The Philip Larkin Society

News

September 2021

The oil-dark sheen: surely too hard one often?
The it is hard to imagine, I know, is soft.
Dead leaves down the boneyards, sunwards, upwards,
Starwards or brink, but the brink, by now,
Is a thing we can't imagine anything under,
Or empty hospitals falling room by room.
Down in the west, perhaps, where the angry light is,
The dead, with their eyes, are gathering dark.

Welcome to the September 2021 Philip Larkin Society newsletter. In this issue, please find reminders about several events, another Larkin object, a scholarly dive into an overlooked relationship, and more.

Please note that the call for papers for the 2026 Philip Larkin Society Conference is now out. It's a little further ahead, either as a pressure or as a more casual basis, but here not yet signed up further details are included below.

Daniel Chase
E-newsletter editor, The Philip Larkin Society

Meet the Members Zoom, October 20th, 7pm

On **Monday, October 20th** we will be hosting another Meet the Members Zoom call, a link will be circulated in the course.

Pull up a chair, pour out some port, pick out a poem. We look forward to seeing you there!

December 6th – Members-only commemoration event

On **Saturday December 6th**, The Philip Larkin Society will be hosting a commemoration event at the Raymond Asten Library, University of Hull. This will be a hybrid event, so for those that are unable to attend, a link to attend from home will be circulated.

Commemorating the anniversary of Larkin's death, though a few weeks later than usual, this event will be a chance to hear from Antony Whiteley on the Cross Section and a date session to follow. It will be a treat.

As details are being finalized, there is little to reveal at present, but do expect to hear more in due course.

The 2026 Philip Larkin Society Conference – Registration

Registration for the 2026 Philip Larkin Society conference will be open from October 1st, and we have an early bird deal.

As previous emails and newsletters have indicated, the conference is to take place at the **University of Hull** on **March 19-20th 2026**. We are taking the 80 year anniversary of the publication of *The Whitsun Weddings* as our inspiration, and will be looking alongside exploration of Larkin's poetry and wider prose writing (as well as the wards of his contemporaries).

Get ready to dive into two days of insightful discussions, engaging sessions, and a chance to connect with fellow enthusiasts. We are excited to welcome you to this vibrant event and we hope to bring you something very special once more.

We are delighted to announce that our keynote speakers are **Rosie Rayfield** (*The Harlean Hayes*) and **Andrew Swarbrick** (*Out Of Reach: The Poetry of Philip Larkin*). Guest speakers also include Dr Sarah Ellis (Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Literature and editor of *Aloud* Larkin), Geoff Woman (writer and former colleague of Larkin at the University of Hull), Dave Wilson (Director of the Hull Live Literature Festival), Antony Whiteley (Poet in Residence), and PLS President Anne Millard (arts journalist and presenter). However, the programme is still in its early stages so please check back for updates.

Early bird registration will be set at £45, and will increase to £55 from the 1st of January. Student tickets will be available at £25. Check the Attendees page on October 1st to access this deal.

An Enveloped Relationship

Among the many traces of Philip Larkin's life preserved in the Brynmor Jones Library, Hull, are his letters. Letters might seem like the least significant, little all envelopes are usually discarded, their sole purpose being to protect what lies inside while in transit. Yet, as Larkin himself knew, the envelope can also accrue meaning from those, particularly those received from loved ones, carefully filed away with their contents inside, but also at some intermediary period carried from around on his person and pressed them into service as a medium for note-taking or doodling. Thus, the envelope can become a kind of hybrid text, combining letters or physical objects, and about the social world that reached him daily through the post.

The least varying one found in letters to his mother Eva, the longest serving and most frequent of his correspondents. Many of the envelopes are addressed in a neat, unvarying handwriting and drawings made by Larkin. These range from shopping lists, some of which have an almost poetic rhythm to them: Cod, Bib, Milk, Bacon, Eggs, Tea, Bread, Butter, Marmalade, Sugar, Cheese, catalogue references, train connection times, numerical calculations and the odd doodle or two. Some are very present-focused, but others do look forward to future events, such as the engraved and personalised quotation from the Latin verse of the 15th century poet, John Grover: 'Larkin et in mollis, non durabit multum, Larkin et in duris, diu durabit' ('Larkin is soft, does not last long; Larkin is hard, lasts a long time'). Yet, goals lie beyond sleep. Forever with the Lord. (Psalm Psalm 127), and Christmas Day, 1950 (Psalm 150). Some envelopes, in fact, don't seem to have found their way into the poetic notebooks or completed poems. For example, on the back of an envelope from five years dark Beech says we find the following:

Ut bright main lines, with all your squab down,
Joining Boston!

Metals too
Rusty or burnished in the sun!

A look at the correspondence around that time suggests that Larkin may have written these either during or immediately after a visit/journey to a library conference in Leeds, a few weeks after starting his new job as Hull University's librarian. Some nine years later, another trans-atlantic visit clearly stirred similar imagery which ended up in the poem, 'Sunny Prestatyn', published in *The Whitsun Weddings*.

Another unsourced envelope, postmarked 12 April 1960 contains more definite clues to Larkin's exact whereabouts at the time of writing. Scribbled on the back of an envelope addressed to Miss Rosalie Hoyland in London, where Larkin was undergoing tests after his strange collapse at a Library Committee meeting the previous year, he writes down a seemingly random sequence of numbers on that very day. It is 14.30 in the morning and Larkin explains his non-availability by his anticipated visitor, Monica Jones, who is due to arrive at 15.00 and will be with him for 1½ hours. "Nothing to bumpy before". It proved to be a long wait. Still, [Egerton] and I waited till 19, we were told you would be a bit longer. The doctors return in the afternoon, so we shall know. Larkin wrote a pair of poems, postmarked, 14 November, 1960 and 1961 respectively, which he sent to Miss Hoyland. This contains the detail of a well-documented episode in Larkin's life.

The envelope is effectively a double object: outward-facing, it bears the handwriting of the sender, the place of posting, the intended recipient and their address. Inward-facing, it is a kind of hybrid text, if protected, the words secured for the intended recipient only. In the case of this sender, Larkin felt that it was safe to leave traces lying around and always within reach, not the case, say, with letters written to Monica Jones, which he kept in a safe.

There is also something telling about Larkin's enthusiasm to throw things away. His entire archive reveals a tendency to hoard things: letters, photographs, cards, ticket stubs, and, of course, poems complete with their envelopes. It reflects the enormous that meaning clings to objects. An envelope in his mother's hand is not just a piece of paper, it is a connection to a loved one, a piece of heritage, it is a place of presence, of comfort. When Larkin moved his mother's envelopes, he preserved not just her well-feel-for-it-ness, but also a piece of her presence, a connection to her person, and a great, who perhaps the ordinary detail of daily life, such surrealists traditionally maintained a quiet, unconscious resonance.

Philip Pullen
Trustee, The Philip Larkin Society

Ted Tarling (1938-2019): a dip into the Archives

The Hull History Centre holds wonderfully rich archives on Larkin and has stewardship of the Larkin Society's Larkinalia (archives recovered from 105 Newland Park after the death of Monica Jones). Among the Larkinalia are a few items that have been donated pointers to the City. The Joan Hartley papers are an excellent example. Another is the archive in Edwin Chell Tarling. Tarling was a Hull-born photographer who lived in Hull for most of his fascinating character whom pulls ground Larkin's on several occasions. And this is not surprising, given their common interests. Tarling was a photographer, a collector of ephemera, a bibliophile and jazzbabe.. He was probably best known for his participation in the Hull Jazz scene, playing the clarinet. He founded the Humo Jazz Band and was a member of the Hull Jazzmen, playing with greats like Ladbin, Saint Barnard and Ian Stewartson.. 'Ted dabs' painted. Larkin was given two paintings by Tarling in the tables which he described as examples of a 'meticulous melancholy'

Larkin advised him and helped materially to secure a grant from the Arts Council to publish a collection of Tarling's photographs. Tarling's photographs were published and published by Tarling himself. And, of course, they were both part of the Hull Jazz scene.

There's more to explore on Tarling and Larkin. For the moment, Tarling bequeathed first beautiful prints to the Bassinth of being a lightning. Marvelous.

Tim Pickles
Chair, The Philip Larkin Society

Stage 4 Beverley, Chris Sewart

A familiar long-poet/lyric lyricist, will be the official poet for the Stage 4 Beverley festival on Thursday 7th October, with poetry by Chris Sewart, winner of the Philip Larkin Society, for the Guardian, Chris writes:

'In the weeks leading up to the festival I will be writing a trio of poems based on the Beverley Minster, its stained glass windows and bestiary, and that also reflect on the forthcoming festival. With work past Southbank as Alice Corbin and Roger Mcclough, and Poetry Ireland Review, Poetry London, Poetry Review and all the other fantastic acts lined up – there will be no shortage of material.

I love being part of the festival and I am really looking forward to being Festival Poet. I'm so pleased that The Philip Larkin Society has chosen me for the Stage 4 Beverley festival, I'm honoured with those that started back in 2019 when I won the first Tarling Festival of Words poetry prize sponsored by the society. So, when I received the email from Tim Pickles, I rushed to Larkin's bio to ponder, 'For Mabel Beech' – 'an enormous cow'?'

For further information, please click this link. Chris's poems will be available to purchase at the festival, and he will be signing copies/poems at the festival approaches. It will take place from **Sunday 8th February** to **Sunday 13th**.

Reminder: ArtLink Hull, Saturday October 11th

Join Lyn Lockwood and guest for Jazz Blues & Folk music in the Atrium and Patrons Pub. The cafe will be followed by a creative writing afternoon at **ArtLink Hull**. The event is set to commence at **10am**, and to end at **4pm**.

There are some tickets still available. Further information, and booking, can be found on this Eventbrite page.

Reminder, Philip Larkin: Masterpiece

Members might be interested in this lighthearted mangling of an inspirable episode from Larkin's life. Entitled 'Philip Larkin: Masterpiece', several dates have now passed. However, the show then go on!

Written by Mark Griffiths, directed by Rose Kelly and starring Mark Griffiths and Ashley Ward, Philip Larkin: Masterpiece, is a 70-min romp out an unknown piece of international espionage which could alter the course of the Cold War, post Philip Larkin's death in 1985. Mark Griffiths (Director of Hull Theatre and previous Midland Graduate's with Ryan, Bert on Bernard of Hull – signing, infirm and absent photography groups – really turn James Bond and complete his dangerous mission!

It is sure to be a fantastic performance, and one that should not be missed.

The remaining tour dates are included here:

Saturday 4th October, 8.30pm - The Square, Isle of Dogs, London

Wednesday 13th - Friday 15th October, 7.45pm - The Seven Oaks, Manchester

Saturday 16th October, 6.30pm & 7.30pm - The Seven Oaks, Manchester

Larkin in 25 Objects, Newland Park letter-writing paper

Writing on his familiar 24 Newcastle Park notepaper in February 1955, Larkin's letter to Kingsley Amis begins with a typically 'up-to-date' sociolinguistic-tinted welcome (*Amis! Welcome to Newland Park! (Pace p.c. change, pace Ian!)* to *amber pace!*). I can't say for sure, but I suspect that Larkin's letter-writing paper was a fusion aspect. It has a large pattern – not a lovely unfortunate (though it sees well but) – a long strip between wire fences – ok, good for a letter. Larkin's letter-writing paper, in his hesitation, is Hull Wood's contentment.

Shortly afterwards, in April, the excellent month, he began his 'Sad' poem, 'Adverts'.

Photo by Dennis Lee. Text by James Booth

Podcast News

Released in August, the most recent episode of *Trip In All That Air* features Daniel Bellert, Daniel is a journalist and broadcaster who has worked for the BBC World Service, Geographic and BBC. His poems have appeared in Poetry Ireland Review, Poetry London, The Press & Magazine and Poetry (Poetrybookshop).

Daniel and Lyn cover two lonely discussed poems 'Days' and 'Two Guitar Pieces'. Daniel brings a fresh perspective on Larkin, and as a self-professed 'life-long poetry hater', it was a pleasure to have him on the show.

If you would like to be a guest on our podcast, or if you would just like to get involved with any aspect of production, then do email Lyn Lockwood @ alanyn-lock@hotmail.com.

Lyn Lockwood
Deputy Chair, The Philip Larkin Society

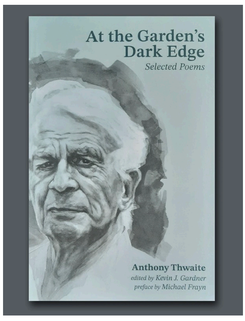
Publications and Merchandise

And now Christmas is coming again, so if we hadn't enough to get up early, it is actually Christmas shopping time!

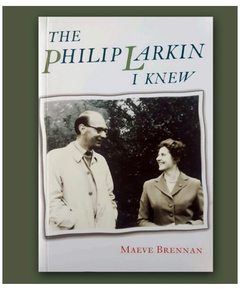
Christmas cards, 4 per packet **£3.00**

Sunny Newland Park, 5 cards per packet **£3.00**

Larkin statue at Christmas, 5 per packet **£5.00**

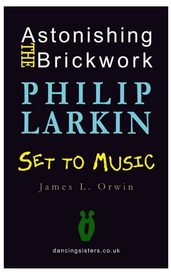


At the Garden's Dark Edge: Selected Poems by Anthony Thwaite (2024) **£12.50**



The Philip Larkin I Knew by Maeve Brennan (2002), **£15.00**

A Mighty Splash!: The Story of the Victoria Avenue Fountain Kingston upon Hull (2024), **£13.00**



Astonishing the Brickwork: Philip Larkin Set to Music by James L. Orwin (2022), **£15.00**

Worry not! The usual Philip Larkin Society merchandise remains in stock and readily available on our online shop.

Rachael Galletly
Merchandise Officer, The Philip Larkin Society

Alliance of Literary Societies

The PLS is an active member of the Alliance of Literary Societies which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. It represents around 100 UK literary societies of all kinds and sizes.

Trevor Norwood, our treasurer, is now The Philip Larkin Society's link to the ALS.

PLS Membership

Thanks to all of you who have already renewed your membership - it is really appreciated. But I would also urge anyone who has not yet paid for the current year (2025-26) to do so as soon as possible - and remember that (if you are eligible) donating through GiftAid allows the Society to claim an extra 25p in every pound. All the details are available at https://philiplarkin.com/membership/ but members can also direct any enquiries to our Membership Secretary at jonbaines@protonmail.com.

You can also treat friends, family or quite frankly anyone to a gift membership. You can let us know who the lucky recipient is, providing their name, address and email address by dropping an email to plstreasurer@philiplarkin.com.

You can pay by PayPal or credit card – and don't forget Gift Aid!

Join the Philip Larkin Society

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