

# East Coker Poetry Group

Quarterly newsletter – Issue 3 – August 2005

## A Work of Art?

Dawn Lawrence, member of the East Coker Poetry Group

A little wood, a little hill, and there upon its crown  
A little house with gables, with a hipped roof sloping down:  
A wooden frame with wooden beams runs all along its length,  
Which gives it certain beauty as well as adding strength.  
Roots of trees in doorposts, hinged doors thick and wide,  
Gnarled and twisted timbers, once the yeoman's pride.

I found it unexpectedly just as the daylight broke:  
It stood before me, silver-grey, in old and weathered oak.  
No matter that the roof looked out on muddy yard and ditch,  
It had that spice of piquancy - that all important pitch.  
How cosy, like a blanket, the sloping roof of thatch,  
Which spoke so much of comfort: how I longed to lift the latch!

Each lattice has become a nest - a little hole to peep -  
Where sparrows chatter in the eaves that never seem to sleep:  
There's a rambling crooked chimney that hugs the outside wall,  
And inside there's an ingle-nook, and window, oh, so small.  
There's curvatures and twists and turns, and not a level space,  
Yet oddities give character to such a lived-in place.

How beautiful the glazing each set with diamond pane,  
Leaded lights of colour, and never one the same.  
A Tudor arch oak doorway with hinge and lifting latch,  
The keyhole and the knocker so finely wrought to match:  
A little house so dearly won grown from the humble soil,  
Once trimmed and clipped so carefully, and worked by honest  
toil.

Such rustic charm in modern times seems half a world apart,  
And yet I hesitate to say 'here stands a work of art':  
For someone took some mud, some wood, a mix of thatch and  
stone,  
Nature added rain and sun: and it became *a home*.

## Forthcoming events

At 7.30pm, The Helyar  
Arms, East Coker

Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> August:  
"The Alchemist" with  
Sean O'Leary, based on  
musical adaptations of  
Gerard Manley Hopkins  
(see page 3), plus a light-  
hearted poetry quiz.

## Next issue

The next issue of the  
poetry group newsletter will  
come out in November.  
Please forward poems for  
publication to the East  
Coker Poetry Group, Tellis  
Farm, East Coker, Yeovil,  
Somerset BA22 9JP, to  
arrive by Friday 4<sup>th</sup> August  
– all will be included.

## Poetry Parodies and Puzzles

Anne Bingley's evening of Poetry, Parodies and Puzzles on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> July, was much appreciated by the 30 or so of us who gathered to hear her selection, read by Anne, David Cloke and Richard Vickers.

Anne had uncovered a wealth of material from ancient and modern sources: some amusing, some sad, some challenging, and some silly - all of it very entertaining.

One of the most popular items of the evening was this alternative to Longfellow:

### The Modern Hiawatha

George A Strong

He killed the noble Mudjokivis.  
Of the skin he made him mittens,  
Made them with the fur side inside,  
Made them with the skin side outside.  
He, to get the warm side inside,  
Put the inside skin side outside.  
He, to get the cold side outside,  
Put the warm side fur side inside.  
That's why he put the fur side inside,  
Why he put the skin side outside,  
Why he turned them inside outside.

These are a couple of parodies that didn't make it into Anne's selection, but are great fun ...

### Buckingham Palace

AA Milne

They're changing guard at Buckingham  
Palace --  
Christopher Robin went down with Alice.  
Alice is marrying one of the guard.  
"A soldier's life is terrible hard,"  
Says Alice .... *and so on*

### Let's All Go Mad

Christopher Matthew

"They're changing sex at Buckingham  
Palace!"  
Murgatroyd mutters with undisguised malice.  
"Roger is marrying one of the guard -  
Bugger whose bearskin reeks of pomade,  
Called Alice."

"They're a goal or two short of a chukka at  
Highgrove!"  
Gutteridge growls and gesticulates. "By  
Jove!  
There's luvvies and duvvies and comics  
galore;  
They say Stephen Fry had to sleep on the  
floor  
In an alcove."

"They're out of their trees in the Lord's  
Pavilion,"  
Somerville splutters, his face vermilion.  
The Long Room has been irrevocably lost;  
It's a loo now, for ladies, and what's more, it  
cost  
A million."

*From Now We Are Sixty*

### Fatigue

Hilaire Belloc

I'm tired of love: I'm still more tired of rhyme.  
But money gives me pleasure all the time.

### Variation on Belloc's Fatigue

Wendy Cope

I hardly ever tire of love or rhyme -  
That's why I'm poor and have a rotten time.

## The Alchemist

On 31<sup>st</sup> August, Sean O'Leary will be introducing us to the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins set to music, with backing vocals provided by Belinda Evans, the talented young local soprano. The work has been made into a 2 CD set, which is on sale for £16 (copies available on the night).

Here is a reminder of the poet's work:

### The Alchemist in the City

Gerard Manley Hopkins

My window shows the travelling clouds.  
Leaves spent, new seasons, alter'd sky,  
The making and the melting crowds:  
The whole world passes; I stand by.

They do not waste their meted hours,  
But men and masters plan and build:  
I see the crowning of their towers,  
And happy promises fulfill'd.

And I — perhaps if my intent  
Could count on prediluvian age.  
The labours I should then have spent  
Might so attain their heritage,

But now before the pot can glow  
With not to be discover'd gold,  
At length the bellows shall not blow,  
The furnace shall at last be cold.

Yet it is now too late to heal  
The incapable and cumbrous shame  
Which makes me when with men I deal  
More powerless than the blind or lame.

No, I should love the city less  
Even than this my thankless lore;  
But I desire the wilderness  
Or weeded landslips of the shore.

I walk my breezy belvedere  
To watch the low or levant sun,  
I see the city pigeons veer,  
I mark the tower swallows run

Between the tower-top and the ground  
Below me in the bearing air;  
Then find in the horizon-round  
One spot and hunger to be there.

And then I hate the most that lore  
That holds no promise of success;  
Then sweetest seems the houseless shore.  
Then free and kind the wilderness.

Or ancient mounds that cover bones,  
Or rocks where rockdoves do repair  
And trees of terebinth and stones  
And silence and a gulf of air.

There on a long and squared height  
After the sunset I would lie,  
And pierce the yellow waxen light  
With free long looking, ere I die.

## Still plenty of time to enter the annual poetry writing competition

Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2005 is National Poetry Day, organised by the Poetry Society.

To celebrate, East Coker Poetry Group is running a competition to find a new "East Coker". The village found fame as one of Eliot's Four Quartets and since then it has proved the inspiration for other amateur and professional writers. Now it's the turn of residents, neighbours, visitors and friends of the village to put pen to paper.

The competition is open to everyone, with a first prize for over 18s of a meal for two at the Helyar Arms, and books and book tokens for younger entrants. The winning poems will feature on the poetry group website and a selection of the entries will be published as a booklist.

The closing date is Friday September 23<sup>rd</sup> and the winners will be announced on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> October to coincide with the national event. For more information visit [www.eastcokerpoetry.org.uk](http://www.eastcokerpoetry.org.uk) or call Sue McKerracher on 01935 863633.

Last year's winning entry:

### Passion fruit for Mrs McGrath

Catherine Simmonds

See it in its shrunken skin, paper light  
As something kept in a pocket over long  
Or an old golf ball lain fifty years in a river  
bed.

Must be some mistake. This, a fruit we must  
taste?

But here she comes, her tools: tea spoon  
and knife

And we sit, expectant as a nest of young  
birds.

The skin may be a dulled shell, but inside is  
red

As a Chinese lantern and seeds, each  
wrapped tight

As a boiled sweet in their glossy yellows.

So our gassy, chalky school room is cut  
through

With a sharp smell like mown grass, melons,  
Apples fizzing in a hot sun and sherbet.

Out come the seeds, one by one, onto the  
bright spoon,

And out come the giggling, timid tongues,  
faces ready

To screw up and protest at the tart,  
fascinating newness of the world.