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The Poetry Society and Barclays Premier League commemorate the centenary of the First World War with new poetry commission from Ian McMillan



Ian McMillan at Barnsley FC Oakwell stadium
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Poet and BBC presenter, **Ian McMillan**, has been commissioned by the **Poetry Society** and **Barclays Premier League** to write a new poem based on the **Christmas Truce International Tournament**, with the help of 280 young footballers.

Since 2011, the Premier League has held the under 12s Christmas Truce International Tournament in Ypres, Belgium, developed to honour the Christmas Truce football tournaments that took place on the Western Front in December 1914. This year, to commemorate the **centenary of the First World War**, the Poetry Society and Premier League have worked together to enhance the educational aspect of the trip for the young footballers taking part in the tournament.

Five British poets will accompany the young football players to Ypres, going with them on a tour of battlefield sites, and helping them to capture their experiences in poetry. The poets will coach the young footballers in their wordplay and observation skills, helping them to develop a deeper understanding of the historical events that inspired the tournament.

Each of the 280 under 12s will produce their own poem inspired by their visit, exploring their feelings about the First World War and the original Christmas Truce football matches in 1914, where soldiers laid down their arms on Christmas day to play football with each another.

Leading poets **Simon Barraclough**, **Steve Ely**, **Chris McCabe**, **Nick Makoha** and **Deanna Rodger** will be with the young people for two days in Ypres, travelling with them to battlefields and war graves and delivering inspiring writing sessions to help the young footballers explore their experiences and get their poems down on paper.

The poet and football fan Ian McMillan has been commissioned to then write a new poem about the Christmas truce taking inspiration from the tournament and young footballers who take part. His poem will reflect the images, observations and experiences the young players shared in their own writing. This poem will be premiered at a **Parliamentary Reception on 9 December** and read in English, French, Flemish and German at the opening of the international leg of the tournament the following week.

The Christmas Truce International Tournament qualifiers and education weekend takes place 14-16 November in Ypres, featuring all 20 English Premier League U12 teams and young teams from Germany, Belgium and France.

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**For further information or to interview the poets, contact Robyn Donaldson on 020 7420 9886
or email rdonaldson@poetrysociety.org.uk**

Notes to Editors:

THE POETRY SOCIETY

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 British poetry both nationally and internationally. With innovative education and commissioning programmes and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, the Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages. It publishes the magazine *The Poetry Review*, runs the National Poetry Competition, the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award and the youth performance poetry championship SLAMBassadors UK. The Poetry Society's early history was deeply connected with the writers of World War 1. Throughout the period its magazine, *The Poetry Review* premiered new work by writers such as Thomas Hardy, Rupert Brooke, Leslie Coulson and Marian Allen. www.poetrysociety.org.uk

THE POETS

Simon Barraclough

Simon Barraclough is a poet, writer, and tutor living in London but originally from Huddersfield in West Yorkshire. He is the author of the Forward Prize-finalist debut, *Los Alamos Mon Amour* (Salt, 2008), the limited edition 'boxed pamphlet', *Bonjour Tetris* (Penned in the Margins, 2010) and *Neptune Blue* (Salt, 2011). He is also the editor of the collaborative Hitchcock-homage, *Psycho Poetica* (Sidekick Books, 2012) and co-author of *The Debris Field* (Sidekick Books, 2013). At the moment he is working on a full-length book and live event entitled *Sunspots* (due in 2015) and has been poet in residence at the Mullard Space Science Laboratory since January 2014.

Steve Ely

Steve Ely is a poet, novelist and biographer. His book of poems, *Oswald's Book of Hours*, was published by Smokestack Books in 2013 and was nominated for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection and the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in poetry. His novel *Ratmen*, was published by Blackheath Books in 2012. In 2015 he will publish a second book of poetry, *England and Ted Hughes's South Yorkshire*, a biographical work about the former poet laureate's early life in Mexborough, near Doncaster. He's read his work on BBC Radio 3 and his poems have been published in several prestigious publications, including *The Sunday Times*, *The London Review of Books*, *The Poetry Review*, the *Forward Book of Poetry 2014*, *The Tablet* and many more. This year he was commissioned by the Poetry Society to write a long poem rising out of the First World War for their event 'The Pity' and he is currently teaching an online poetry course for The Poetry School. Ely's work explores a range of themes – nature, landscape, conflict, identity, politics, England and the English – and football. He's written poems about his own twenty-five year career as a Sunday League footballer (a tragic downward spiral from mercurial Bergkamp-esque genius to Grant Holt style 'lump' – a book-length work is planned eventually) and several footballers past and present – including Lionel Messi. As well as writing, Ely works as a freelance Educational Consultant and sometimes teaches in secondary schools, on a short-term basis. Formerly a Headteacher, he worked in schools for twenty years as a teacher of English, Religious Education and Humanities, over the years taking football teams from year seven to the sixth form. He supports Barnsley (allegedly) but these days spends more time watching the Leeds United under 21 team – because his nephew Frankie Mulhern plays for them.

Nick Makoha

Born in Uganda, Nick Makoha fled the country with his mother, as a result of political overtones that arose from the civil war during the Idi Amin dictatorship. He has lived in Kenya, Saudi Arabia and currently resides in London. He has presented his work at many international events and toured for the British Council in Finland, Czech Republic, the US and the Netherlands. His pamphlet, *The Lost Collection of an Invisible Man*, was published by Flipped Eye in 2005. His poem "Vista" was used as part of a video installation to promote the Turner prize in 2008 for Tate Remix. Currently working on his 1st full collection *The Second Republic*, Nick has had poems shortlisted for the Flamingo Feather poetry competition, New Generation African Poets, Troubadour International Poetry Prize and the Arvon International Poetry competition. He was one of ten writers on a programme called The Complete Works: a national two year development programme for ten advanced Black and Asian poets.

Chris McCabe

Chris McCabe's collections are *The Hutton Inquiry*, *Zeppelins*, *THE RESTRUCTURE* and *Speculatrix*, published in December 2014 by Penned in the Margins. He has recorded a CD with the Poetry Archive and was shortlisted for The Ted Hughes Award in 2014. His plays *Shad Thames*, *Broken Wharf* and *Mudflats* have been performed in London and Liverpool and he has written a book of prose, *In the Catacombs: a summer among the dead poets of West Norwood Cemetery*. He works as the Poetry Librarian at The Saison Poetry Library and teaches for The Poetry School.

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Ian McMillan

Ian McMillan is poet-in-residence for The Academy of Urbanism and Barnsley FC. He presents *The Verb* every week on BBC R3 and he's a regular on BBC Breakfast, *Coast*, *Pick of the Week*, *You & Yours*, *Last Word* and *The Arts Show*. He's been a castaway on *Desert Island Discs*. Previously he was resident poet for English National Opera, UK Trade & Investment, Yorkshire TV's Investigative Poet and Humberside Police's Beat Poet.

Deanna Rodger

Deanna Rodger is an actor and spoken word poet. She is the youngest UK Poetry Slam Champion (2007/8) and completed vocational acting training in The National Youth Theatres (NYT) REP Company 2012. She has written and performed as a poet and actor in 2012 Olympic Team Welcome Ceremonies, Buckingham Palace, Speakers House, 10 Downing street and Honey Coated Dream as well as delivering two TedX performances. She has recently completed the audio book recording of 'Feral Youth' by Polly Courtney and is currently writing her one woman show *LondonMatter* which has received support from POP Productions (IdeasTap, Sky Arts), Roundhouse Camden, The Albany and the Arts Council. She is co founder of two popular spoken word events Chill Pill and Come Rhyme With Me and is in poetry collectives: Point Blank Poets (Biennale UK Artist International award 2011) and Keats House Poetry Forum, as well as leading on Podium Poets and workshops in and around the UK.

BARCLAYS PREMIER LEAGUE

The Barclays Premier League is the most watched continuous annual global sporting event in the world. Last season 13.9 million fans attended matches with record average stadium occupancy of 95.9%. Across nine months of the year, 380 matches are viewed in 175 countries with coverage available in over 650 million households.

The quality of Premier League football and the interest that it generates allows us to support all areas of the sport. This season we will invest in more than 50 new artificial grass roots pitches in communities across the UK and deliver hundreds of projects that focus on improving sports coaching in schools and inspiring young people to play sport. The financial investment in this important area of our work will be £56m.

On top of this, the Premier League also invests in the Football League, the Football Conference and other football bodies. Premier League football provides in excess of £1bn per season to the Exchequer in tax revenue.

CHRISTMAS TRUCE INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENT

The Premier League has held the Christmas Truce International Tournament in Ypres since 2011 and invites U12 teams from the German, Belgian and French leagues to be part of the competition in December. To decide who competes in the Tournament, the Premier League runs a qualifying competition for its clubs. Usually this takes place in England, but for 2014 U12 teams from all 20 Premier League clubs will head to Ypres for a weekend of competitive football and education. The teams are split into four groups, with groups A&B playing football on Friday while groups C&D take part in the education day. On Saturday the groups switch over and then on Sunday it's all about the football as the knockout stages take place.

For the education day the boys will be taken to four sites:

- Langemarck German Military Cemetery – An opportunity to look at the background to the First World War from a German view and the impact it had on the country.
- Dochy Farm New British Cemetery – The role of sport and the Great War telling the story of Jimmy Speirs who captained Bradford City in the 1911 FA Cup Final and whose body is buried at this cemetery.
- Old Cheese Factory – A visit to a Recruitment Stand with an opportunity for the team to handle equipment and weaponry and to dress in Great War uniform.
- Tyne Cot CWGC – A visit to the largest War Cemetery in the world. A chance to look at the impact of the war and for a period of silent reflection.

There will also be a performance of a one-man theatre show about the Christmas Truce.

38 of the boys who are attending this weekend took part in a re-recording of the 'All Together Now' song, where they were the backing choir along with 22 German boys. This is going to be released at Christmas as a charity single. <http://www.premierleague.com/en-gb/news/news/2014-15/nov/041114-academy-players-record-all-together-now-to-mark-centenary.html>

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