

Good at games –  
Lorraine Mariner's pick  
of your poems PAGE 6



Unplugged forever! Niall  
O'Sullivan celebrates an  
open mic institution PAGE 8



# Poetry News

Winter 2011

The newsletter of the Poetry Society

www.poetrysociety.org.uk

## “Like a freedom flag unfurled”



For the third year running, in a joint project between the Poetry Society and the Royal Norwegian Embassy, the Trafalgar Square tree is wrapped with a poem this Christmas, in celebration of the City of Oslo's annual gift to London. Three children from St Mary of the Angels Primary School in the London Borough of Westminster read the poem out loud at the lighting ceremony on 1 December as the white lights of the tree were switched on for the first time.

The 'Look North More Often' project brings together established poets and schoolchildren to create the poem that surrounds the tree. This year, five poets, including Lindsay MacRae, shown below, worked with

children from twelve schools: eleven in London and one in Immingham, Lincolnshire (the port where the tree enters the UK). They wrote poems on the theme of 'journeys', imagining the journey of the tree from a forest outside Oslo to pride of place at the heart of London.

Kevin Crossley-Holland, who has been involved with 'Look North More Often' from the outset, was present at this year's felling ceremony. As he told the *Guardian*, "I joined three English primary school children, their teacher and several parties of Norwegian children in a silent forest outside Oslo – a magical place lit up by silvery hoarfrost and the sheer voltage of everyone's excitement. We stared into a crackling

### from 'Roots' this year's tree poem

Like a poem around a tree  
Like a freedom flag unfurled  
A homeless refugee  
I have travelled round the world



pine fire, ate stew, sang, joined hands and swore lasting friendship, and we all witnessed the felling of the tree destined for Trafalgar Square." He added, "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 year's finished poem was written by Roger McGough, weaving together the words and ideas of the children from all twelve schools. He said, "Working with the kids, and people like Chrissie Gittins and Kevin Crossley-Holland, hearing their stories, looking at their lines and putting something new together – something that's theirs and mine and that's a poem... it really sparks me off." Mayor of Oslo Fabian Stang said simply: "It is good to be in a forest. It is good to be with children. It is good to give a gift."

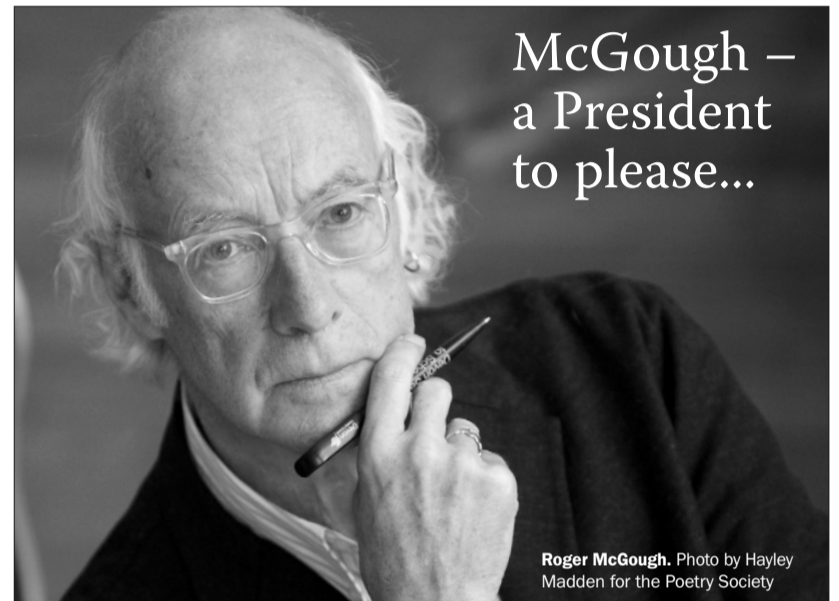
The poets who worked on the project were Chrissie Gittins, David Harmer, Cheryl Moskowitz, Coral Rumble and Lindsay MacRae. They led projects in schools in the London boroughs of Camden, Islington, Lewisham and Westminster, and Allerton Primary School, Immingham.

### from 'Roots' this year's tree poem

Lights, camera, action!  
A switch is pulled  
and I light up like an angel.



Lindsay MacRae and children of St Georges School, Westminster. Photos Hayley Madden/The Poetry Society



McGough –  
a President  
to please...

Roger McGough. Photo by Hayley Madden for the Poetry Society

The Poetry Society is delighted to announce Roger McGough as the Society's new President.

McGough, one of Britain's best-loved poets, has been described by Carol Ann Duffy as the "patron saint of poetry". He has written or appeared in over 50 books for people of all ages, and is a great advocate for the art form.

Describing it as an "honour to become the Society's new President" and to follow in the footsteps of predecessors such as Jo Shapcott, Paul Muldoon, and Dannie Abse, McGough said: "I believe that poetry will become more relevant and important over the coming years, and an efficient and well-run Poetry Society should be there to embrace it."

His appointment as President, having been a member since the 1970s and a Vice President, brings experience, vitality and an irrepressible wit to the role. Jo Shapcott welcomed him, saying: "We know Roger McGough for his strong connection with poetry readers, his generosity to other poets,

and the range and brio of his own work. All this makes him a wonderful new President for the Poetry Society."

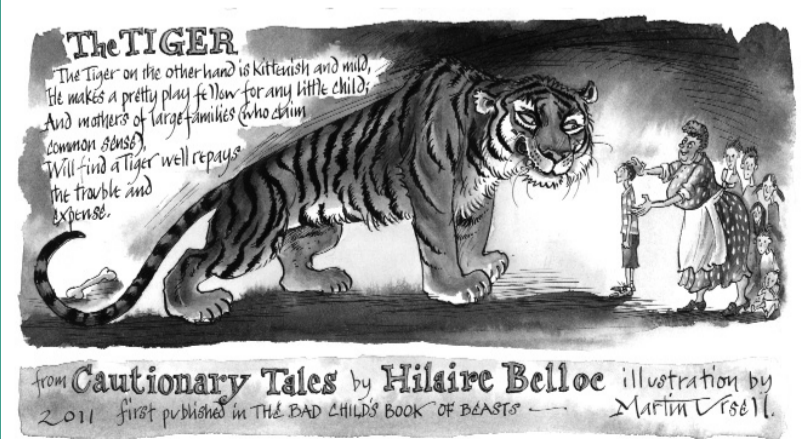
McGough takes up his position at an exciting time for the Society as it looks forward to expanding its programmes. As his first assignment as President, McGough has contributed to the 2011 'Look North More Often' project (see left).

McGough's next grand plan is 'The Doors of Liverpool', an exhibition that he is currently working on with students of Liverpool John Moores University, with doors donated by the public. It will be shown at the new Museum of Liverpool early next year.

Poet Laureate and Poetry Society Vice President Carol Ann Duffy celebrated the announcement, saying: "Roger McGough, a much-loved performer, children's poet, and National Treasure, is a lovely, popular choice as the Poetry Society's new President."

• To read our interview with Roger McGough, turn to page 3.

### A tiger comes to tea at the Poetry Café see page 2



## WHAT WAS THE BEST POETRY OF 2011? HAVE YOUR SAY

Now is the time to send your recommendations to the judges of The Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry. It is easy to email via the Poetry Society website. TURN TO PAGE 3 FOR DETAILS

Suggestions for the 2011 Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry must be in by 6 January 2012