

East Coker Poetry Group

Newsletter February 2006

Forthcoming meetings - all at 7.30pm, The Helyar Arms, East Coker

Tuesday 21st February 'Humour is a funny thing'

Presented by John Darling and John Burgess. Should be great fun.

Tuesday 21st March 'A Quartet'

Dawn Lawrence, Diana Turton, Roger Burt and Joyce Best present their personal selection of poetry.

Wednesday 26th April 'Japanese Poetry'

The mysteries of poetic forms such as Haiku, explored by Catherine Simmonds.

The Skittle ally. Following the successful use of the skittle ally for our last two meetings it is hoped to use the skittle ally for all future meetings held at the Helyar Arms. The acoustics are good and without the general 'bar chatter' in the background.

The Helyar Arms allows us to use the skittle ally without charge and has been very helpful to the poetry group in many ways. We can support them too – why not come to our meeting in good time and get a drink at the bar before we start, or even stop for a meal after the meeting. If you wish to book a table, call them on 01935 862332.

Poetry enthusiast **Anne Bingley** found another item in the national press that is of interest to the group. The Financial Times carried an interview with **Ted Kooser** who is the present US poet laureate. He makes some good points and some contentious ones (particularly in East Coker), as the work of poets such as T.S. Eliot, he feels, fuelled the notion that a poem's impenetrability is a sign of its quality. "I frankly don't believe readers should be expected to learn something in order to understand a poem." He sees his role as being "a kind of public relations specialist for poetry." His poetry often deals with closely observed moments of daily life, "material for poetry is all around us. Ordinary objects are made special by drawing attention to them." He has just been awarded a Pulitzer prize for his 10th book of poems, *Delights and Shadows*, written after recovering from cancer. "You become very alert to the details of life. You spend your time noticing things"

I shall certainly look out for his work.

At our Christmas meeting **Jane Williams** from Wells handed me a leaflet about the Poetry readings held at the **Café Piano** in Sadler Street, Wells. This is a much more open type of poetry reading where poets are encouraged to bring their own poetry to 'read on the night' or just listen to others reading their poems. Their next meeting is on Monday February 13th, 7.45 – 9.30pm.

‘Slam poetry’ is on the march, according to Richard Morrison writing in the Sunday Times. Slam poetry is performance poetry – where the poets or ‘spoken word artists’ perform (recite is too feeble a word) from memory with the panache of a Bronx hip-hopper. He notes that spoken poetry is experiencing a resurgence, to such an extent that there is now a £ 10,000 Arts Foundation fellowship available. So give up buying that lottery ticket – start practising your slam poetry now!

Poems Poems Poems

The Adults of the War

Thoughts evoked by Joyce Best’s poem “The Children of the War”

By “Senex” (We will all have to guess who ‘Senex’ is. – ed.)

We joined the Army. RAF and went to sea,
Were ATS, and WRAC and WAAF and Wrens;
We did hush-hush work with Omega,
Nursed and pushed our Government pens.

Women drove ambulances and trucks
Took them to bits to understand
Their works; and as Land Army girls
In breeches to farm the land.

Dad joined Dad’s Army, to do his bit,
Mum made do and mended all she could
To stretch the weekly rations out
To clothe and feed her hungry brood.

With whistling deaf aids, walking frames
Bodily bent with snowy hair.
And panic buttons round our necks,
We survive the days with Social Care.

With clapped out bodies, broken minds,
Inwardly we are still the folk
Who fought, imprisoned, maimed, yet strove
To rid the world of Hitler’s yoke.

Only our badger-grey children know the score
How we were the adults of the war.

Old Mill

By Dawn Lawrence

The landmark haunts me, gaunt and grim,
How like a prison it now seems,
Locked in secrets, grey with sleep,
Lonely, weather-stained with dreams:
Here the great stones ground the gold,
The white dust whirled from dawn to dusk;
Now once again the mill wheel turns,
My thoughts are thrown in with the husk.

The world forgets the millstones' grind,
The secrets where the corn was fed,
The world forgets the joy, the pain,
That slowly ground the dreams to bread:
The sounds and sights go rushing by,
The whispered voices sigh and moan,
The heavy iron sings and snarls,
The heavy timbers creak and groan.

And then a sudden tremor breaks,
To leave a strange excited feel,
I see the water churn below,
That flies and foams beneath the wheel:
What magic in the waters glance
Connects it to the wheel it's in?
A bright star shivers in its depths,
As earth and sky begin to spin.

Half conscious now, I stand and stare,
And try to calm my restless mind,
I seem to hear the miller's voice,
The song that made his daily grind:
Dark shadows cling, far echoes call,
My whereabouts I cannot trace,
And as I stand, I ask myself-
'What is the magic of this place?'

Nativity

By Sally Jackson

It happened so quickly,
It seemed like a dream
She was dazed and bewildered, couldn't
explain
How the ethereal young man
Had come out of the blue

When they found she was pregnant
They searched for a man
Who would make her accepted and cover her
shame.
He needed a wife;
And hoped for a son,
He was touched by her beauty
And her innocent youth.

The place of his forebears
When census time came
Was all in a turmoil,
No rooms to be found.
"Move in with the cattle" they jokingly said.

There he made her a bed out of sweet-smelling
hay,
For she was already in labour.
No woman to attend.
So he did what he could in this desperate plight.

"What wretch could have done this –
Caused all this pain and distress?"
He murmured in anger,
As she lay back exhausted, the babe at her
breast.

The cattle were silent, the pair fell asleep.
While he stood patiently watching
And savoured the peace.
Thinking,
"What man could have begotten such a scrap of
a boy?"

The moon found an opening and lit up the
scene
With luminous rays
Of brilliant light.
He stared in amazement then cried out aloud:-
"Who is the father of this radiant child?"

Elms

By Iona Lamb

The row of elms have had their tops defined,
As in a sketch, each upmost twig outlined
With a richer pencil, here and here,
And here, all along the line.
Each bud pregnant with the hope of spring,
And knowing it will come, in time, in time.

For most of us, the age of the typewriter has passed and we now use the 'word-processor' on our computer. The temptation to skim on the proof reading is always present as most PCs have a 'spell checker'. Here is a version of an anonymous poem that was being prepared for publication in a parish magazine by a colleague, who thought it rather amusing.

Spelling Checkers

Anon

Eye halve a spelling chequer
It came with my pea sea
It plainly marques four my revue
Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.

Eye strike a key and type a word
And weight four it two say
Weather eye am wrong oar write
Itch owes me straight a weigh.

As soon as a mist ache is maid
It nose bee fore two long
And eye can put the error write
Its rare lea ever wrong.

Eye have run this poem threw it
I am shore your pleased two no
Its letter perfect all the weigh
My chequer tolled me sew.

Material for the next newsletter should be sent to:-

David Cloke, Church Cottage, Burton Cross, East Coker, Yeovil. BA22 9LY

Tel. 01935 862623

or Joyce Best 01935 862317

Our group website is www.eastcokerpoetry.org.uk