#### **Trees**

### Poetry Meeting held on 11th April 2023

We begin with WINDSONG by Judith Nicholls - read by Irene

I am the seed
that grew the tree
that gave the wood
to make the page
to fill the book
with Poetry



Lodgepole Pine

#### **Lin** and **Jeanette** chose this poem

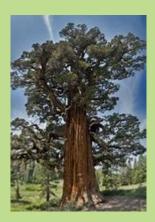
Trees by Joyce Kilmer (1886-1918 American poet killed while fighting in WW1)

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

#### **Fiona** chose Trees by Helen B Cruikshank

The parson's voice droned word on word I did not hear for sorrow dulled my ears. I dropped the cord within your grave and blurred Black figures wavered through my smarting tears. "Oh I shall faint," I thought, and on the tree That grows beside your grave I put my hand. My grief the plane tree seemed to understand, So much it comforted and steadied me. I'm glad you have those trees so near your mound (Plane trees in front of you and pines behind); For you loved trees. At night time by the sound The wind made in their leaves you knew their kind. You will not feel so lonely where you lie If you can hear the pattering of rain On smooth, broad leaves, and say "That is a plane," Or, "Surely those are pines that sough and sigh."

#### **Dorothy** read In the Fields by Charlotte Mew



Under old trees the shadow of young leaves
Dancing to please the wind along the grass,
Or the gold stillness of the August sun on the August sheaves;
Can I believe there is a heavenlier world than this?
And if there is
Will the heart of any everlasting thing
Bring me these dreams that take my breath away?
They come at evening with the home-flying rooks and the scent of hay,

Lord when I look at lovely things which pass,

Over the fields. They come in spring.

The poet laureate, Simon Armitage, has written a new poem which pays homage to spring, for World Poetry Day. 'Plum Tree Among the Skyscrapers' is the first in a collection of poems inspired by blossom and commissioned by the National Trust. The charity will vow to bring blossom back to landscapes across the UK by planting 20m trees by 2030 to help tackle both the climate and nature crises.

The poem was read by Linna

#### Plum Tree Among the Skyscrapers

by Simon Armitage

She's travelled for years through tangled forests and formal gardens, edged along hedgerows, set up her stall on tenanted farms then moved on, restless, empty handed sometimes, sometimes with fruit in her arms. She's hopscotched through graveyards and parks, settled down in allotments, clung to a church roof by a toe. She's pitched camp on verges and hard shoulders. stumbled on threadbare moors above the tree-line and slummed it on wasteland, but dug in on steep hillsides and rough ground. She was Queen of the May on a roundabout once in a roundabout way. She's piggy-backed across trading estates, hitched in a mistle thrush beak, drifted with thistledown. She's thumbed a lift into town. Now here she is. in a cracked slab in a city square in a square mile mirrored by glass and steel,

dwarfed by money and fancy talk. Hand-me-down brush, pre-loved broom, to the paid-by-the-minute suits and umbrellas and lunchtime shoppers she's a poor Cinderella rootling about in a potting compost of burger boxes and popped poppers. In that world, orchard and orphan are one and the same. But she's here to stay plum in the middle and today she's fizzing with light and colour, outshining the smug sculptures and blubbering fountains. Scented and powdered she's staging a one-tree show with hi-viz blossoms and lip-gloss petals; she'll season the pavements and polished stones with something like snow.



## Congratulations to **Valerie** who chose three poems and recited them from memory



#### I Remember, I Remember

by Thomas Hood
I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn;
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day,
But now, I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away!

I remember, I remember,
The roses, red and white,
The vi'lets, and the lily-cups,
Those flowers made of light!
The lilacs where the robin built,
And where my brother set
The laburnum on his birthday,—
The tree is living yet!

I remember, I remember,
Where I was used to swing,
And thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing;
My spirit flew in feathers then,
That is so heavy now,
And summer pools could hardly cool
The fever on my brow!

I remember, I remember,
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heav'n
Than when I was a boy.

## Autumn Morning in Cambridge by Frances Cornford (1886-1960)

I RAN out in the morning, when the air was clean and new,
And all the grass was glittering and grey with autumn dew,
I ran out to the apple tree and pulled an apple down,
And all the bells were ringing in the old grey town.
Down in the town, off the bridges and the grass
They are sweeping up the leaves to let the people pass,
Sweeping up the old leaves, golden-reds and browns,
While the men go to lecture with the wind in their gowns.

The Seed Shop by Muriel Stuart (1885-1967 the daughter of a Scottish barrister)

HERE in a quiet and dusty room they lie,
Faded as crumbled stone and shifting sand,
Forlorn as ashes, shrivelled, scentless, dry Meadows and gardens running through my hand.

Dead that shall quicken at the voice of spring, Sleepers to wake beneath June's tempest kiss; Though birds pass over, unremembering, And no bee find here roses that were his.

In this brown husk a dale of hawthorn dreams; A cedar in this narrow cell is thrust That shall drink deeply at a century's streams; These lilies shall make summer on my dust.

Here in their safe and simple house of death, Sealed in their shells, a million roses leap; Here I can stir a garden with my breath, And in my hand a forest lies asleep.

#### Fiona read this unusual poem

#### Christmas Trees by Robert Frost

The city had withdrawn into itself And left at last the country to the country; When between whirls of snow not come to lie And whirls of foliage not yet laid, there drove A stranger to our yard, who looked the city, Yet did in country fashion in that there He sat and waited till he drew us out A-buttoning coats to ask him who he was. He proved to be the city come again To look for something it had left behind And could not do without and keep its Christmas. He asked if I would sell my Christmas trees; My woods—the young fir balsams like a place Where houses all are churches and have spires. I hadn't thought of them as Christmas Trees. I doubt if I was tempted for a moment To sell them off their feet to go in cars And leave the slope behind the house all bare, Where the sun shines now no warmer than the moon. I'd hate to have them know it if I was. Yet more I'd hate to hold my trees except As others hold theirs or refuse for them, Beyond the time of profitable growth, The trial by market everything must come to. I dallied so much with the thought of selling. Then whether from mistaken courtesy And fear of seeming short of speech, or whether From hope of hearing good of what was mine, I said, "There aren't enough to be worth while." "I could soon tell how many they would cut, You let me look them over."

"You could look.

But don't expect I'm going to let you have them."

Pasture they spring in, some in clumps too close
That lop each other of boughs, but not a few
Quite solitary and having equal boughs
All round and round. The latter he nodded "Yes" to,
Or paused to say beneath some lovelier one,
With a buyer's moderation, "That would do."
I thought so too, but wasn't there to say so.
We climbed the pasture on the south, crossed over,
And came down on the north.
He said, "A thousand."

"A thousand Christmas trees!—at what apiece?"

He felt some need of softening that to me:
"A thousand trees would come to thirty dollars."

Then I was certain I had never meant To let him have them. Never show surprise! But thirty dollars seemed so small beside The extent of pasture I should strip, three cents (For that was all they figured out apiece), Three cents so small beside the dollar friends I should be writing to within the hour Would pay in cities for good trees like those, Regular vestry-trees whole Sunday Schools Could hang enough on to pick off enough. A thousand Christmas trees I didn't know I had! Worth three cents more to give away than sell, As may be shown by a simple calculation. Too bad I couldn't lay one in a letter. I can't help wishing I could send you one, In wishing you herewith a Merry Christmas.



**Irene** chose the same poet

#### The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both And be one traveler, long I stood And looked down one as far as I could To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better claim, Because it was grassy and wanted wear; Though as for that the passing there Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black. Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.

#### Jeanette read the next two poems

#### Poison Tree by William Blake

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears

Night and morning with my tears,

And I sunned it with smiles

And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright,
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,--

And into my garden stole
When the night had veiled the pole;
In the morning, glad, I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

# Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening by Robert Frost



Whose woods these are I think I know. His house is in the village though; He will not see me stopping here To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake To ask if there is some mistake. The only other sound's the sweep Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

#### Two poems about the Alder Tree, which I chose

#### Planting the Alder by Seamus Heaney

For the bark, dulled argent, roundly wrapped And pigeon-collared.

For the splitter-splatter, guttering Rain-flirt leaves.

For the snub and clot of the first green cones, Smelted emerald, chlorophyll.

For the scut and scat of cones in winter, So rattle-skinned, so fossil-brittle.

For the alder wood, flame-red when torn Branch from branch.

But mostle for the swinging locks Of yellow catkins.

Plant it, plant it, Streel-head in the rain.

#### Alder by Kathleen Jamie

Are you weary, alder tree, in this, the age of rain? From your branches droop clots of lichen like fairy lungs. All week, squalls, tattered mists: alder, who unfolded before the receding glaciers first one leaf then another, won't you teach me a way to live on this damp ambiguous earth? The rain showers release from you a broken tune but when the sun blinks, as it must, how you'll sparklelike a fountain in a wood of untold fountains.

This is Barbara's own composition

#### The Storm

It stood alone, stark against the leaden sky, The ravages of storm and gale Marked on its now torn and broken limbs. The neighbouring copse laid low Awaits the saw and woodman's harvesting.

Despair could mark the work of tempest such as this But life goes on regardless.

Where once stood mighty oak and copse New shoots from cleared ground emerge Proclaiming life amid the desolation.

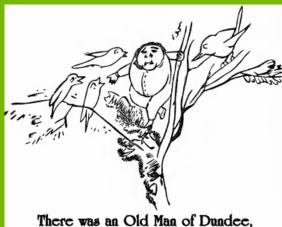
A time will come when children's shouts Will once again be heard Amongst the stout and sturdy branches, Drowning out the present cries of anguish At Nature's seeming heartlessness.



#### Barbara also read

Hear This by Marchant Barron, a young poet whose poems 'Conversations with Trees' were featured among the trees of the Silk Wood Trail at Westonbirt National Arboretum.

Listen, the woods are full of knotted words that twine the trunks and twist within the leaves. Wood seals the blood on blistered bark that seeps beneath. The winded words unfold; leaves drop and burrow deep and damp, intent to hide. The voices rot and sing their requiem, through chandeliers of broken rain, which fall on trees that hear our words when we are lost.



There was an Old Man of Dundee,
Who frequented the top of a tree;
When disturbed by the Crows,
he abruptly arose,
And exclaimed, "I'll return to Dundee!"

This poem was written by **Barbara's cousin**Thelma Faber

The Cowman and the Square Tree

Twice a day he walks the field, for his health he now keeps walking, fields where once he was the cowman, stops, if stopped, is pleased by talking.

Talks of little incidents that illustrate the fuss and folly office workers, council men, make of the unnecessary.

With a smile he tells the tale of how they told him he must cut his tree down, as it blocked the view of the school sign they'd put there.

He had trained the shape of that tree to stand square-topped upon its feet.

People noticed it - it was a feature of the village street.

'No', said everyone, you mustn't, we must not lose our square tree. The sign must go, you must move that'. He tells the tale with quiet glee.

So they sent out three men one morning 'Had to dig the sign up, see, moved it only two foot sideways, took 'em until half past three'.

Then he goes his way, still chuckling, careful steps, but undeterred, his life led to his own timetable, just as he once milked the herd.

..... and here is Lin's own spine-tingling poem

#### Obsession

I saw a tree today,
I longed to paint it
But knew myself unequal to the task.

I saw a tree today, Writhing upward out of the looming mists of wet evening. It stepped, Giant bold beside my path.

I saw a tree today,
I longed to paint it
In shades of grey and black, rain and night.

I saw a tree today,
I longed to capture it
But knew myself unequal to the task.

I saw a tree today, In spirit It possessed me.

I saw a giant today, Gaunt arms outstretched to gather the night. Twisted and hunchback, Head hooded, tattered cloak bunched round Against this dreich October six o'clock.

I saw a fearful ghoul today, Striding through the rain. It stalked sinister beside my path, Bony fingers splayed to the oncoming dark.

I saw today,
A bony shadow of overimaginative fear,
In the dark, primitive recesses of winter night.

I saw a tree today,
Writhing upward out of the looming dark
Of a wet October evening.

I saw a tree today, And knew myself obsessed. My own choice is in sharp contrast......

The Kindness of Trees by Jackie Kay

Deep in the forest there stood

A tree whose heart beat in the winter wood
Who understood everything that was bad
And everything that was good.

It extended long arms to woo you As the winter wind blew and blew And everything a child could think, The tree already knew.

And every time a boy was sad, The tree dropped a pine. And every time a girl got mad, The tree roared in the wind.

In the dead mid-winter night,
The tree blew a hello, goodbye;
When every child was asleep in bed,
The tree sang a lullaby.

And when Christmas time came round The tree's song soared and soared. And when gifts adorned the ground, The tree blushed, made a ssh sound.

And people gathered round the tree:
To sing the winter song, in harmony;
One to keep the bright light glowing,
A song for what we know without knowing.

It had a sad and piercing melody -A worry for the ash, sparrow, bee. The polar bear, the ice melting. A worry for you, me, dear tree.

In the depths of the winter wood,
The friendly tree stood, kind and good,
And breathes a word that caught the mood:
A pledge, a promise, a plea for good.

#### Two more poems read by Linna

#### The Rose Tree by W B Yeats

'O WORDS are lightly spoken,' Said Pearse to Connolly, 'Maybe a breath of politic words Has withered our Rose Tree; Or maybe but a wind that blows Across the bitter sea.' "It needs to be but watered," James Connolly replied, "To make the green come out again And spread on every side, And shake the blossom from the bud To be the garden's pride.' "But where can we draw water,' Said Pearse to Connolly, "When all the wells are parched away? O plain as plain can be There's nothing but our own red blood Can make a right Rose Tree.'

Wild Geese by Mary Oliver (American poet 1935-2019)

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert repenting. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine. Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes,

over the prairies and the deep trees,

the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

A last poem chosen by Irene

## Loveliest of Trees by A E Houseman

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now Is hung with bloom along the bough, And stands about the woodland ride Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

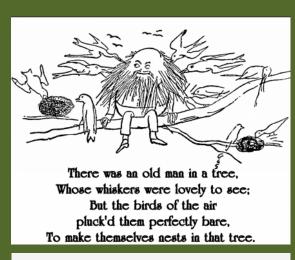
And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

Other poems read by Dorothy and Thelma were old favourites which have appeared before.

A Birthday by Christina Rossetti

Sea Fever by John Masefield

Upon Westminster Bridge by William Wordsworth



Thank you to Edward Lear who snuck in twice