



## *An Evening with the Author P. D. James*

Merril Lilley

P. D. JAMES (Baroness James of Holland Park) addressed an appreciative audience of her readers at the Junior Library on 28th May. After pointing out the subtle distinction between crime writing and detective fiction and commenting on the characteristics of some of the most famous fictional detectives, P. D. James gave the audience a fascinating insight into her own work.

For her the starting point for a novel had often been a particular feeling experienced in a suitable setting; on seeing boats on a quiet beach in Norfolk (*Devices and Desires*) or looking up at a tower in Dorset (*The Black Tower*) The long process of researching the background and of building up and getting to know the characters took much longer than the actual writing of the novel. It was for her a process of revelation rather than creation.

She regaled the audience with various anecdotes of the writing process, stressing the necessity of accuracy in detail, quoting from readers' letters, which flooded in whenever an error was made.

Speculating on the popularity of detective fiction, she said that readers like the familiar structure of the detective novel as well as the excitement, suspense and anticipation. They like a good story and the solving of a puzzle by human perseverance, intelligence and reasoning.

Afterwards Baroness James answered questions and signed copies of her books. A very successful evening and an excellent choice of venue for the event Δ

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## *Spring:* ONE-OFF GALLERY EXHIBITION

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Leo Wright

The 'One-Off' Gallery in Castle Street timed another of its interesting exhibitions to chime with the Arts Festival: this one featured some dozen East Kent artists.

There were water-colours and oils, large and small, and, full of character, the hand-tinted etchings by Michael Baker. These mostly showed interest in people and situations, some reminiscent of George Cruikshank's. There were many local subjects: Dover, Canterbury, St. Margaret's, Folkestone, several of which succeeded in that difficult artistic aim: *faire quelque chose de rien*.

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In exotic contrast were Tim Showan's light effect in a French garden and Gloria Dean's Venice spectaculars: one red and one blue.

On a day warm enough for summer it was a special pleasure to see the flower paintings by Jean Jones and Jennifer Tyler.

Jean and her husband were well represented. We shall surely see more of his work in their next exhibition: 'Architects as Artists'. Most of his pictures this time were not architectural and showed considerable variety of interest and subject. There were some of Jean's delightful studies of beach scenes against the light which she has been favouring and there was another "Palm House at Kew".

Different visitors will remember different pictures but there was something for all tastes and a high standard at very modest prices. Try pricing similar paintings in London.

## *A Creative Writing Workshop*

with RUTH ELWIN HARRIS

Merril Lilley

During Festival week Ruth Elwin Harris stayed at Dover College as writer-in-residence, helping pupils with their writing. She also visited St. Margaret's Primary School for one day. On the Thursday (19th May) she gave a talk on "The use of original sources in writing" and on the Thursday (21st May) held a writer's workshop at the school. Unfortunately both events were poorly attended, which was a great pity as they were of great interest.

Ruth Elwin Harris has written a series of historical novels for teenagers, the Quantocks series, four novels about four sisters at the time of the First World War, a book for each sister. The first novel is called "The Silent Shore". While researching for one of these novels, the author found, in the Imperial War Museum, a collection of 201 letters by an old Dover College pupil, written from France in 1916. This discovery led to the publication of her latest book, "Billie", based on the collection of his letters.

The evenings with Ruth Elwin Harris were of interest and value to writers, historians or researchers, as they led to fascinating discussions of the uses of old registers, newspapers, magazines, catalogues, autobiographies, wills and correspondence and stressed the importance of visits to museums, libraries and record offices. They also included reflections on the publishing of MSS and the problems encountered by writers in finding a publisher for a first novel. One wished that Mrs. Harris might have had larger audiences to enjoy the discussions.

