

The Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum

## The Poetry Roundabout



January 2021

Undaunted Lockdown Edition!

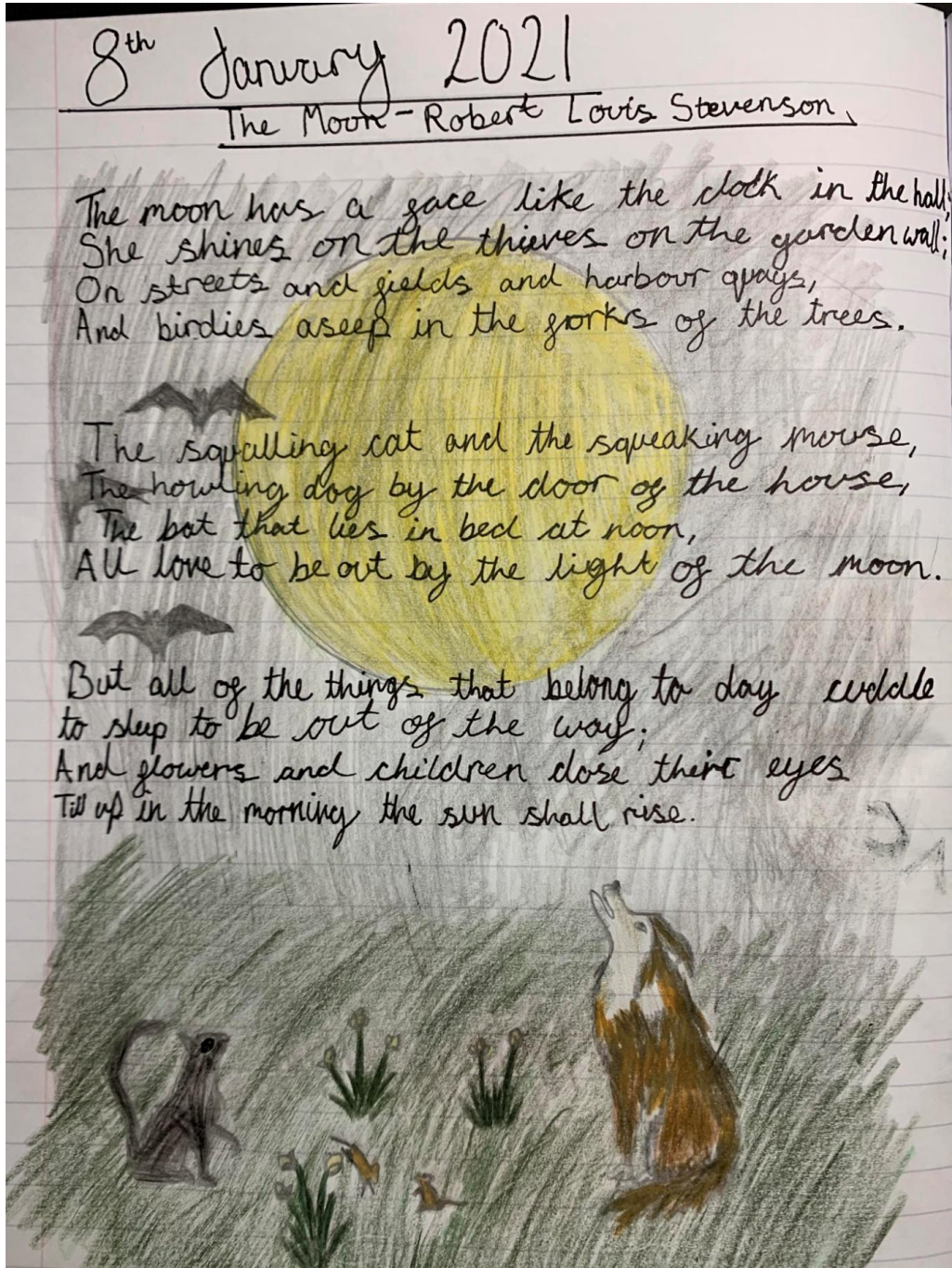
on The Smith's website and now on ZOOM!



featuring Robert Bloomfield [1766- 1823]

the poet of vaccination

*The Zoom meeting is planned for Friday, Feb. 5th 2021 at 7.30 p.m.  
For details about taking part, email [johnjcoutts@gmail.com](mailto:johnjcoutts@gmail.com)*



Artwork by Lucy Scott [aged 10] Tockwith CofE Primary Academy. North Yorkshire. .

## The Moon

By Robert Louis Stevenson

The moon has a face like the clock in the hall;  
She shines on thieves on the garden wall,  
On streets and fields and harbour quays,  
And birdies asleep in the forks of the trees.

The squalling cat and the squeaking mouse,  
The howling dog by the door of the house,  
The bat that lies in bed at noon,  
All love to be out by the light of the moon.

But all of the things that belong to the day  
Cuddle to sleep to be out of her way;  
And flowers and children close their eyes  
Till up in the morning the sun shall arise.

**John Coutts** [Poet in Residence] writes: *Lucy's interpretation of Robert Louis Stevenson's poem gets us off to a good start. This month's edition begins with seasonal reflections, features a wide range of themes and styles, and includes Robert Bloomfield's poem celebrating Jenner's discovery of vaccination against smallpox.*

**Jeff Kemp** sends us ‘A small poem – well, the title’s about the longest part – for the end of the year,’

***Party Like There’s No Tomorrow***

To write  
31-12  
and say  
‘time’s up,’

is like throwing  
a stick in a river  
and saying  
‘it’s stuck.’

**Elizabeth Lawson** *looks back to Christmas , recommending*

**‘To Mrs K\_\_\_\_, On Her Sending Me an English Christmas Plum-Cake at Paris’**

by Helen Maria Williams

What crowding thoughts around me wake,  
What marvels in a Christmas-cake!  
Ah say, what strange enchantment dwells  
Enclosed within its odorous cells?  
Is there no small magician bound  
Encrusted in its snowy round?  
For magic surely lurks in this,

A cake that tells of vanished bliss;  
 A cake that conjures up to view  
 The early scenes, when life was new;  
 When memory knew no sorrows past,  
 And hope believed in joys that last! —  
 Mysterious cake, whose folds contain  
 Life's calendar of bliss and pain;  
 That speaks of friends for ever fled,  
 And wakes the tears I love to shed.  
 Oft shall I breathe her cherished name  
 From whose fair hand the offering came:  
 For she recalls the artless smile  
 Of nymphs that deck my native isle;  
 Of beauty that we love to trace,  
 Allied with tender, modest grace;  
 Of those who, while abroad they roam,  
 Retain each charm that gladdens home,  
 And whose dear friendships can impart  
 A Christmas banquet for the heart!

**Helen Maria Williams** ( 1759 – 1827<sup>1</sup>) was a British novelist, poet, and translator. She was a supporter of *abolitionism* and of the ideals of the *French Revolution*, but found herself imprisoned in Paris during the *Reign of Terror*. Nevertheless she spent much of the rest of her life in France.

**John Coutts** looking further back - to November and Remembrance Sunday, has written.

### **To the Unknown Soldier.**

Your mother knew you,  
 Amazing in her womb:  
 But how could she foresee  
 Your famed and lonely tomb?  
 Your mother knew you.

Did teachers know you:  
Lonely as odd boy man out?  
Or leader of the gang?  
Or likely lad or lout?  
Did teachers know you?

Your comrades knew you,  
Chewing on bully beef  
Entrenched in squelching mud,  
Before you came to grief...  
Your comrades knew you.

But we don't know you.  
Nor did whoever threw  
Or fired or struck or dealt  
The death that ended you.  
How could we know you

When no one even knows  
Your name and number, who  
Or what you liked or loved  
or feared? Authentic you  
Nobody knows

Who knows? God knows.  
You lie on guard for others  
Each one a subtle wonder;  
Fathers, sons, brothers.  
Who knows? God knows

## **Mair. Mighty Mekong**

**Mike Springate** writes: *“Mair” is a term for “Mother”, both in Thai and Laotian. This poem was written just before the 2016 Anglo-Thai Association expedition crossed the Friendship Bridge north towards Luang Prabang’.*

Mair. Mighty Mekong, river, axis, artery; Madre Asiatica.  
 Brown, drowned river; you are a knifeblade, laid flat,  
 Horizontal on the Oriental plain. Stretched wide,  
 Sliding, smooth, whirled and currented with rocks.  
 Pointed between us, the forelip of Thailand  
 And the cusp, the slow, steady rumble  
 Of green trees, knitted and knotted  
 On the mediaeval frame, the warp and weft of silken Laos.

Mair, Majestic Mekong, deep, even in your shallows  
 To house alike Pa Beuk – immensely hoovering catfish –  
 And the once mountain dwelling opiate HMongs.  
 Marked, as the dusk draws down the light,  
 Arrowed by a last-minute canoe, swivelling the current  
 Across the silent brown swell to the sand-brushed edge  
 Fronting an empty Laotian strand. Calm, ever calm.

Mair, Mysterious Mekong, reflecting the humid cloud,  
 Gray as a pigeon in the last linger of light.  
 Strong, silent, sinuous, serene – all S’s else.  
 For nothing has changed here in centuries – nor will.  
 A very few Thai fishermen; an equal absence of Laos.  
 Nothing, since my forty years visitation past to peace;  
 Except the cruel buildings, Thai concrete, massive hoardings  
 but nothing more essential than “things”, nothing that matters,  
 or changes the heart of Laos or Thailand. A girl giggles  
 in the hotel which switches on its lights. Oh, Mair! All, all is well.





**Jock Stein** writes: *'I was so surprised to see Omar Khayyám feature in the Christmas edition of The Economist that I went to read it again, and found the poet was, as I could now imagine him, churning out philosophy when lockdown was stopping him going to pubs: - philosophy, or 'wisdom' being a relation of both maths and poetry in his day. For someone who crossed such boundaries, it is perhaps not a surprise that in the Rubáiyát, one spirit is blended with another kind of spirit. While my own take on both alcohol and fate is different from Omar's, it is a wonderful poem, and my four quatrains pay homage to it, as I wish everyone a happy new year in spite of everything.'*

## **Into the New Year**

*'Omar Khayyám wrote verse and cubic equations'*

- The Economist, Jan. 1st 2021

*The Moving Finger writes, and having writ  
moves on, post Brexit, Covid: who'll forget  
that annus horribilis, total lockdown,  
even now we can't get shot of it.*

*And then, and then comes Spring: and we will tear  
up resolutions, splurge without a care  
on earth's resources, as Omar Khayyám  
submerged his honour in a wine-filled jar.*

*How marry art and science? How hotwire  
our future, change our practice under fire,  
find that fate has ceased to finger us  
and grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire?*

*But leave the wise to wrangle, whether verse  
or mathematics. Now, before the hearse  
conveys us to the final Dawn of Reckoning,  
let us just live, for better or for worse.*

**Anne Clarke** writes: *I'm sending Ezra Pound's parody of 'Summer Is Icumen In' which though winter .is already here definitely applies to the weather we're having at the moment.*

***Winter is icumen in***

By Ezra Pound

Winter is icumen in,  
 Lhude sing Goddamm,  
 Raineth drop and staineth slop,  
 And how the wind doth ramm!  
 Sing: Goddamm.  
 Skiddeth bus and sloppeth us,  
 An ague hath my ham.  
 Freezeth river, turneth liver,  
 Damm you; Sing: Goddamm.  
 Goddamm, Goddamm, 'tis why I am, Goddamm,  
 So 'gainst the winter's balm.  
 Sing goddamm, damm, sing goddamm,  
 Sing goddamm, sing goddamm, DAMM.

**John Coutts** adds: *Thanks, Anne. and here is the original. With the tune. I learnt a lot about it by consulting [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer\\_is\\_icumen\\_in](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer_is_icumen_in)*

The image shows a musical score for the hymn 'Sumer is I-cumen in'. It consists of six staves of music in a single system, all in treble clef and 12/8 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first five staves are for the main melody, and the sixth staff is divided into two parts: 'Pes I' and 'Pes II'.

Sv-mer is i-cu-men in. Lhu-de sing cuc-cu. Gro-weþ sed and blo-weþ med and  
springþ þe w - de nu. Sing cuc - cu. A - we ble - teþ af - ter lomb. lhouþ  
af - ter cal - ue cu. Bul-luc ster-teþ. buc - ke uer-teþ mur - ie sing cuc-cu.  
Cuc - cu cuc - cu wel sing-es þu cuc - cu ne swik þu na - uer nu.  
Pes I: Sing cuc - cu nu. Sing cuc - cu.  
Pes II: Sing cuc - cu. Sing cuc - cu nu.

## **Good tidings, or News from the Farm [1804] [extracts]**

by Robert Bloomfield

**John Coutts** writes: *I came across Bloomfield's work when looking for poems about vaccination. Our featured poet was a 'working class' writer, born in Suffolk, who educated himself by reading 'The Gentleman's Magazine'. His poem 'The Farmer's Boy' - illustrated by the famous Thomas Bewick - sold 25000 copies. Bloomfield's father had fallen a victim to smallpox, and he was a keen advocate of Jenner's new method of vaccination. Here are some extracts from his poem, with editorial comments Bloomfield writes rhyming couplets, in the formal style of the eighteenth century but his passionate concerns and commitments come clearly through. His outlook and attitudes may be compared with contemporary concerns about Covid, and current debate about the historical role of the British Empire. Sadly, Bloomfield died in poverty.*

### **The author's Preface:**

*'I have employed my thoughts on the importance of Dr. Jenner's discovery... I have witnessed the destruction described in my brother's family; and I have, in my own, insured the lives of four children by Vaccine Inoculation, who, I trust, are destined to look back upon the Small-pox as the scourge of days gone by.— My hopes are high, and my prayers sincere, for its universal adoption.*

### **[The consequence of smallpox**

#### **The blind child cannot run with his playmates/]**

Where's the Blind Child, so admirably fair,  
 With guileless dimples, and with flaxen hair  
 That waves in ev'ry breeze? he's often seen  
 Beside yon cottage wall, or on the green,  
 With others match'd in spirit and in size,  
 Health on their cheeks, and rapture in their eyes;  
 And, hark! that laugh is his, that jovial cry;

He hears the ball and trundling hoop brush by,  
 And runs the giddy course with all his might,  
 A very child in every thing but sight; ....

### **And is left alone**

The new suggestion and the quick assent;  
 The grove invites, delight thrills every breast—  
 To leap the ditch and seek the downy nest  
 Away they start, leave balls and hoops behind,  
 And one companion leave—the boy is blind!

### **The poet's brother lost two children**

Sleep not, my soul! indulge a nobler flame;  
 Still the destroyer persecutes thy name.  
 Sev'n winters cannot pluck from mem'ry's store  
 That mark'd affliction which a brother bore;  
 That storm of trouble bursting on his head,  
 When the fiend came, and left two children dead!

### **A pioneer – Lady Mary Wortley Montagu**

*Mary Wortley Montagu [1689-1762] brought news of a form of inoculation [‘variolation’] practised in the Ottoman Empire. She has been described as ‘the unsung hero of vaccination’ – but Bloomfield gives her full credit.*

Dear must that moment be when first the mind,  
 Ranging the paths of science unconfin'd,  
 Strikes a new light; when, obvious to the sense,  
 Springs the fresh spark of bright intelligence.  
 So felt the towering soul of Montagu,  
 Her sex's glory, and her country's too;  
 Who gave the spotted plague one deadly blow,  
 And bade its mitigated poison flow  
 With half its terrors; yet, with loathing still,  
 We hous'd a visitant with pow'r to kill.

### **The hero: Edward Jenner**

*Dr. Edward Jenner (1749 – 1823) created the world's first smallpox vaccine. He used the term in his 'Inquiry into the Variolae vaccinae known as the Cow Pox', [1798] in which he described the protective effect of cowpox against smallpox.<sup>1</sup>*

Then when the healthful blood, though often tried,  
 Foil'd the keen lancet by the Severn side,  
 Resisting, uncontaminated still,  
 The purple pest and unremitting skill;  
 When the plain truth tradition seem'd to know,  
 By simply pointing to the harmless Cow,  
 Though wise distrust to reason might appeal;  
 What, when hope triumph'd, what did Jenner feel!  
 Where even hope itself could scarcely rise  
 To scan the vast, inestimable prize!  
 Perhaps supreme, alone, triumphant stood  
 The great, the conscious power of doing good,....

Forth sped the truth immediate from his hand,  
 And confirmations sprung in ev'ry land;

**In America** *the Cherokee nation seek the blessings of vaccination.*

Its beams already, o'er th' Atlantic wave,  
 Pierce the dark forests of the suffering brave:  
 There, e'en th' abandon'd sick imbib'd a glow,  
 When warrior nations, resting on the bow,  
 Astonish'd heard the joyful rumour rise,  
 And call'd the council of their great and wise: ...  
 ...And present ills bade present feelings press  
 With all the eloquence of deep distress;  
 Till forth their chiefs o'er dying thousands trod  
 To seek the white man and his bounteous God:

### **And so to India....**

*'That isle' is Ceylon [now Sri Lanka.] The poet has heard news of the First Kandyan War between the British and a kingdom in the interior. He feels that the blessings of vaccination outweigh the reported plundering and violence of the British [synonymous with 'English']*

Where India's swarthy millions crowd the strand,  
 And round that isle, which crowns their pointed land,  
 Speeds the good angel with the balmy breath,  
 And checks the dreadful tyranny of death:  
 Whate'er we hear to hurt the peace of life,  
 Of Candian treachery and British strife,  
 The sword of commerce, nations bought and sold,  
 They owe to England more than mines of gold;  
 England has sent a balm for private woe;  
 England strikes down the nation's bitterest foe...

**Europe** – *divided by the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars – also shares the benefits of the new discovery*

Europe, amidst the clangor of her arms,  
 While life was threaten'd with a thousand harms,  
 And Charity was freezing to its source,  
 Still saw fair Science keep her steady course;  
 And, while whole legions fell, by friends deplor'd,  
 New germs of life sprung up beneath the sword

### **A plea to parents – have your children vaccinated!**

Speak loud to parents;—knew ye not the time  
 When age itself, and manhood's hardy prime,  
 With horror saw their short-liv'd friendships end,  
 Yet dar'd not visit e'en the dying friend?  
 ... Love ye your children?—let that love arise,

Pronounce the sentence, and the serpent dies;  
Bid welcome a mild stranger at your door,  
Distress shall cease, those terrors reign no more.  
Love ye your neighbours?—let that love be shown;  
Risk not their children while you guard your own;

**A heartfelt conclusion.**

Go, blessing, from thy birth-place still expand,  
For that dear birth-place is my native land!  
In village paths, hence, may we never find  
Their youth on crutches, and their children blind;

**The poet says goodbye**

In pure delight didst thou, my soul, pursue  
A task to conscience and to kindred due,  
And, true to feeling and to Nature, deem  
The dairy's boast thine own appropriate theme;  
Hail now the meed of pleasurable hours,  
And, at the foot of Science, strew thy flow'rs!



**Eugene Lubbock** [Year 9: The Charter School, North Dulwich] recommends

### **Jabberwocky**

by Lewis Carroll

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!  
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!  
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun  
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand;  
Long time the manxome foe he sought—  
So rested he by the Tumtum tree  
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,  
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through  
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!  
He left it dead, and with its head  
He went galumphing back.

“And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?  
 Come to my arms, my beamish boy!  
 O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”  
 He chortled in his joy.

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
 All mimsy were the borogoves,  
 And the mome raths outgrabe.

**John Coutts** comments: *Thanks, Eugene. I’ve noticed that ‘frabjous’ and ‘galumphing’ – words made up by the poet – are now included in my dictionary*

In conclusion, **John** offers a limerick in the style of Edward Lear.

There was a young lady of Brixton  
 Whose ears were not properly fixed on.  
 If she started to cough  
 They would flap and fall off,  
 Which bewildered the people of Brixton.