

Trafalgar Square Christmas Tree is wrapped in poetry



Celebrating a homecoming

In 1909, a group of poetry enthusiasts met in the Eustace Miles vegetarian restaurant on the eastern side of Trafalgar Square, and founded the Poetry Society. In 2009, ever-keen to find a central space for poetry, in its centenary year the Poetry Society returns to Trafalgar Square to wrap poems around the nation's most iconic Christmas tree.

Poets Kit Wright and Kevin Crossley-Holland were commissioned to write two new poems to be displayed on specially created decorative panels encircling the tree. Printed in colours which evoke northern forests, the 34.6 linear metres of poetry can be read from every corner of the Square. The poems form a backdrop to the daily carol-singing sessions in the Square until 23 December (and currently find themselves unexpectedly in the midst of the climate change protest encampment).

The project is a partnership with the Royal Norwegian Embassy and celebrates the City of Oslo's annual gift of a Christmas tree to the people of London.

Crossley-Holland has written 'Snow and Spruce Forest', a new version of the famous Norwegian poem 'Snø og granskog' by Tarjei Vesaas. "Home. What is home? / Snow and Spruce Forest / – that's home", says the poet in his moving evocation of homecoming; summoning up images of waist-deep drifts 'and tree after tree as far as the eye can see'.

The second poem, by Kit Wright, is based on lines, images and ideas from poems by Westminster Primary children. Children from fifteen schools in Westminster worked with poets Coral Rumble and Kevin Crossley-Holland to explore cultural, historical and environmental themes suggested by the Norwegian tree. The children's resulting poems – 369 in total – were then sent on to Wright, to inspire his poem, 'Tree Song'.

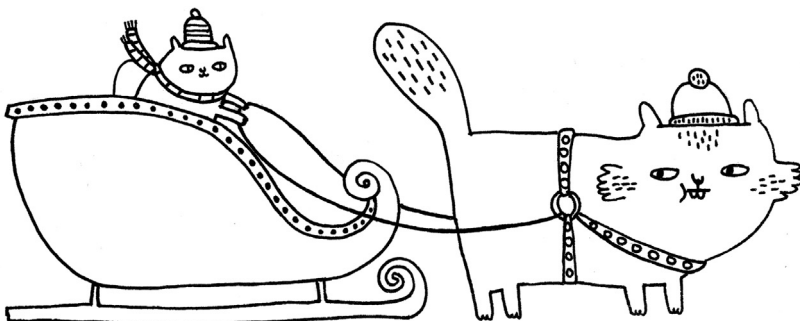


Illustration by Gemma Correll

"Coral Rumble and I met with fantastic enthusiasm and support for this collaborative project," said Kevin Crossley-Holland. "The children we worked with told us that it "kickstarts your brain" and "makes you dream", and "gets your heart beating". Three children from St Stephen's CofE primary, Westbourne Park, also performed 'Tree Song' for guests at the official tree lighting-up ceremony.

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For further information

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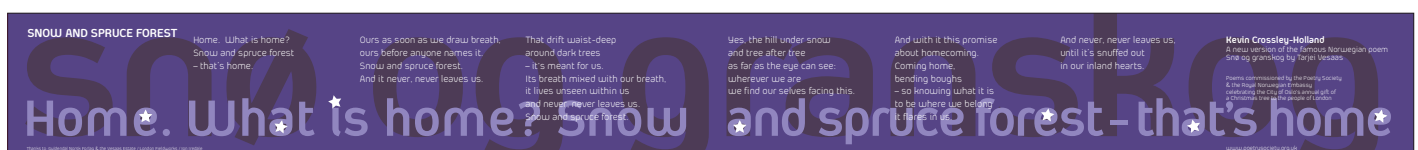
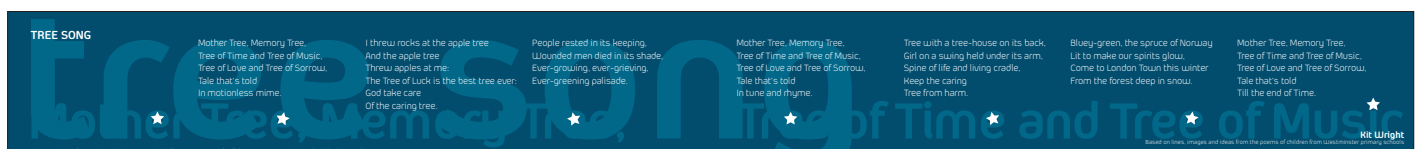
The initiative looks set to be repeated next year, extending to other cities around the UK and becoming an ongoing Christmas tradition. The poems are on display in Trafalgar Square until 23 December.

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For further information and/or to interview any of the poets or schools involved please contact Lisa Roberts on 020 7420 9895 or email 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 both nationally and internationally. Today it has 3650 members around the world, 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. 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
- Kevin Crossley-Holland is well-known for his poetry, novels, story collections, translations such as *Beowulf* (1982) and reinterpretations of medieval legends. He has also written and presented many radio programmes. He is the author of seven volumes of poetry, and his *Selected Poems* was published in 2001. His latest novels are *Gatty's Tale* (2006) and *Outsiders* (2007). In 2007, his book, *Storm*, was shortlisted for the Carnegie of Carnegies. For this year's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College, Cambridge, Kevin Crossley-Holland has written a contemplative text, 'The Heart-in-Waiting'.
- Coral Rumble has worked as a poet and performer for many years, and now specialises in writing and performing for children. She has three collections published – *Creatures*, *Teachers And Family Features* (1999), *Breaking The Rules* (2004), and *My Teacher's As Wild As A Bison* (2005).
- Kit Wright's books of poetry include *The Bear Looked Over the Mountain* (1977), which won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize and the Alice Hunt Bartlett Award, and *Short Afternoons* (1989), which won the Hawthornden Prize and was joint winner of the Heinemann Award. His poetry is collected in *Hoping It Might Be So: Poems 1974-2000* (2000). His latest book of poetry is *The Magic Box: Poems for Children* (2009).
- The schools that took part in the project were Hampden Gurney, Millbank, St Peters Chip Mews, St Vincent De Paul, St Clement Danes, Queens Park, Barrow Hill, St Peters Eaton Square, St Saviours, Soho Parish, St Josephs, St Mary Magdalene, St Stephens, Burdett Coutts, Westminster Cathedral – arranged with the support of the Westminster School Effectiveness Group. A Poetry Society resource pack produced in association with the Royal Norwegian Embassy, taking Norwegian poems as the starting point, was also sent to all Westminster primary schools.



Design by Jon Iredale

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