

New Poem Commissioned to Welcome the Trafalgar Square Christmas Tree!

Three London schoolchildren will read a specially commissioned poem at the Trafalgar Square Christmas Tree lighting ceremony on 5th December



Photo: Hayley Madden for the Poetry Society

In one of London's favourite traditions, the **Poetry Society** and the **Royal Norwegian Embassy** will once again collaborate to wrap the Trafalgar Square Christmas tree in poetry, to celebrate the City of Oslo's annual gift to London. This year's poem is entitled '**Decorating the Tree**'. The poem will be read at the official lighting up ceremony by three children from **St Peter's Eaton Square CE Primary School**, London Borough of Westminster, at 6pm on Thursday 5th December.



Children reciting their poem in 2012
Photo: Hayley Madden for the Poetry Society

The project, called **Look North More Often**, brings established poets together with schoolchildren to create a poem to go on display around the tree. Poets worked with children from London schools to write poems inspired by the gift of the tree. They looked at how objects, when given as presents, can come to represent more than their worth; instead they can symbolise friendship, love, thanks and more.

Writer **Kevin Crossley-Holland** has been involved with the project since its inception and this year he takes on the role of weaving together the words and images created by the schoolchildren to create a poem. It's a collaborative effort, reflecting the thoughts and feelings of the children, producing one poem to be displayed around the base of the tree which will be read by three schoolchildren at the lighting up ceremony. The poem begins:

'I am your tree. I grew in the north.
Year by year in the seasoned earth.
Sift, white sift, snowflakes, stars:
I was storm-shelter for carolling birds.
Dear creatures, what gifts have you brought?'

Continues over

Kevin said: "There could not be a more symbolic gift than a tree, for a Norwegian. The giving of a great tree as a gesture of gratitude is simple and profound. This wonderful project, it develops literacy, environmental awareness and – crucially – a sense of community. It's a truly valuable scheme."

The Trafalgar Square Christmas tree was first sent to London in 1947 as a mark of thanks for Britain's support during the Second World War. Every year the Lord Mayor of Westminster visits Oslo for the traditional tree-felling ceremony. The current Lord Mayor of Westminster, Cllr Sarah Richardson, said: "The annual gift of the Christmas tree is rooted in the historic link between the cities of Oslo and London, and the tree-lighting ceremony is a highlight of the festive season in the capital. I would like to thank Kevin Crossley-Holland and the Poetry Society for bringing the tradition to life for the next generation through this wonderful poem."

The poem will be displayed on banners around the tree in Trafalgar Square from 6th December 2013 until 6th January 2014.

– ENDS –

**To arrange interviews with the poets, for pictures or any other information please contact
Robyn Donaldson on 0207 420 9886 or email on marketing@poetrysociety.org.uk**

Notes to Editors:

- **The Poetry Society** was founded in 1909 to promote "a more general recognition and appreciation of poetry". Since then, it has grown into one of Britain's most dynamic arts organisations, representing poetry nationally and internationally, with nearly 4,000 members. It publishes the leading poetry magazine *Poetry Review*, and has an extensive education programme. It has a long commitment to the commissioning of new work, and runs prestigious competitions including the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award and the National Poetry Competition. The Poetry Society is a registered charity, and an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation. www.poetrysociety.org.uk
- **A symbol of Anglo-Norwegian friendship**, a tree for Trafalgar Square has been given to the people of London by the City of Oslo since 1947 in gratitude for British support during the Second World War. www.norway.org.uk
- **The tree** arrives in Trafalgar Square on Monday 2nd December. The lighting up ceremony takes place on Thursday 5th December.
- **The schools** that worked with 'Look North More Often' this year are: St Peter's Eaton Square CE Primary School, Westminster; St Clement Danes CE Primary School, Westminster; and Manorfield Primary School, Tower Hamlets.
- **The project's title**, 'Look North More Often' is taken from a poem by the Norwegian poet Rolf Jacobsen. 2013 is the fifth year the Poetry Society has created poetry for the Trafalgar Square Christmas Tree. Each year pupils from different primary schools have worked with poets to write poems to celebrate the tree. The children's lines and images have then been combined into a new poem by a favourite poet. The 2009 poem was 'Tree Song' by Kit Wright, 2010 saw 'Green Magi' by John Agard, 2012's offering was 'Roots' by Roger McGough and last year's poem was 'The Kindness of Trees' by Jackie Kay. In 2009-10, commissioned new translations were also displayed by Kevin Crossley-Holland and Philip Gross of classic Norwegian poems by Tarjei Vesaas and Nordahl Grieg. In 2010 the poem banners were destroyed when protesters in the Square attempted to set fire to the tree.

POETS

- **Kevin Crossley-Holland** is a well-known poet and prize-winning author for children. His most recent book *Scramasax* was published by Quercus last year. *The Seeing Stone* won the Guardian Children's Fiction Award, the Smarties Prize Bronze Medal, and the Tir na n-Og Award. The trilogy has won worldwide critical acclaim and has been translated into twenty-five languages. Crossley-Holland has translated *Beowulf* from the Anglo-Saxon and his collaborations with composers include song cycles with Sir Arthur Bliss and William Mathias, and a carol with Stephen Paulus for King's College, Cambridge. He is President of The School Library Association and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

The poets who worked with the children in the schools were Lindsay MacRae, Cheryl Moskowitz, and Coral Rumble.

- **Lindsay MacRae** has had three books published by Puffin, including *How To Avoid Kissing Your Parents in Public*, which won a Scottish Arts Council award.
- **Cheryl Moskowitz** is a poet, playwright and novelist, and an actress and storyteller with more than 25 years of experience. Author of *Can it Be About Me?* (Circle Time Press), her poetry for children has featured on BBC TV's *A Bear Behind* and the CBeebies's *Poetry Pie*.
- **Coral Rumble** has worked as a poet and performer for many years, specialising in writing and performing for children. She recently developed a parent's guide to poetry with the Poetry Society in association with Disney Channel's *A Poem Is* series. Her poetry collections include *Creatures, Teachers And Family Features* (1999), *Breaking The Rules* (2004), and *My Teacher's As Wild As A Bison* (2005).

For further information

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