

# An Introduction to Lane Cove Poets

After 14 years, the Lane Cove Poets continue to meet monthly in the library on the last Monday of each month. The group is going from from strength to strength.

WORDS: CATHERINE BRIGGS, POET AND WRITER, AND DR ROB ANDERSON, POET AND PHOTOGRAPHER.



Poetry can give insight into the heart of a community and foster the spirit in a way that shows a deep knowledge of human nature. The poetic tradition goes back to the Bards in many cultures, who sang stories of Homer and the Odyssey, the Celtic tales of Culhwch and Olwen, early King Arthur, the sprawling epics of India - and in Australia, the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that have been passed down for over 60,000 years. Poetry taps into the fundamental need for storytelling and passing on stories through the music of nature and the word.

Lane Cove in Covid times has been disorientating as we live through disconnection from friends and family near and far. For the Lane Cove Poets-in-Residence, the music of poetry helped us give voice to our words and emotions and unite with each other. Magic lies in the poet conveying what is in our hearts and embracing the feelings of others. During the early pandemic, the Lane Cove Poets met online, but now we are back to meeting face to face and can enjoy companionship and shared experiences of human nature. Performing our poetry and music encompasses not only the joys of life but also the hard times and has particularly helped us to cope with the challenges of the pandemic.

The Lane Cove Poets-in-Residence group was founded in 2009 by Graeme Payne, who is still an active member, and Karen Mitchell from the Library, after realising that a thriving community like ours needed a voice for literary endeavours. Beginners and established poets were

encouraged to join. It is a tribute to the people of Lane Cove that 14 years later the poetry group is still meeting monthly in the library on the last Monday of each month. In turn, the library and its parent, the Lane Cove Council, support the group with guest speakers. Workshops and visiting poets encourage the growth of poetic ability. We are fortunate to have well-known poet, musician, and writer Paolo Totaro in our midst as a leading light, who can be called upon to give advice to our poets, whether budding or more experienced.

From this beginning, the Lane Cove Library's annual Literary Awards showcase the talent of our community. Members of the Poets-in-Residence are encouraged to enter their poetry in the awards, which have become a nationally recognised writing competition for writers of poetry and prose.

The poets' group originally met every other month in one of Lane Cove Library's study rooms. The idea was to have a group where poets could read their poems and have open discussion about them in a way that would be a safe and enjoyable experience for all. This style of meeting could facilitate the sharing and development of poetry knowledge and skill. Wanting to meet more often, the group met in the alternate month at members' homes.

Now we meet once a month, discussing and creating poetry on themes such as nature, love, relationships, or experiment with forms of poetry such as sonnets and villanelles. Membership changes as poets come and go.

The music of poetry helped us give voice to our words and emotions and unite with each other



Many have come along for a taste and then stay, which is wonderful. Having more poets encourages more poems and more discussion, which we all value. We have also had well-known poet Judith Beveridge guide the poets for the literary awards and have gained much from her expertise. Our poems are also displayed on rotation in local cafes, 'bringing poetry to the Mall'.

In November 2022, the group had its first exhibition of poems in the library, on the theme of Ebbs and Flows showcasing Lane Cove Council's Festival of the River. 12 poets contributed two poems each, including guest poet Mark O'Connor, who is renowned in Australia and internationally for his poetry on the environment. We are fortunate to have photographers and artists among our members, so our works were enhanced by the photography of Mitchell Stirzaker, Dr Rob Anderson, and Paul Bennett, as well as photographs from the Lane Cove archives.

Librarian Karen Mitchell arranged a delightful celebration for family and friends, assisted by Bronwyn and Eric from the library staff. With the help of Dr Rob Anderson and Catherine Briggs, a booklet of the poetry was produced in record time for the occasion. Photographs of a fairy wren and a powerful owl on the cover enhance the publication and emphasise the abundant birdlife which we are fortunate to enjoy in Lane Cove. This publication can be viewed in the library on request.



## Ebbs and flows

*Life ebbs and flows:  
falling asleep for instance  
right now, would be  
an ebb of sorts:  
staying awake to experience flow  
as ghosts of times past glow,  
and I suppose I earn repose  
As a dream arises. Along this river I linger.  
A cut off meander is a billabong.  
As a child I loved the concept.  
Dawdling, I could trace the river  
and end up a perfect shape – forgotten  
but perfect. A delicious way to be inert,  
filled with fish and yabbies and visited by laughing birds.  
Mind you, if instead, I strode on overcoming natural reserve,  
I would find where the mouth of the river kisses the ocean.  
I could adopt wind and waves,  
run shrieking into the sea.  
Water, salt and fresh, would gush  
over my form,  
transform into mermaid,  
an Australian selkie.  
And then - I could embrace the wide world beyond the horizon.  
Wild girl, wild wind, and seaweed in my hair.*

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# Who are the Lane Cove Poets?

Poetry is the passion which unites the Lane Cove Poets-in-Residence, and the variety of backgrounds adds to the rich mix and expertise of the group. Paul Bennett is a well-known musician and artist around Lane Cove and beyond. He brings his poetry alive with beautiful illustrations. Jonathan Cant is a performance poet, writer and musician and has been longlisted and commended for awards. He enlightens the members with his knowledge of language and metre. Paris Rose is a performance poet, appearing at Sydney Fringe Festival and Australian Poetry Slam as well as being Writer-in-Residence for Westwords. Jo Lyons is an accomplished editor, poet, writer, and artist. She is a performance poet and has been published in several anthologies.

**Vicki McDonald** joined Lane Cove Poets in 2012 and thought she had found her creative niche. She loves poetry because it shows we are capable of great depths of understanding, which inspires her to write her story. Kerrie Jamison is an insightful psychiatrist and poet, bringing a discerning eye to the Lane Cove poets and Live Poets at Don Bank, winning their Short Fiction Cup. Adrienne McClymont, a 10-year member of Lane Cove Poets, was a teacher of adults and young people and loved teaching poetry; she brings vast knowledge to the poetry group, captures the 'natural world in words' and always travels with a notebook. Graeme Payne, upon retirement from directorship, founded Lane Cove Poets in 2009 and has since been convenor, and is a master of rhyme. He was a former President of the Lane Cove Historical Society and has given many maritime history talks at the library.

**Catherine Briggs** (pictured on previous page) was a librarian, English teacher, and antique dealer. Now she edits student work, writes poetry and prose, and published Looking Back, Looking Forward during Covid. She is also a member of the Lane Cove Historical Society. Hae-Lyun Kang is a Korean Australian writer, artist and author living in Sydney. She has a BA from WSU and has been part of the poets' group at Lane Cove Library since 2018. Dr Rob Anderson is a scientist and works in consulting and education. He brings his considerable talent to writing children's books and poetry for children with nature photography. His photographs are seen at [www.smileatnature.com](http://www.smileatnature.com) Mitchell Stirzaker is a poet and philosopher based in Sydney. He seeks to express existential journeys and tensions, as well as visions of paths to harmony between people situated differently in the world, and between the human self and the more-than-human world.

Following the success of November's exhibition, the poetry group are now working towards publishing an anthology of their poetry in 2023.

The Lane Cove Poets-in-Residence and other Sydney poets will perform at the wonderful Carisbrook House in Lane Cove on Saturday 25 March at 6.30pm. This event, curated by the Lane Cove Historical Society and MCed by Irish poet Daragh Byrne, is a collaboration between two Lane Cove organisations supported by Lane Cove Council. Tickets are available at: [www.trybooking.com/1015498](http://www.trybooking.com/1015498)

## Aubade to home

*I wake up to a river of poetry in my head,  
see my currawong swing into the pine tree.  
I saw it knock feathers off a rainbow lorikeet yesterday and keep flying.  
I have only three weeks left in this house; I sit on my perfect balcony,  
just the birds and me — drinking Irish tea out of my favourite green bird cup, Owly.  
To sleep, to dream, to keep the dream in reach,  
to quote Kae Tempest riffing on old Shakespeare.  
I don't think I've woken up yet, even  
though I've had a whole lifetime to practise.  
Sun hits the pines, the currawong lets out a song. Crickets chirp up, thinking summer has come;  
they have another think coming — the rain will be back, and here to stay.  
Crickets don't want to know, start in stereo.  
A plane rumbles overhead, they're back again.  
Currawong zips in and snaps the loudest cricket in its beak — a moment's silence  
from its peers as they decide what to do. After a beat they carry on, seem  
to have learnt nothing from experience. Another plane passes high overhead,  
the river still runs. We keep repeating  
the stuff from before but the old world  
is gone, the whole earth on borrowed time, yet we keep moving.*

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