



# East Finchley's Gold Medal Poet

By Daphne Chamberlain

**On 7 June, Fleur Adcock took a taxi to Buckingham Palace. She was about to be awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. As she put it, "Suddenly this amazing thing had come whirling like a discus out of the sky."**

In 1996, Fleur had received an OBE for services to poetry, but this time her journey and the presentation were filmed for a television programme about the monarchy at work.

Unseen by the cameras was her 20-minute private audience with the Queen, when they chatted about New Zealand, Fleur's birthplace. After eight years in England during and immediately after the Second World War, when she attended 11 schools, she "very reluctantly" went back there, aged 13, returning here in 1963. With her five year-old son, Andrew, she moved briefly into Durham Road, then settled in Lincoln Road.

"There has always been a nice, friendly feeling here, with lots of families and young children," she says, "but there used to be more of what I call useful shops." Some of those shops, along with other pieces of East Finchley life, turn up in her poems.

Fleur was a founder member of the East Finchley Arts Festival committee, arranging the poetry programme and often reading her work. She writes about personal relationships, ecology and family history, as well as editing and translating anthologies. These include the Faber Book of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Women's Poets and The Virgin and the Nightingale (a collection of racy medieval Latin verses).

Fleur has also collaborated on a libretto and an opera, held several Fellowships and a writing residency, and works on poetry with teenagers in schools.



Fleur Adcock. Picture by John Dearing

The Queen's Gold Medal, chosen by a panel chaired by Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, recognises her collected work from 1960 to 2000. She is the 38<sup>th</sup> person to receive this award since 1934, the second New Zealander and the seventh woman, including her admired 1969 predecessor Stevie Smith.

The Gold Medal has aroused much interest in the land of her birth and she has been busy with interviews for New Zealand radio and magazines. Soon she will return there to visit her family. "This gold medal is so nice for my children and grandchildren," she says. "At last I've done something they can approve of!"

## Post Office

By Fleur Adcock

*The queue's right out through the glass doors to the street: Thursday, pension day. They built this Post office too small. Of course, the previous one was smaller - a tiny prefab, next to the betting-shop, says the man who's just arrived; and the present one, at which we're queuing, was cherry-trees in front of a church. The church was where the supermarket is: "My wife and I got married in that church" the man says. "We hold hands sometimes when we're standing waiting at the checkout - have a little moment together!" He laughs. The queue shuffles forward a step. Three members of it silently vow never to grow old in this suburb; one vows never to grow old at all. "I first met her over there" the man says, "on that corner where the bank is now. The other corner was Williams Brothers - remember Williams Brothers? They gave you tokens, tin money, like, for your dividend." The woman in front of him remembers. She nods, and swivels her loose lower denture, remembering Williams Brothers' metal tokens, and the marble slab on the cheese-counter, and the carved mahogany booth where you went to pay. The boy in front of her is chewing gum; his jaws rotate with the same motion as hers: to and fro, to and fro.*

"Post Office" is included in Fleur Adcock's "Poems, 1960 - 2000", published by Bloodaxe Books in 2000. ISBN 1-85224530-1.

## Clean up closed down

By Diana Cormack

An article in our May edition, *Clean Up Down Under*, suggested that an Australian scheme where councils give training, graffiti removal kits and personal safety equipment to volunteers to deal with the problem locally could be tried here.

Chairman John Hajdu contacted *THE ARCHER* to say that the Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association has run a similar scheme for over two years. Unimpressed by the local council's graffiti cleaning efforts at that time, they contacted Haringey and offered to help. After appropriate training and with kit, volunteers Bill Jago and Jack Whitehead set off twice weekly to remove not only offending graffiti but also the many out-of-date notices about lost pets or coming events.

However, new health and safety rules have ended their work, though local businesses are able to continue with graffiti busting activities supported by the council. Jack Whitehead spoke highly of the help they had received from Haringey and told *THE ARCHER* that he and Bill are still involved with keeping the neighbourhood clean. They now go round noting what needs to be done and putting the details weekly on the council's website.

"It will be cleaned off very

quickly," Jack said. "We can now cover a wider area and help to keep graffiti at a very low level."

John Hajdu told *THE ARCHER* that their scheme had worked extremely well and brought new members into the association. "We are very proud of what we have done and believe it to be unique in Haringey, if not the whole of north London," he said.

The Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association intends to monitor the efficiency of the council's graffiti removal services. If necessary they will ask for the situation to be reviewed in a couple of months.

At the time of writing *THE ARCHER* was waiting for a comment from Haringey Council.

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