

# WORD FROM THE CLOISTERS

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## What a bloke!

THE SHOESTRING Press has just published a small but sprightly collection of poems, *Here At The Door* (the title comes from a line of John Donne: "I tune the instrument here at the door") by Michael Alexander, who patiently steers slower learners around the potholes of Eliot's *The Waste Land* in this week's issue.

Alexander is probably the only person in the world, except perhaps for Seamus Heaney, who can say that his Old English verse translations have sold more than a million copies. They have been singled out by Kenneth Clark, W.H. Auden, Donald Davie, Ted Hughes and Heaney himself, among others. He tells us his interest in the world of the Anglo-Saxons was aroused as a schoolboy. "My Downside education alerted me to the role of St Gregory in making England a Christian country. This opened up this earlier English world." He realised with a shock when he got to Oxford that his tutors were intellectually and culturally inferior to his teachers at Downside.

Alexander got into translating when a teacher at Worth prep school, Peter Whigham, a poet himself, commissioned him, after he had scraped into Oxford but before he had begun



there, to try to translate a selection of the best short Old English poems into verse. "Whigham gave me £100, quite a sum of money then. A crazily generous thing, to help a young writer, though he had little money himself."

Alexander sent the first poem he had translated, "The Ruin", to Penguin Books, and the editor of Penguin Classics, E.V. Rieu, commissioned him to produce *The Earliest English Poems*. Then he was persuaded to translate *Beowulf*: "A frightening prospect to a translator who was not an academic – so many scholarly and linguistic problems. Took me five years." And Alexander left his job in publishing to

become an English lecturer. *Here At The Door* includes a 15-line, three-stanza reduction of *Beowulf*, which ends:

Much later a Dragon awoke,  
Sent Beowulf's hall up in smoke,  
So his fifty not-out  
Was all up the spout.  
But he killed it, then died. What a bloke!

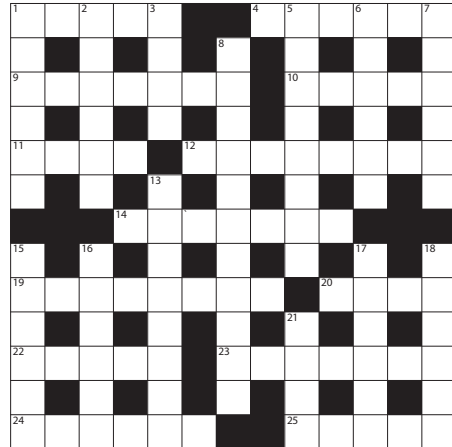
A FRENCH Religious sister recently celebrated her birthday in convivial surroundings with a traditional cocktail of port with dark chocolate. She received a handwritten greeting from President Emmanuel Macron among the many letters and boxes of chocolates sent by well-wishers. She was 118 and, following the death last week of a Japanese woman one year her senior, is now the oldest person in the world.

Lucile Randon, known as Sister André, was born into a non-practising Protestant family in southern France on 11 February 1904. She became a governess to three children in Marseille at the age of 12 during the First World War. She worked as a teacher before taking her religious vows with the Daughters of Charity. She has lived in nursing homes for 40 years, the last ten in Toulon.

"I'm thinking of getting out of this business but they won't let me," she told well-wishers.

## PUZZLES

### PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 803 Alanus



#### Across

- 1 From Shanghai far port of call for Mount Carmel (5)
- 4 Short travellers' saint on motorway with holy oil (6)
- 9 Short Oriental reforms the son of Noah inside hospital (7)
- 10 Approve wine from Hungary after time (5)
- 11 See 17 Down
- 12 Nocturnally wakeful type may be barn type (5,3)
- 14 Merciful pope who annoyed Henry VIII (7)
- 19 Sunday worship with no basses in the choir? (4,4)
- 20 Eyeless in Huxley novel where Samson mill worker (4)
- 22 Spinning wheel association for me and team atop condemned mythical king (5)

- 23 Overpay them for their shared feelings (7)
- 24 Revelation of exiled Apostle written in deep atmospheric place (6)
- 25 Danes redesigned chair for pope (5)

#### Down

- 1 Greeting card when aircraft is seized in flight (6)
- 2 A politician depicted in the manner of French antelope (6)
- 3 Imitate cross at the highest level (4)
- 5 Preparing plot for when the eggs crack? (8)
- 6 Can be o.k. sharing pint with pen supplier (6)
- 7 Insect of the month for a day or two (6)
- 8 Organised singers overcome their director (11)
- 13 On fire with love for the bird (8)

- 15 Little person living on coastal seabed? (6)
- 16 It goes to show how selfish and conceited one is (6)
- 17 (& 11 Across): Prodigal's return prompts show of muscle by corpulent Edward (6,4)
- 18 Tree embargo externally but aught permitted inside (6)
- 21 Work of God in everyday life organisation (4)

**Correction:** A production error in last week's Tablet resulted in an incorrect solution being given for crossword no. 799. The correct answer to 17 down should have been Trolls.

Please send your answers to: Crossword Competition 30 April The Tablet, 1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0GY. Email: thetablet@thetablet.co.uk, with Crossword in the subject field. Please include your full name, telephone number and email address, and a mailing address. Three books – on Jesus, Christian Art and Catholicism – from the OUP's Very Short Introduction series will go to the sender of the first correct entry drawn at random. **■ We are processing entries but there may be a delay in notifying winners and sending out prizes. Please keep entering.**

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### SUDOKU | Hard

6	1		8	5		9	4
4			6				3
		8			2		
7			9	4			5
	4					7	
9			6	7			8
		4			5		
1				4			9
5	3		2		8		4

Each 3x3 box, each row and each column must contain all the numbers 1 to 9.

#### Solution to the 9 April puzzle

1	6	2	7	3	4	8	9	5
7	4	8	2	9	5	6	1	3
9	3	5	1	6	8	7	2	4
2	5	9	3	1	7	4	6	8
3	7	4	9	8	6	1	5	2
6	8	1	4	5	2	9	3	7
4	9	6	8	2	3	5	7	1
5	2	7	6	4	1	3	8	9
8	1	3	5	7	9	2	4	6

#### Solution to the 9 April crossword No. 800

- Across:** 1 Dönitz 5 Matin 8 Alpha 9 Langton 10 Ordo 11 Nazarene 13 Eamon 14 Duffy 19 Orthodox 21 Holy 23 Arizona 24 Roman 25 Abela 26 Yemeni.  
**Down:** 2 Of Padua 3 Iraq 4 Zoltan 5 Mandatum 6 Tithe 7 Nantes 8 Azov 12 Dolorosa 15 Footman 16 Sonata 17 Kodály 18 Syon 20 Taizé 22 Prom.