The phrase 'epigrammatic turns' is of particular interest as it may be the earliest oblique reference to haiku in the United Kingdom. The British author, translator and Japanologist, Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935) infamously referred to haiku as 'poetical epigrams'.

Publication of, what was then termed, 'Oriental literature' soon followed. In 1867 the London-based publisher 'Smith, Elder and Co.' released *Japanese Odes*, with Translations; being Stanzas by a Century of Poets translated into English.\*<sup>2</sup> The poems included in this book were 'waka' (tanka) rather than haiku.

Two years later, in 1869, the Anglo-Irish diplomat and scholar of both Japanese and Korean languages, William George Aston (1841-1911), wrote *A Short Grammar of Japanese Language*. In 1877 the much-expanded second edition of this work\*<sup>3</sup> included the first-known haiku to be published in English. Charles Trumbull, writing in 2008, made a convincing argument that the three 'hokku' included in the chapter titled *Prosody* may have been composed by Aston himself as they are not among "...the canonical works of the Japanese masters..." \*<sup>3</sup> Trumbull further indicated that, if this were the case, "...they would be the first haiku composed and published by an Englishman." \*<sup>4</sup>

In 1877 Basil Hall Chamberlain wrote a paper on the subject of *Japanese Miniature Odes* for the *Cornhill Magazine* which included several translations of haiku. In July 1877 Chamberlain was quoted as saying,

"If a moral, a lesson, must perforce be drawn from the works of the classic poets of Japan, it might perhaps, be formulated in three simple words: 'Life is brief.' Life is brief. Let us make the best of it for we know not what comes after, nor if anything comes after...Love nature, love life and enjoy it, would seem to be the burden of the songs of the poets of Japan; but yet they never can forget how soon the life to which they so greatly hold will end, how soon the natural beauties they so dearly prize will – for each one, at least – pass hopelessly away."

Although Chamberlain grasped the essence of haiku, his translations are both florid in their language and untrue to the original form and structure – Chamberlain 'translated' the poems as rhyming couplets. In 2013 Jim Kacian suggested that Chamberlain was seeking "English equivalents".\*5 It seems probable that Chamberlain also felt that he was 'improving' on the originals. In 1936 Kazuo Koizumi, the son of Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), compiled a series of letters written by Chamberlain to his father. The letters included in the volume\*6 are ordered by date and range between January 1893 and May 1896. However, the two concluding letters, dated 1890 & 1891 are separated from the chronological sequence in a final section titled 'Letters of Exceptional Interest'.

Chamberlain's comments in the letter that concludes the collection are revealing,

"I threw myself into Japanese poetry, even to the length of trying to compose it. I read practically all, from the Man'yōshū downwards, and I now see that all of it together hardly contains so much imaginative power as half-a-dozen of Wordsworth's sonnets."

The letter is published without comment, though it is telling that Hearn's son chose to conclude the book with it.

A passage from an 1880 review\*7 of Hall's *The Classical Poetry of the Japanese* accurately describes Chamberlain as a man who has,

"...devoted much labour to the task of studying the poetical literature of the Japanese, and rendering characteristic specimens into English verse."

Lafcadio Hearn's own translations of haiku are well known. Chamberlain sought to anglicise the poems, whereas Hearn's translations are more true to, and respectful of, the originals. Ultimately Hearn (who was born on an Ionian island, grew up in Dublin and died in Japan) immersed himself totally in Japanese culture, becoming a Japanese citizen. Although he emigrated to the United States at the age of nineteen, and later to Japan, the numerous books he wrote about the country and its culture, were widely read by an English audience.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century the greatest early populariser of haiku in the United Kingdom was Yone Noguchi (1875-1947). His importance has long been understated, possibly because the response to his own poetry has always been polarised.

As early as 1897 the following was reported in the *Globe* (London),

"He [Yone Noguchi] writes spasmodic rhapsodic passages, which are not too coherent, and totally lacking in form and rhythm. This output notwithstanding, Mr. Noguchi is hailed as poet by one section of the younger men, and his portrait adorns the literary journals, of which there are many. Another section pours ridicule. The Roycroft Press, says the 'Philistine', for example, 'will not for the present issue a book of poems by Mr. Noguchi,' because 'Mr. Noguchi has written no poems.'" \*8

The starkly divided reception to his poetry does not detract from the role he played as a pioneering populariser of the form in the United Kingdom. His first translations of Basho appear in the introduction to his own book of poems *Seen and Unseen: or The Monologues of a Homeless Snail*" (1895). In 1913, on the invitation of the Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges, he came to Britain to lecture on the subject of Japanese poetry at Magdalen College, Oxford. He then continued on to lecture at the 'Japan Society' in London. The following year he published the influential book *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry*.\*9 Additionally, he was acquainted with many of the literati of the time including W.B. Yeats and George Bernard Shaw. His books were reviewed in the major British newspapers and, in January 1913\*10 he contributed an essay, "What is a Hokku Poem?" which appeared in the well-regarded, but short-lived modernist journal *Rhythm*. In short, the influence of classical Japanese poetry on mainstream English poetry of the 1920s and 1930s was in no small part due to the influence of Yone Noguchi.

Although Noguchi's efforts did not lead to a 'haiku movement' there were other attempts to promote haiku. The first known haiku contest in the U.K. took place in 1899. Organised by the weekly London Journal *The Academy*, it was reported that

"...200 were sent in to compete for the prize." \*11

Paul Miller, writing in 2020, stated that,

"...an original English-language haiku wouldn't be written by a non-Japanese for over a decade." \*12

However, I have since discovered a single example from the first decade of the twentieth century. Bertrand Dobell (1842-1914), an English bookseller, publisher and poet privately printed a collection of poems titled 'Rosemary and Pansies' in 1904. The volume included a dozen haikai and a footnote describing the "...three lines of five, seven and five syllables respectively." \*13

Although I have not (yet) found a copy of the book, a 1904 review in *The Daily News* \*14 does include an example,

Beauty's in all things! Morn is lovely but also Lovely the night is

In 1915 *Vanity Fair* ran a similar contest. Again, there was no long-lasting, discernible impact. In fact, other than this one contest, there is no perceptible interest in haiku in the United Kingdom for almost thirty years. The situation is neatly summarised in the Haikupedia article *Haiku in the United Kingdom: England:* 

"The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 turned poets' attentions elsewhere, and there appear to be no poets of distinction in the British Isles who engaged with haiku between the two World Wars." \*15

The poetic climate was, at this time, shifting: the Imagists (1912-1915) and, in particular, the Imagist manifesto helped to create a poetic climate that would more readily include haiku. However, Imagist poets attracted less attention in the years leading up to World War II, and it was only after the war that interest in haiku was rekindled in Britain with the release of Reginald Horace Blyth's (1898-1964) monumental four-volume work *Haiku* (1949-1952). In America, poets such as Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg were first introduced to haiku by Blyth's books.

In Britain too, Blyth's work has had a lasting impact. The British poet James Kirkup (1918-2009) summarised this as follows,

"I kept on dipping into my four books [R. H. Blyth's *Haiku*], generously illustrated by poem-paintings and painted poems, and I was absolutely entranced. The enchantment came from my apprehension that I was in the presence of a deeply cultivated mind that yet bore its remarkable learning very lightly, did not show off its scholarship, but really treated his subject with affectionate familiarity not devoid of a quirky wit. I could hear the man's voice coming to me from the printed page, a voice both bluff and quiet, common-sensical yet eloquent, plain yet musical." \*16

Secondhand copies of Blyth's books continued to introduce poets (including myself) to Japanese haiku and in 1994 The British Haiku Society "...reactivated Blyth's influence" with the publication of *The Genius of Haiku*,\*<sup>17</sup> a select anthology of Blyth's literary criticism distilled from over 6,000 pages of his work.

The 1950s and 1960s witnessed sporadic bursts of interest in haiku. In 1959 *The Sunday Times* ran a national haiku competition. Readers were invited to submit haiku related to the words 'Spring', 'Love' and 'Summit'. From over 2,500 entries the first prize was won by E. Laura Beckinsale. Her winning 'Spring' haiku demonstrates an understanding of the form beyond the 5/7/5 syllable strictures of the time,

Sun-warmed cherry tree — A blind boy seeing blossom No-one else can see. \*18

In 1967 another broadsheet newspaper, *The Guardian*, ran a further national competition – sponsored by Japan Airlines – which attracted over 3000 entries. These national contests raised awareness of haiku, as did Penguin's *Junior Voices* and *Voices* books, edited by Geoffrey Summerfield.

In 1968 the Irish poet Juanita Casey included haiku in her collection *Horse by the River*.

However, the first sustained attempt to publish newly-written haiku, in the United Kingdom, occurred in 1970. Gerry Loose (1948-2024), encouraged by the sound poet and publisher Bob Cobbing, hand-printed and edited the UK's first haiku journal *Haiku Byways* (later *byways*).\*<sup>19</sup> The journal included work by Bill Wyatt, Dee Evetts, Chris Torrance, Tom Raworth, Cid Corman, Geraldine Little and many others. Wyatt and Torrance were particularly active in popularising haiku in the 1970s.

a small ceremony lifting stakes now thinner than my trees come of age *Dee Evetts* 

caught out in the snow for a moment, I seem to recognise something in the dog's eyes Bill Wyatt

Throughout the 1970s momentum began to build (and has continued to do so in every decade since). The poet Colin Oliver (1946-present) distributed haiku cards between 1975 and 1991. In 1973 'Words Press' published a series of broadsheets one of which included two haiku by James Kirkup (1918-2009), later to become the first President of the 'British Haiku Society'.

Mainstream British poets also began to experiment with haiku in the 1970s. At the 1971 Stratford poetry festival Frances Horovitz read some of her own haiku. \*20

In 1974 Iain Crichton Smith was the first poet to write haiku in Gaelic. The punk poet John Cooper Clarke also included humorous 'haiku' in his stage show from 1977 onward. Peter Finch also actively promoted haiku through his pioneering avant-garde poetry journal *Second Aeon* which ran from 1967-1974 and with *Second Aeon* publications, which continued until 1987.

Perhaps the most important promoter of haiku in the three decades leading up to the formation of 'The British Haiku Society' was Peter Mortimer, who founded 'Iron Press' in 1973. Based in the north-east of England, the in-house magazine '*Iron*' ran for 73 editions from Spring 1973 through to 1997. Mortimer was unusual as he published haiku alongside mainstream poetry and fiction. He also reviewed poetry publications, including translations of classical haiku, for the *Newcastle Journal*.

With the exception of 'Rialto' magazine, Mortimer's inclusion of haiku in a mainstream journal was a rare occurrence. The perception of many major publishing editors was that haiku were principally a gateway-form to 'real poetry'; something to be included in publications such as Puffin's I'll Tell You A Tale (1974) which was directly aimed at the Primary school (aged 5-11) market. This impression is confirmed by the scathing responses of major publishing house editors to David Cobb's 1985 haiku collection.

Andrew Motion, then editorial director for 'Chatto & Windus' responded politely but indicated that Chatto would not take the collection as "...they present the reader with a very unvaried diet." Michael Schmidt (Carcanet Press) thanked Cobb for the manuscript but stated that Cobb had "...sent them, unfortunately, to an editor strongly prejudiced against form." Craig Raine (Faber) was more blunt in his response –

"Thank you for sending your selection of haiku which I am now returning. I quite liked some of these but I'm afraid I think the form has a limited, if genuine, interest."

Other rejections include the phrases "...read at length the effect of the form has a rather wearying effect on me" and "...the prospect of a book composed entirely of haiku does leave me feeling slightly anxious. Is there any way you could vary the formal content of the book with other poems?" \*21

In light of such negativity David Cobb's doggedness in setting up the 'British Haiku Society' is all the more

In light of such negativity David Cobb's doggedness in setting up the 'British Haiku Society' is all the more impressive. His first mention of the possibility came in a January 1990 letter to the 'Haiku Society of America',

"As far as I have been able to establish, there is no haiku society in Great Britain. Perhaps you know of one? If there isn't one, it may be that I have to take on the responsibility of starting one up."  $*^{22}$ 

Dorothy Howard, then president of 'Haiku Canada', was the first to reply to Cobb, passing on Dee Evett's address. On the 1st February 1990 Cobb wrote to Evetts. Evetts reply (5th February 1990) neatly encapsulates the situation in the U.K. in early 1990,

"I have certainly known the feeling of isolation of which you write. For lack of any kind of forum (since Gerry Loose's short-lived '*Haiku Byways*' in the early 70s) it seems that haiku poets in this country have remained virtually invisible to each other..."

Evetts continues, stating that he was also considering,

"...setting up some kind of network, at the very least, that might eventually lead to the founding of a British Haiku Society...it looks as if we arrived at more or less the same place at the same time, in feeling that some kind of haiku organisation in this country is long overdue."\*22

Cobb and Evetts then worked together, producing and distributing *Haiku Interest Group* flyers in April 1990. Forty-three people responded – including Gerry Loose and James Kirkup – and the first meeting of 'The British Haiku Society' took place in a wine bar in London, on the 26th July 1990. An embryonic, hand-typed, version of what was to become *Blithe Spirit - HIG newsletter number 1* was circulated on the 26th June 1990. *Newsletter 2* followed on the 20th September 1990. The first haiku written by members of the society appear in this issue and among them are these memorable poems,

a cloudless sky — painters stretch ladders

to their farthest rungs David Cobb

each
grassleaf
distinct before
the storm
Gerry Loose

damp morning:
cash for a journey
warm from the machine
Dee Evetts

In many ways 1990 can be viewed as a pivotal year in the history of British haiku. Martin Lucas and David Cobb summarised it in their introduction to *The Iron Book of British Haiku* (1998),

"The interest in haiku that had previously been smouldering flared into life in 1990 with the foundation of the British Haiku Society." \*23

In November 1990 the first issue of *The Haiku Quarterly* was published and edited by Kevin Bailey. The journal included translations of both Bashō and Buson; translations from the Greek of George Seferis (1900-1971); haiku by established American poets such Vincent Tripi and Alexis Rotella; as well as a broad range of haiku by British poets such as Cy Patterson, David Cobb and Kevin Bailey, among others,

the rising moon full on my nape the breath of a moth David Cobb

It's so cold even the dahlias are shivering in the breeze

Cy Patterson

By January 1992 the newly named *Blithe Spirit* had assumed its present form as the journal of The British Haiku Society.

In the same year 'Iron Press' released the landmark publication *The Haiku Hundred*. The book was the end-result of a collaboration between the British Haiku Society and 'Iron Press'. From 5,500 submissions, one hundred haiku were selected for publication. The book ultimately ran to six prints, selling over 10,000 copies.

Interest in Japanese short form poetry led to the founding of further journals. Brian Tasker published eight issues of *Bare Bones* between 1992 and 1995. *Time Haiku*, set up and edited by Erica Facey, launched in 1994 and is still running under the editorship of Diana Webb (2025).

In Ireland Jim Norton founded the journal *Haiku Spirit* in 1995. It ran for 20 issues between 1995 and 2000 and was edited at different times by both Jim Norton and Sean O'Connor.

*Presence*, founded by Martin Lucas (1962-2014) was launched three years later, in January 1996, and has continued releasing three issues per year, to the present.

In the same year ai li founded the meticulously produced journal *Still* which stood out from the crowd with its 'one poem per page' approach.

In 1998 John Barlow founded and edited the journal *Snapshots*. Snapshot Press, would go on to be at the forefront of haiku publishing.

# Part Two: 2000-2025

The first quarter of a century of the new millennium has seen many changes in the British haiku scene. *Snapshot Press* and *Alba Publishing* have dominated the publishing market with an array of internationally acclaimed titles.

Snapshot Press was founded in 1997 by John Barlow, a leading poet with over 150 awards to his credit. His books include *The New Haiku* (with Martin Lucas, 2002), Waiting for the Seventh Wave (2006) and Wing Beats: British Birds in Haiku (with Matthew Paul, 2008).

He also edits the well-loved Haiku Calendar which has appeared annually since 2000. A keen naturalist, John's own haiku are informed by his acute observation and love of the natural world.

the skip of a skipping stone alpine swifts

John Barlow \*24

Kim Richardson (1951-present) founded the renowned publishing house *Alba Publishing* in 1989 as a 'desktop publishing' service. However, the first poetry book to be published by the company was *Double Rainbow*, which Kim co-wrote with Maeve O'Sullivan in 2005. Over the ensuing twenty years *Alba Publishing* has released more than two hundred books, numerous of which have placed in the Haiku Society of America Merit book awards, including Sean O'Connor's *Fragmentation*, the overall winner in 2022. Kim is also associate editor of *The Haibun Journal*. His own haiku have appeared in all major British and international journals and have been both anthologised and translated. In 2000 one of his haiku, published in *Blithe Spirit*, received the Museum of Haiku Literature Award. In 2005 Kim went on to publish a solo collection, *Night Ferry*, which was shortlisted for The Haiku Foundation's Touchstone Distinguished Book Award.

fuschia bushes drenched in bees

Kim Richardson \*25

More recently, in 2015, *Boatwhistle Press* was established by Hamish Ironside. In 2016 they released the acclaimed *Off the Beaten Track: A Year in Haiku* which features twelve months of haiku by twelve poets.

New British journals have proliferated in the 21st century. Alan Summers (1956-present) is currently the UK's most prolific producer and editor of online journals. Alan has been a leading figure in the British, and international, haiku scene since the early 1990s. He was General Secretary of the British Haiku Society (1998-2000); a former President of the United Haiku & Tanka Society (2017-2021); and an Editor Emeritus for the multi-award-winning Red Moon Anthologies for best haikai literature (Red Moon Press, 2000-2005). In 2022 Alan was the winner of 'The First Modern Kigo Competition' (Nyitrai & Peat) with the autumn kigo 'creeping sepia'. He co-founded two ground-breaking journals, *Haijinx* – haiku with humor; and *Bones* journal, now both ceased. Alan then went on to found a number of journals, including *Bloo Outlier Journal*, now all absorbed into the single journal *The Pan Haiku Review*. Alan's journals have provided a valuable platform for many of the more avant-garde British haijin, His own poems have been published and anthologised widely. Since 2000 he has run the respected literature agency (now named) 'Call of the Page'.

thunder
I slide a kigo
into the gun

Alan Summers \*26

A long-running website with a Japanese short form focus is *Red Thread Haiku Sangha* edited by George Marsh. It has been influential in introducing the work of poets such as Sean O'Connor, Stuart Quine, and many others. Marsh has also long been active as an educator. In 1988 *Through Poetry: Writing and the Drafting Process*, was published by Hodder & Stoughton. His own poetry is subtly Zen-influenced,

on a rusty buoy the fog bell feels each melancholy wave  $George\ Marsh\ *^{27}$ 

Over the last fifteen years (2010-2025) numerous online journals/e-zines have come and gone. An early example was *Moongarlic E-zine*, run by Sheila Windsor and Brendan Slater: eight issues were produced between 2013 and

2017. *Noon: Journal of the Short Poem* began life as hand-sewn limited editions (2004-2009). Since 2014 issues of the popular journal, edited by Philip Rowland, have appeared online.

In Ireland *Shamrock*, the online journal of the Irish Haiku Society, launched in January 2007, initially as a quarterly, but more recently as themed issues.

In Scotland Colin Stewart Jones' *Gean Tree Press*, published the quarterly e-zine *Notes from the Gean* between 2009 and 2013. More recently *Puddock Haiku Journal* has been run by Stewart Jones since 2019.

*Wales Haiku Journal*, founded by Paul Chambers (1986-present) in 2018, has already established itself as a leading publication. Now superbly edited by Paul Woodhouse, the quarterly online journal has recently expanded to include essays, haibun and related forms.

Chambers is a fine poet in his own right. He has published two full-length collections of haiku poetry, won the Museum of Haiku Literature Award, the NHK Haiku Masters Award, the Golden Triangle Haiku Award, and has featured in the award-winning A New Resonance series. In 2021 his collection *Dry Bones* won the Haiku Foundation's Touchstone Distinguished Book Award.

pre-dawn stars...
plumes of breath
from a cattle truck

Paul Chambers \*28

Three notable exceptions to the online trend have been the founding of the print journals *hedgerow*, *seashores* and *the haibun journal*.

hedgerow was established by Caroline Skanne (1978-present) in 2014. Caroline is a poet, writer, artist, editor – currently of hedgerow and previously of Blithe Spirit. She also runs the publishing house, Wildflower Press. Born in Stockholm, Sweden, she moved to the UK to study, and spent 15 years in London, before relocating to Kent. Her poems have appeared in all major journals and in January 2024 she was the guest author at Cornell University's Mann Library.

a tinker with what spells birdsong

Caroline Skanne \*29

*Seashores* was founded by Gilles Fabre in 2018. Within six years the journal has established itself as a respected presence with a distinctly international flavour –

Gilles was born in France but now lives in Ireland. In addition to *seashores* he is the editor of the international bilingual (English/French) *haikuspirit* website.

His own haiku have been widely published and have appeared in numerous anthologies including *The New Haiku* (Snapshot Press, 2002). His first collection

*Because of a Seagull*, which focuses mainly on Dublin and Ireland, was published by Fishing Cat Press in 2005. This was followed, in 2020 by *Along the Way*, a search for the spirit of the world.

a boy and a girl along the western coast of Africa pushing a goat

Gilles Fabre \*30

Irish-born Sean O'Connor founded *the haibun journal* in 2019. O'Connor is one of our leading poets. His first solo collection *Let the Silence Speak* was shortlisted for the Touchstone Distinguished Books Award in 2016. In 2022 his fourth collection *Fragmentation* won the HSA Merit Book Award (best haibun book) and in 2024 he received an honourable mention for the same award. For two years he served as a judge in the Japan-based Genjuan International Haibun Contest.

a gale blowing the glossy brochure full of headstones

Sean O'Connor \*31

Another British poet who has served as the editor of various journals is Claire Everett. Her own haiku, tanka, tanka prose and haibun have been widely published internationally. She has served as editor for *Take Five: Best* 

*Contemporary Tanka*, the Red Moon Anthology, *Haibun Today*, and *Skylark*. She is also a contributing editor for *Macqueen's Quinterly*. She was awarded 2nd place in the 2012 British Haiku Society Awards for tanka.

cumulonimbus the egret preens deeper into its breast

Claire Everett \*32

Of the journals founded before the turn of the millennium *Blithe Spirit*, *Presence* and *Time Haiku* have maintained their leading roles.

In 1994 Erica Facey founded the Time Haiku Group in London to make haiku more accessible and launched the journal *Time Haiku* the following year. Currently it is edited by Diana Webb. Diana has been a leading presence among the British, and international, haiku community for more than thirty years. Among many honours, she has received the Haiku Museum of Literature Award on two occasions (2005 & 2018). She has also guest edited the journal *Drifting Sands* on three occasions. Her work has been published widely in all leading journals. She is perhaps best-known as an innovative writer of haibun. Her latest book, a haibun 'novelarette' titled *Envelopes* was released by Alba Publishing in 2024.

midsummer morning the for-sale sign half light half shadow

Diana Webb \*33

A past editor of *Time Haiku* and General Secretary of the British Haiku Society was Doreen King. In 2005 Iron Press released her collection *The Katsura Tree*. Following this, in 2007, *Rose Stems*, edited by Vincent Tripi, was released by tribe press. Her poetry often explores the perfection of imperfection.

scent of flowers...
every now and then
the choir in tune

Doreen King \*34

Blithe Spirit is now edited by Iliyana Stoyanova (1969-present). Iliyana was born in Sofia, Bulgaria. Before becoming editor of *Blithe Spirit* she was the BHS Awards Administrator (2016-2024), Secretary of the United Haiku and Tanka Society (2017-2020), and BHS Communications Officer (2016-2023). Currently she serves as the BHS President (2023-present), Editor of the Living Legacies at the Living Haiku Anthology (2014-present), and Haikupedia Editor (2020-present). Her haiku and other poems have been published in numerous journals and anthologies, and have won several international awards including the 22nd "Kusamakura" International Haiku Competition (2017), Runner-up, Museum of Haiku Literature Award – *Blithe Spirit* (2017, 2018, 2022) etc.

distant thunder a line of footprints still escaping the waves

Iliyana Stoyanova \*35

Annie Bachini is a previous President of the British Haiku Society (2007-2009). She also edited a surreal issue of *Blithe Spirit*, the journal of the British Haiku Society, in 2003, followed by surreal sections in the next two issues. A leading exponent of the form, her most recent release is *Two Haiku Poets*, co-written with the longstanding British poet Helen Buckingham.

waiting room the rhythmic squeaks of the cleaner's shoes

Annie Bachini \*36

Ian Storr (1947-present) has been part of the editorial team of the leading international journal *Presence* since 2012. He has been Haibun Editor, *Presence* (2012-2014); Production Editor, *Presence* (2014-2018) and General Editor (2018-2025). Ian's own poetry has won many honours including the Snapshot Press Haiku Calendar Competition on three occasions – 2014, 2015 and 2019. Storr self-published his first haiku collection, *Seeds from the Larch Cones*, in 2010.

winter's end fence wire ripples in the wake of a coot

Ian Storr \*37

Although the key British journals are thriving it should be noted that this is due to the efforts of a small number of unpaid volunteers. In August 2024 Storr announced his retirement, aged 78, as editor of *Presence*. From #82, *Presence* will be edited by a collective drawn from the Edinburgh Haiku Circle.

During his long tenure as editor of *Presence* Ian has been ably assisted by numerous poets, including Alison Williams who has served as tanka editor for the journal. Her haiku have been widely published and are included in the Norton anthology *Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years*.

restaurant closed
a pigeon hunched against
the chill

Alison Williams \*38

Sadly, the British haiku scene has lost many leading lights in the last twenty-five years.

John Crook (1945-2001) was a highly regarded British poet. *ebb tide*, a posthumous collection, edited by Brian Tasker, was released by Snapshot Press in 2003. His poems were widely published and anthologised.

summer clouds –
two swans passing
beat for beat

John Crook \*39

Martin Lucas (1962-2014) was a multi-talented haiku poet and essayist. In addition to founding and editing *Presence*, Lucas was President of the British Haiku Society between 2003 and 2006. He was the author and coeditor of several books and anthologies. Martin's first collection of haiku, *bluegrey*, was published in 1994; followed by five more until his untimely death. His work was included in many anthologies, including *The Iron Book of British Haiku* (Iron Press, 1998) and *The New Haiku* (Snapshot Press 2002)

a moment before sunrise –
ice singing
beneath the swans' feet

Martin Lucas \*40

Ken Jones (1930-2015), who was, until 2013, one of three editors of the print journal, *Contemporary Haibun*, and the online journal *Contemporary Haibun Online*, died in 2015. For his contribution to *Pilgrim Foxes: Haiku and Haiku Prose*, co-authored with Jim Norton and Sean O'Connor, Ken was awarded the Sasakawa Prize for Original Contributions in the Field of Haikai. He won numerous other awards including first place in the 2005 English language haibun contest and in 2011 was placed joint first in the BHS Haiku contest. His collection *Bog Cotton* was shortlisted for the Haiku Foundation Touchstone distinguished book award in 2012.

Under a mackerel sky
the running tide
of my ebbing life

Ken Jones \*41

A year later Bill Wyatt (1942-2016) died. Wyatt started writing haiku in 1959 after reading Jack Kerouac's *Dharma Bums*. He was a pioneering writer of haibun and also an ordained Zen Buddhist monk. Among his many achievements, he was a recipient the Museum of Haiku Literature Award.

lingering within it but the longest day soon passes Bill Wyatt \*42

Rachel Sutcliffe's (1977-2019) death in 2019 deprived the British haiku community of a distinctive voice. Her poetry was personally therapeutic and her honest, keenly observed haiku resonated with many readers worldwide. Among numerous awards she was runner-up in the BHS Museum of Haiku Literature Awards in February 2018 and her work was featured on NHK Haiku Masters. Her collection *Flying Free: A Poetic Response to Illness* was published by Misfit Books Press in 2018.

dripping tap
I begin to think
you're right

Rachel Sutcliffe \*43

A year later, in 2020, David Cobb (1926-2020) one of the lynchpins of the British haiku community passed. David co-founded the British Haiku Society and in 2020 was the Genjuan Haibun Contest Grand Prix winner. During his long lifetime he published nearly two dozen books. Cobb's contribution to the haiku community was a global one. His legacy will be long-lasting.

daffodil morning looking for something very blue to wear David Cobb \*44

2020 also saw the death of Stuart Quine (1962-2020) who was well known for his distinctive one-liners/monoku. *Sour Pickle - one-line haiku* was released in 2018. This was followed, in 2019, with *Wild Rhubarb - one-line haiku* which was awarded Third Place in the Haiku Society of America's Merit Book Awards in 2020.

lassitude and languor these days without rain  $Stuart\ Ouine\ *^{45}$ 

In 2022 we lost Brendan Slater (1971-2022). His raw, minimalist approach was instantly recognisable and his publication credits are wide-ranging. His E-zine *Moongarlic* is much missed. In 2012 he co-edited (with Alan Summers) *Four Virtual Haiku Poets*, haiku by Scott Terrill, Brendan Slater, Colin Stewart Jones and Michael Goglia. His solo collection *In Bed with Kerouac* was published by 'Yet to be named free press' in 2012. A further solo collection, *Rum, Sodomy and the Wash*, was also published in 2012.

I wake 100 yards from where I last remember

Brendan Slater \*46

The following year Colin Blundell (1937-2023), another of the major names in British haiku died. Colin was both a President of the British Haiku Society and, for 14 years, editor of its journal *Blithe Spirit*. As a publisher he supported many poets through his *Hub Editions* imprint.

below the stone track the estuary starts to fill with the evening tide

Colin Blundell \*47

Cicely Hill lived for five years in Japan and her poems have a Shinto-like feel for the inner lives of objects. She was widely published internationally and in 1993 was the recipient of a Museum of Haiku Literature award.

At dawn Wakened by the long silence Of an unwound clock

Cicely Hill \*48

Most recently Brendon Kent's (1958-2024) untimely death in February 2024 deprived the British haiku community of a fine poet. His successes are numerous and include the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Contest, International Section (Best International Haiku (2015), Sakura Award (2017, 2019), and Honourable Mention (2018, 2019); the Golden Haiku Contest in Washington, D.C. (Honorable Mentions in 2018, 2019, 2020, and twice in 2021). His poems are included in two Red Moon anthologies: A Hole in the Light (2018) and Wind Flowers (2019); Yanty's Butterfly: Haiku Nook: An Anthology (2016), The British Haiku Society Members' Anthologies Ekphrasis (2017) and Temple (2021), All the Way Home: Aging in Haiku (2019), and the bilingual BHS anthology Shining Wind/Сияен вятър (2024). In 2018 Kent published his debut haiku collection Moon on Water. His final collection Navigating Moons. Poems of a Cancer Journey (2024) is a deeply moving legacy. Kent's haiku explore the interconnected nature of life.

hospital window the future of the planet the future of me

Brendon Kent \*49

These are only a few of the many losses that have occurred over the past 24 years.

In 2001 Martin Lucas singled out nine leading British haijin. \*50 Of these, Jackie Hardy, Caroline Gourlay (1939-present) and Brian Tasker have continued to write many engaging haiku in the 21st century.

Jackie Hardy was the editor of *Blithe Spirit* for six years (1992-1998) and winner of the Bloodaxe Books/Evening Chronicle Poetry competition in 1998. She has written numerous books including *The Dust is Golden* (Iron Press), and edited the wide-ranging collection *Haiku: Poetry Ancient & Modern*. Her poems are influenced by the landscapes of Northumbria.

lighting the fire those first flames catching last year's news

Jackie Hardy \*51

Caroline Gourlay followed Jackie as editor of *Blithe Spirit* from 1998-2000. She writes longer poems as well as haiku and tanka. Her first collection *Crossing the Field* (Redlake Press 1995) was followed by *Reading All Night* in 1999. More recently 'Five Seasons Press' released *Across the Silence* in 2015. Her haiku are beautifully crafted and have both depth and immediacy.

Spring moves up the hill, The smell of last year's bracken crosses its path

Caroline Gourlay \*52

Brian Tasker began writing haiku in the late 1980s. He was the founder and editor of *Bare Bones* which ran for eight issues between 1992 and 1995. His haiku are Zen-inspired.

fragrant incense burning old regrets

Brian Tasker \*53

There are numerous other British poets whose publication record straddles the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such as Katherine Gallagher (1935-present) and Susan Lee Kerr (1945-present).

Australian-born Katherine Gallagher has been composing haiku since the 1970s. Her haiku have been published in all the leading journals and are included in numerous anthologies including *The Iron Book of British Haiku* (1998), *First Australian Haiku Anthology* (1999), *Haiku World: An International Poetry Almanac* (1996), *The New Haiku* (2002) and the Snapshot Press Haiku Calendar (2004, 2007, 2017). In 2004 she won a Museum of Haiku Literature Award for a haiku published in *Blithe Spirit* and has won recognition in the First Polish International Haiku Competition (2007, 2011) and the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival (2009).

almost hidden behind the house an ancient orchard in flower

in ancient orchard in flower Katherine Gallagher \*54

Susan Lee Kerr first discovered haiku in the United States in the 1960s, and in the 1990s began writing and publishing haiku in British journals including *Haiku Quarterly, Blithe Spirit, Time Haiku*, and *Presence* as well as various anthologies. She won First Place in the Shintai Haiku section of World Haiku Review, Summer 2021. Kerr is the author of five books and numerous articles. *The Walk Home* (Alba Publishing), a retrospective collection of haiku, senryu, and tanka spanning 30 years, was published in 2020. Her latest book, *Learning to Leave* (Alba Publishing), is due to be released in August 2025.

winter sunset even the gasworks scaffold gilded rosy pink

Susan Lee Kerr \*55

Additionally, there are poets who give up much of their own time working tirelessly behind the scenes. Frank Williams (1951-present) has had multiple roles in the British Haiku Society and is a well-loved and respected poet. He has published nine chapbook collections of haiku and edited three BHS members' anthologies: *Air* (2012), *Edge* (2015), and *Water* (2022), and four London Haiku Group members' anthologies: *A Trolleyful of Pumpkins* (2005), *From the Bridge* (2014), *A Haze of Infinity* (2017), and *That Kind of Blue* (2019), and assisted various editors in the preparation of other BHS anthologies.

for a moment... the squirrel becomes a grey arrow

Frank Williams \*56

David Bingham too has been a long-standing contributor to the British haiku scene. He served as editor of *Blithe Spirit* (2013-2014), and as acting BHS president (2021-2022). He is a leader of the Shropshire-based Green Wood Haiku group. He won the BHS Ken and Noragh Jones Haibun Award in 2017 and 2024.

slowly moving the shadow cast by a caterpillar

David Bingham \*57

There are ex-pats too who regularly publish in the U.K. and beyond. Of these, Stephen Gill (Tito) (1953-present) continues to feature in the key journals. His distinctive four-line poems are instantly recognisable. In the 1990s he edited *Rediscovering Basho* (Global Oriental) and served on the British Haiku Society Committee as national events officer. In 1995, he moved to Kyoto, working at Ritsumeikan and later Ryukoku Universities.

Hush now!
under the blue spruce
water
black with trout
(Samegai, Shiah, 23.7.11)

Tito \*58

There are also ex-pats who have returned to the U.K. such as Judy Kendall. Judy has published four poetry collections and edited two collections of Edward Thomas's letters. Whilst lecturing in English at Kanazawa University she co-translated a collection of Miyaji Eiko's haiku (pub.1996) She has been the recipient of numerous awards and her poems have been included in the *Forward Anthologies of Best Single Poems* (2007, 2010) and *Best Poems of First Decade of 21st Century*. Her haiku can be found in Red Moon's *Best Global English Language Haiku of 2015* anthology and in many issues of *Presence*. She contributes regularly to *Presence* and serves as its essays, reviews, and bilingual haiku editor. In 2021 she was one of the two judges of the British Haiku Society awards.

travelling light
i will my neighbour
to turn the page

Judy Kendall \*59

Dee Evetts who was, for many decades, USA-based returned to the U.K. in June 2019. He is a former librarian for the British Haiku Society and an active presence in the British haiku community. Since 2019 he has contributed numerous essays for *tsuri-doro* and *Blithe Spirit. city beach*, his first new collection in over 20 years was released in 2024.

There are also many poets who are harder to categorise, poets who plough their own unique furrows such as the Anglo-Russian poet A A (Tony) Marcoff. Active as a writer of haiku since 1968, Tony's poems have a mystical air. His haiku, as well as his recent highly-regarded tanka and tanka prose, are clearly informed by his interest in both Zen and mysticism. He has been anthologised in both *The New Haiku* (2002) and *Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years* (2013). A sense of reverence and tranquility pervade much of Marcoff's work. The following haiku demonstrates his deep connection with both the natural and the spiritual world:

the way the temple alters the wind  $A \ A \ Marcoff *^{60}$ 

ai li has convincingly walked her own innovative path since the 1980s. She is well-known for the range of new poetic forms she has created including the Cherita (1997), Gembun (1997) and, more recently, the Dua (2022). She possesses an understated eye for detail and a distinct spirituality – the former informed by her work as a professional photographer F.R.P.S; the latter by her work as a spiritualist medium.

mist
i called
and you
arrived
with
your cloak
ai li \*61

Meanwhile, John McManus, the recipient of two Touchstone awards, uses hard-hitting haiku to tackle social issues such as poverty and racism. He founded the first video haiku journal *Frozen Butterfly* and in 2016 Iron Press released the collection *Inside His Time Machine*.

night bus
a pair of drunks
shouting racial slurs

John McManus \*62

Keith J Coleman is more traditional in his approach but his style is equally distinctive. Well-known as a translator of Bashō, his haiku have been widely published and anthologised.

meteor watch:
sailing down heaven in the wee hours,
a white gull

Keith J Coleman \*63

frances angela (1950-present) is one of Britain's most respected poets with a strong international presence. Nineteen of her haiku have been selected for various of the Red Moon anthologies. Her collections have also garnered critical acclaim. *Philip Street*, won the Snapshot Press Chapbook Award in 2018, Additionally she won the Touchstone Award for individual haiku poem in 2017 and 2nd Place in the Martin Lucas Haiku Award in 2020.

asylum
the darkness
of mother's hair

frances angela \*64

An increasing number of poets are writing in Welsh and Gaelic. Others, such as Simon Chard employ a mix of the English language and Scottish colloquial language to great effect. The following nine syllable haiku is a remarkable example of how much can be said in so short a span,

set fair the pop of the dubbin tin

Simon Chard \*65

John McDonald started writing haiku in the mid-1990s. He writes in Scots and runs a bilingual blog of haiku zenspeug.blogspot.com. His poems have featured in many journals and were included in *World Haiku Series* 78 (2019)

the grue o tyin a snuid granny's arthritis

Translation:

the horror of tying a ribbon grandmother's arthritis

John McDonald \*66

A small number of poets such as Andrew Detheridge and Richard Thomas also straddle the worlds of 'mainstream' poetry and haiku. Matthew Paul (1966-present) is perhaps the UK's most well-known poet with a foot in in both 'camps'. He has been active in the British haiku scene since the 1990s and has served as both a committee member of the British Haiku Society and a co-editor of *Presence*. In 2006 his first haiku collection *The Regulars* was published, followed in 2015 with *The Lammas Lands*. His blog is wide-ranging and always insightful. Charles Trumbull has accurately described him as "perhaps the most perceptive and hard-hitting reviewer in the business",

a dove's two-note song...

I sink a pint of bitter
in the old pub's shade

Matthew Paul \*67

There are, of course, many promising young (and not-so-young) up-and-coming poets whose work appears regularly in the journals and who, undoubtedly, will find their place in future histories.

A caveat to close. My summary of the first quarter of the 21st century is, by necessity, a selective one. There are many other poets who have equal claim to inclusion. I could, for example, have focused upon British poets — such as Joanna Ashwell, Debbi Antebi, Helen Buckingham et al. — who have featured in the various Touchstone Awards since their foundation in 2010. Or, I could have listed and explored each of the winners of The Museum of Haiku Literature Award such as Russell Collier, Clare McCotter, Fred Schofield et al. Or I could have singled out British poets who have placed in the BHS contests such as Joanna Ashwell, Richard Tindall, David Jacobs, Matt Morden, Sam Morris et al. Or I could have focused on British winners of the Snapshot Press awards and competitions such as the talented poet John Hawkhead whose recent collection *Bone Moon* (2022) received universal critical acclaim. Or, British poets who have featured in the annual Red Moon Anthologies such as the ever-engaging Mark Gilbert (1964-present). Or I could have quite legitimately explored the work of poets who elect not to enter any of these contests. Each of these (equally valid) approaches would make for engaging and informative essays in their own right.

#### **NOTES:**

### Part One: 1854-1999

- \*1 Daily Director and Entr'acte (London, England) 10th July 1860
- \*2 F.V. Dickins. *Japanese Odes, with Translations; being Stanzas by a Century of Poets translated into English.* Smith, Elder & Co., 1867
- \*3 W.G. Aston. A Grammar of the Japanese Written Language. Crawford & Co. (London, Trübner Lane), 1877
- \*4 Charles Trumbull. Modern Haiku Vol. 39.3 "Research Note: W.G. Aston." pp.59-63
- \*5 Jim Kacian. *An Overview of Haiku in English* in Haiku *in English. The First Hundred Years*. W.W. Norton & Company (New York/London), 2013
- \*6 Kazuo Koizumi. (compiled by) *Letters from Basil Chamberlain to Lafcadio Hearn*. The Hokuseido Press (Tokyo), 1936
- \*7 Daily News (London, England), 29th December 1880
- \*8 Globe (London, England), 16th January 1897
- \*9 Yone Noguchi The Spirit of Japanese Poetry John Murray (London), 1914
- \*10 Yone Noguchi "What is a Hokku Poem?" Rhythm 11 John Murray (London), January 1913
- \*11 Tablet (London, England) 29th April 1899.
- \*12 Paul Miller. Frogpond 43:2. Two Very Early Haiku Contests, 2020
- \*13 Bertrand Dobell. Rosemary and Pansies. Privately printed, 1904
- \*14 Daily News (London, England) 30th July 1904
- \*15 <u>haikupedia.org</u>. Author: David Cobb with contributions by: Colin Blundell, Iliyana Stoyanova, and the Haikupedia editors. Last updated 2023
- \*16 James Kirkup (Introduction) The Genius of Haiku. The Hokuseido Press, 1995
- \*17 David Cobb & Martin Lucas (editors) *The Iron Book of British Haiku*. Iron Press, 1998
- \*18 The Sunday Times. March 8th 1959
- \*19 Gerry Loose *Haiku Byways* (later *byways*) 1970-c.1972

<u>Note:</u> It is unclear how many copies of the journal were published between 1970 and c.1972. *Haikupedia* states that only 3 issues were published between 1970 and 1971. Recently, (May 2024) I purchased *byways number 5*. If further copies exist please contact the author: <a href="mailto:alanpeat@icloud.com">alanpeat@icloud.com</a>

\*20 Birmingham Daily Post 2nd August 1971

Note: Frances Horovitz continued to write haiku and in 1982 *Five Seasons Press* published her 'Rowlstone Haiku. Hereford Poems 8' in a pamphlet, illustrated by Alan Halsey.

- \*21 British Haiku Society Archive file compiled by David Cobb "Haiku Archives of The British Isles 1". The original letters are not included.
- \*22 British Haiku Society Archive file compiled by David Cobb "Haiku Archives of The British Isles 1"
- \*23 David Cobb & Martin Lucas (editors) The Iron Book of British Haiku. Iron Press, 1998

## Part Two: 2000-2025

- \*24 John Barlow, *tinywords*, 11.2. 2011
- \*25 Kim Richardson, Double Rainbow, Alba Publishing, 2005
- \*26 Alan Summers, *tinywords* 20.2 (November 2020); also included in *Haiku* 2021 (Lee Gurga & Scott Metz, editors (Modern Haiku Press)
- \*27 George Marsh, Salting the Air, Waning Moon Press, 1997
- \*28 Paul Chambers, *The Dry Bones*, The Red Ceilings Press, 2021
- \*29 Caroline Skanne, NOON: journal of the short poem #23

- \*30 Gilles Fabre, Along the way, a search for the spirit of the world, Alba Publishing, 2020
- \*31 Sean O'Connor, A Patch of Earth, Alba Publishing, 2023
- \*32 Claire Everett, *Acorn* #28, 2012
- \*33 Diana Webb, hedgerow #143, 2023
- \*34 Doreen King, Rose Stems, tribe press, 2007
- \*35 Iliyana Stoyanova, First Place in the 10th edition of the 'European Quarterly Kukai', June 2015
- \*36 Annie Bachini & Helen Buckingham, Two Haiku Poets, Iron Press, 2023
- \*37 Ian Storr, Irish Haiku Society Competition 2013, Joint 3rd prize (with Scott Mason)
- \*38 Alison Williams, Presence #75, March 2023
- \*39 John Crook (from) Wing Beats: British Birds in Haiku, Snapshot Press, 2008
- \*40 Martin Lucas, Winner of the Katikati Haiku Contest, 2010
- \*41 Ken Jones, Blithe Spirit 15:3, 2005
- \*42 Bill Wyatt, Blithe Spirit 24:4, November 2014
- \*43 Rachel Sutcliffe, Frogpond, Volume 36:3, Autumn 2013
- \*44 David Cobb (from) Jumping from Kiyomizu, Iron Press, 1997
- \*45 Stuart Quine, Wild Rhubarb, Alba Publishing, 2019
- \*46 Brendan Slater, Rum, Sodomy & the Wash, Yet To Be Named Free Press, 2012
- \*47 Colin Blundell, Blithe Spirit 4:4, November 1994
- \*48 Cicely Hill, *The Earth Drawn Inward*, Waning Moon Press, 1997
- \*49 Brendon Kent, *Navigating Moons. Poems of a Cancer Journey*. Available as an ebook from navmoonbook@gmail.com 2024
- \*50 Martin Lucas, *Haiku in Britain: theory, practice, context.* PhD thesis. University of Wales. 2001
- \*51 Jackie Hardy, *Haiku: Poetry Ancient & Modern*, edited by Jackie Hardy (London: MQ Publications, 2002)
- \*52 Caroline Gourlay (from) Crossing the Field, The Redlake Press, 1995
- \*53 Brian Tasker, Notes from a Humdrum, A Year in Haiku, Bare Bones Press, 1992
- \*54 Katherine Gallagher, Museum of Haiku Literature Award (selected from *Blithe Spirit* 14.2, June 2024)
- \*55 Susan Lee Kerr, The Walk Home, Alba publishing, 2020
- \*56 Frank Williams, Blithe Spirit 34.3, August 2023
- \*57 David Bingham, Time Haiku 51, 2020
- \*58 Stephen Gill (Tito), Blithe Spirit 34.3, August 2023
- \*59 Judy Kendall, *Haiku: Poetry Ancient & Modern*, edited by Jackie Hardy (MQ Publications, 2002).
- \*60 A A Marcoff, Daily Haiku Prompt, October 13th 2023
- \*61 ai li, hedgerow #134 (2021)
- \*62 John McManus, *Inside His Time Machine*, Iron Press, 2016
- \*63 Keith J Coleman, The Museum of Haiku Literature Award (selected from *Blithe Spirit* 20.1, March 2010)
- \*64 frances angela, *Philip Street*, Snapshot Press, 2018
- \*65 Simon Chard, The Haiku Calendar 2022 (April), Snapshot Press, 2022
- \*66 John McDonald, Taj Mahal Review Vol 2 No. 2
- \*67 Matthew Paul, Kingfisher 6, 2022

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