

## POETRY APPRECIATION 2024

### January 2024: MEMORABLE LAST LINES

The New year got off to a good start with the subject of "Poems with Memorable Last Lines".

One person complained that she could remember a memorable last line but didn't have a clue as to the title or first line of the poem so spent hours trying to find it, but that was just a blip!

Lynn's rendering of The Highway had not just a memorable last line but also her memorable rendition of the sound of horses hooves. Rene was not wholly successful in attempting Kipling's "Gunga Din" as it was meant to replicate the words and accent of a low class 19th century British soldier in India but we did get the message in the words "You're a better man than I am Gunga Din".

The poems provoked discussion on topics as varied non-violent political resistance, racism, death in war and peace and the importance of loving the whole person not just a particular attribute.

Ann told us about her personal recollections of Benjamin Zephaniah so we will not only enjoy his poetry but learnt how good a man he was.

### February 2024: JOHN CLARE

Our February meeting was devoted to the poetry of John Clare.

Born into a poor English farming family at the end of the 18th century, with little formal education and the added burden of severe mental illness, Clare produced some of the most beautiful poetic descriptions of the English countryside ever written. His first published works were hugely successful but sadly this success was not repeated as pastoral poetry fell out of fashion. Mental illness overtook him and the last 27 years of his life were spent in asylums.

His work was not just pretty verse about pretty things for pretty leisured people. He also railed against the injustice of the Enclosures of common land and the suffering this brought to the already poor farm labouring families. This did not endear him to the more well-off book-buying public and they largely ceased to buy his books. He died poor, after 27 years in asylums.

Part of "The Village Minstrel" describes the suffering of the labouring poor and "The Badger" shows the torturing of an animal at the hands of men whilst great beauty is found in his group of poems about birds and deep pathos in his "I Am"

Towards the very end of his life, isolated and deeply unhappy in an asylum he could still write a poem in which a girl invites her lover secretly into the family cottage at night and they discover that "kisses are sweet in the dark".

John Clare. What a poet!