

## Meeting held on 11th June - Farming

We begin with two of my choices

### Scything by James Crowden (born Plymouth 1954)

Farmer, poet and educator)

Gently we feel the edge of dawn creep forward  
Between mist and pine.  
Gently we swing the curved blade into the wet grass  
Into the damp dew  
Gently we edge knocked knees forward  
Into the swathe.

Mowing ragwort and daisy  
smartweed and sorrell  
corncockle and chicory  
Cutting, cutting, cutting close.



Down to the roots, down to the moss  
timothy and foxtail  
cock's foot and fescue  
dog's tail and ryegrass.

Gently we swing the shoulders  
charlock and dodder  
sweet vernal and sowthistle  
Bowling to the rhythm of the scythe  
The meadow's pasture, the measured stride  
Creeping forward into the shadow's singing.

SWISH SWISH SWISH SWISH

### The Cow and The Pig and The Hen

by A H Upham (American poet died 1945)

The farmer smiled as he passed them by—  
The cow and the pig and the hen;  
For the price of wheat had gone sky-high,  
And the cow and the pig and the hen  
They ate up grain he could sell at the mill,  
They needed his care when nights were chill,  
He swore of them all he'd had his fill—  
The cow and the pig and the hen.



These barnyard cattle had had their day,  
The cow and the pig and the hen.  
He could get thirty bones\* for a ton of hay—  
No need for the cow or the hen.  
He never would milk another cow,  
He hated the sight of a grunting sow,  
And raising chickens was work for the frau,  
Good-bye to the cow and the hen.

\*bones - dollars in the  
1800s



Anne read this poem

### Sheep Dipping by Norman MacCaig

The sea goes flick-flack or the light does. When  
John chucks the ewe in, she splays up two wings  
That beat once and are water once again.

Pushing her nose, she trots slow-motion through  
The glassy green. The others bleat and plunge -  
If she must do it, what else is there to do?

They leap from ledges, all legs in the air  
All furbelows and bulged eyes in the green  
Turned suds, turned soda with the plumping there.

They haul themselves ashore. With outraged cries  
They waterfall uphill, spread out and stand  
Dribbling salt water into flowers' eyes.

They gave no heed to his jeer or frown,  
The cow and the pig and the hen,  
Whatever goes up, said they, comes down,  
The wise old cow and the hen.  
The hen laid eggs the winter thru,  
The cow gave milk and the piggy grew,  
But hay dropped down from thirty to two—  
Oh, the cow and the pig and the hen!  
Now he sits and sighs, as he counts the cost,  
For the cow and the pig and the hen.  
He almost cries for the milk he's lost,  
The cow and the pig and the hen.  
He'd tend them gladly in mud and rain,  
And scrap his acres of hay and grain,  
If he only could buy them back again,  
The cow and the pig and the hen.

Two more poems chosen by **Anne**

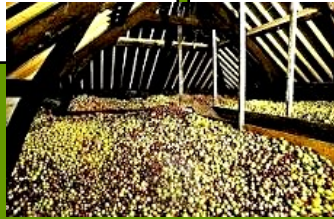
**The Hayloft** by R L Stevenson

Through all the pleasant meadow-side  
The grass grew shoulder-high,  
Till the shining scythes went far and wide  
And cut it down to dry.

Those green and sweetly smelling crops  
They led the waggons home;  
And they piled them here in mountain tops  
For mountaineers to roam.

Here is Mount Clear, Mount Rusty-Nail,  
Mount Eagle and Mount High;—  
The mice that in these mountains dwell,  
No happier are than I!

Oh, what a joy to clamber there,  
Oh, what a place for play,  
With the sweet, the dim, the dusty air,  
The happy hills of hay!



**Moonlit Apples** by John Drinkwater

At the top of the house the apples are laid in rows,  
And the skylight lets the moonlight in, and those  
Apples are deep-sea apples of green. There goes  
A cloud on the moon in the autumn night.

A mouse in the wainscot scratches, and scratches, and then  
There is no sound at the top of the house of men  
Or mice; and the cloud is blown, and the moon again  
Dapples the apples with deep-sea light.

They are lying in rows there, under the gloomy beams;  
On the sagging floor; they gather the silver streams  
Out of the moon, those moonlit apples of dreams,  
And quiet is the steep stair under.

In the corridors under there is nothing but sleep.  
And stiller than ever on orchard boughs they keep  
Tryst with the moon, and deep is the silence, deep  
On moon-washed apples of wonder.

**Mary** read the next four poems

**Fetching Cows** by Norman MacCaig

The black one, last as usual, swings her head  
And coils a black tongue round a grass tuft. I  
Watch her soft weight come down, her split feet  
spread.

In front the others swing and slouch; they roll  
Their great Greek eyes and breathe out milky gusts  
From muzzles black and shiny as wet coal.

The collie trots, bored at my heels, then plops  
Into the ditch. The sea makes a tired sound  
That's always stopping though it never stops.

A haycart squats prickeared against the sky.  
Hay breath and milk breath. Far out in the West  
The wrecked sun flounders though its colours fly.

The collie's bored. There's nothing to control....  
The black cow is two native carriers  
Bringing its belly home, slung from a pole.

**The Merry Ploughman** by Robert Burns

As I was a-wand'ring ae morning in spring,  
I heard a young ploughman sae sweetly to sing;  
and as he was singing, these words he did say -  
There's nae life like the ploughman's in the  
month o' sweet May,  
The lav'rock in the morning she'll rise frae her  
nest,  
and mount i' the air wi' the dew on her breast;  
and wi' the merry ploughman she'll whistle and  
sing,  
and at night she'll return to her nest back again.



### An Ettrick Herd's Song by William Addison

Noo I never could sing at a pairty,  
Tho' it's no for the want of a will;  
Yet I sing an auld sang, whaur there's naething  
but the dogs and the sheep on the hill.

Dean and Hemp dinna mind their ain maister,  
and the yowes graze awa' or lie still,  
When I sing an auld sang, whaur there's naething  
but the dogs and the sheep on the hill.

Oh! The Hame Land is bonnie in sunlicht  
and frae faur abune, the lark's trill  
Gaurs me sing an auld sang, whaur there's  
naething but the dogs and the sheep on the hill.



### My own last poem

A Sheep by Alfred Brendel (born 1931 in what is  
now the Czech Republic is a classical pianist,  
composer, poet and author)

A sheep  
addressed me as follows  
True  
you do not have my looks  
my wool my curls  
your voice  
does not pierce the heart  
your speech  
fails to convey the essential  
you do not run after rams  
you love neither peace nor nature  
sneeze in July  
and disappear at the slightest trickle of rain  
beneath your umbrella

And yet  
you remain one of us  
Even black sheep do  
Underneath your wolf's clothing  
something frail and gentle  
begs for protection  
I salute you  
little lamb at the shambles

Baaaah  
I said

### The Solitary Reaper by William Wordsworth

Behold her, single in the field,  
Yon solitary Highland Lass!  
Reaping and singing by herself;  
Stop here, or gently pass!  
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,  
And sings a melancholy strain;  
O listen! for the vale profound  
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chant  
More welcome notes to weary bands  
Of travellers in some shady haunt,  
Among Arabian sands:  
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard  
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings? -  
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago:  
Or is it some more humble lay,  
Familiar matter of today?  
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,  
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the maiden sang  
As if her song could have no ending;  
I saw her singing at her work,  
And o'er the sickle bending;-  
I listened, motionless and still;  
And, as I mounted up the hill,  
The music in my heart I bore,  
Long after it was heard no more.



Next we have **Irene's** four poems

### The Farmyard by A A Attwood

One black horse standing by the gate,  
Two plump cats eating from a plate;  
Three big goats kicking up their heels,  
Four pink pigs full of grunts and squeals;  
Five white cows coming slowly home,  
Six small chicks starting off to roam;  
Seven fine doves perched upon the shed,  
Eight grey geese eager to be fed;  
Nine young lambs full of frisky fun,  
Ten brown bees buzzing in the sun.

### The Back Step by Lee Knowles

Every day at sunset  
We watch the cows go by.  
We always like to be there,  
My grandmother and I.

They always go to water  
Along the same old track,  
But some must have a wander  
And some go quickly back.

There's Mabel, Maude and Judy,  
Mitzi who's always late  
And Betsy Anne, who's rubbing  
Her flanks along the gate.

Not for them the drabness  
Of car, or bike or train.  
For them it's warming sunshine  
And clear, refreshing rain.

It's giving milk each morning  
And dozing in the grass.  
It's never thinking over  
How each new day will pass.

And we can share a little  
In all this peace around,  
Sitting on the back step  
Scratching on the ground.

And so we dream together,  
And watch the cows go by,  
While shelling peas and chatting -  
My grandmother and I.

### Treasure by Una Leavy

Judith goes to feed the hens  
plaits down her back  
legs bare in navy shorts  
- the bucket's red.  
Lifting the latch  
of the wire-mesh gate  
she steps in the hen run,  
Rhode Island reds  
rush in a tumbled fuss  
of featheriness  
hustling for grain.

Six nesting boxes  
huddle in the shade  
sheltering from sun  
six eggs are laid  
smudgy with mud  
fuzzy with hen-down.

Carefully now  
into the bucket  
one  
by  
one  
dying to tell  
longing to yell  
but she mustn't run.

Tenderly now  
past rhubarb and sage  
by lupins and hollyhocks  
"Nanna" she calls.  
"I've got them all  
— an egg for every box!"



### Haying by John Frederic Herbin

From the soft dyke-road, crooked and wagon-worn,  
Comes the great load of rustling scented hay,  
Slow-drawn with heavy swing and creaky sway,  
Through the cool freshness of the windless morn.  
The oxen, yoked and sturdy, horn to horn,  
Sharing the rest and toil of night and day,  
Bend head and neck to the long hilly way,  
By many a season's labour marked and torn.  
On the broad sea of dyke, the gathering heat  
Waves upward from the grass, where road on road  
Is swept before the tramping of the teams.  
And while the oxen rest beside the sweet  
New hay, the loft receives the early load,  
With hissing stir, among the dusty beams.



Linna's three poems are next

To a Mouse by Robert Burns

*On Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough,  
November, 1785*

WEE, sleekit, cowrin, tim'rous *beastie*,  
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!  
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,  
Wi' bickering brattle!  
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,  
Wi' murdering *pattle*!

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion  
Has broken Nature's social union,  
An' justifies that ill opinion  
Which makes thee startle  
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion  
An' *fellow-mortal*!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may *thieve*;  
What then? poor *beastie*, thou maun live!  
A *daimen-icker* in a *thrave*  
'S a sma' request;  
I'll get a blessing wi' the lave,  
An' never miss't!

Thy wee-bit *housie*, too, in ruin!  
Its silly wa's the win's are strewin!  
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,  
O' foggage green!  
An' bleak *December's win's* ensuing,  
Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,  
An' weary *Winter* comin fast,  
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,  
Thou thought to dwell,  
Till crash! the cruel *coulter* past  
Out thro' thy cell.

That wee bit heap o' leaves and stibble,  
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!  
Now thou's turned out, for a' thy trouble,  
But house or hald,  
To thole the *Winter's sleety dribble*,  
An' *cranreuch* cauld!

But Mousie, thou art no thy lane,  
In proving *foresight* may be vain:  
The best-laid schemes o' *Mice* an' *Men*  
Gang aft agley,  
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,  
For promis'd joy!

Still thou are blest, compared wi' me!  
The *present* only toucheth thee:  
But Och! I *backward* cast my e'e,  
On prospects drear!  
An' *forward*, tho' I cannot see,  
I *guess* an' *fear*!



Summer Farm by Norman MacCaig

Straws like tame lightnings lie about the grass  
And hang zigzag on hedges. Green as glass  
The water in the horse-trough shines.  
Nine ducks go wobbling by in two straight lines.

A hen stares at nothing with one eye,  
Then picks it up. Out of an empty sky  
A swallow falls and, flickering through  
The barn, dives up again into the dizzy blue.

I lie, not thinking, in the cool, soft grass,  
Afraid of where a thought might take me—as  
This grasshopper with plated face  
Unfolds his legs and finds himself in space.

Self under self, a pile of selves I stand  
Threaded on time, and with metaphysic hand  
Lift the farm like a lid and see  
Farm within farm, and in the centre, me.

## Ploughing Match by Kenneth Steven

October 17th. The chestnut trees are flinted and alight,  
The skies are made of ice. But in this field  
Under the low hill rims  
Tractors ramble round like great red beetles, smoking.

Men stand in little knots, all wide red smiles  
And talk of town and cattle feed and Christmas,  
While their women folk, wrapped up like hens,  
Sip tea and whisper to the collies by their feet.

Then the Clydesdales clamber into place. They jingle  
With a jewellery of harnesses and ancient things  
Kept bright on every farm. The plough blades bite the earth -  
Green fields fold over black; the lines go straight as stakes.

And suddenly it is not now but then -  
A hundred years and more ago, and every one of us  
Knows horse scents, horse names, horse secrets, stories -  
The roads are paved with grass.

And tonight the ploughmen who have proved their hands  
and eyes  
Will dance away the dark in barns that reel with tunes;  
And if their luck is lit, they'll blush the cheeks  
Of girls who burned their hearts through every furrow.



## Lin's first two poems

### Familiar by Stewart Conn

For years he worked on the farms  
Disposing of animals at will,  
Trapping the inoffensive; laying powder  
So that they retched for water  
Till their bellies burst; or by stealth

And wire, night-planning, pine  
Saplings bent back, ready to spring...  
And always, afterwards, hanging  
The bodies on fence-wires, a barb  
Through the throat, lips drawn back.

Spoke to no-one. Surly when approached.  
Fondling only his dog - till it died,  
Causing further rumour. Slept in barn  
And hedgerow, till folk said the damp  
Had wasted him away, soured his brain.

Last seen wallowing in a ditch-foot  
(Whether in nightmare or fact no-one knew);  
Last heard, the moon full, gibbering  
Of beasts scenting him out, homing on him,  
Teeth bared, great wounds in their necks.

### The Scarecrow in the Schoolmaster's Oats By George Mackay Brown

HAIL, Mister Snowman, Farewell,  
Bright consumptive.

Rain. A sleeve dribbling,  
Broken mirrors all around me.

A thrush laid eggs in my pocket.  
My April coat was one long rapture.

I push back green spume, yellow breakers,  
King Canute.

One morning I handled infinite gold,  
King Midas.

I do not trust Ikey the tinker.  
He has a worse coat.

A Hogmanay sun the colour of whisky  
Seeps through my rags.  
I am - what you guess - King Barleycorn.

### I Lived on a Farm (Impromptu by Lin)

I lived on a farm,  
Yet I did not farm it.  
Its fields touched my house,  
Its sheep licked the putty on my windows,  
Its escaped cow munched my flowers,  
And menaced my baby in her pram.

I lived on a farm  
Yet I did not farm it.  
The noise of its milking machine  
Wakened my guests at six a.m.  
And the separated calves and their mothers  
Kept up a cacophony of plaintive roars.

I lived on a farm  
Yet I did not farm it.  
Their collie, never trained to the sheep,  
Visited regularly and we walked to the farmyard  
together.  
When the overwintering sheep were being moved,  
It was all hands on deck, and my dog as the back-  
stop.

I lived on a farm  
Yet I did not farm it.  
In spring my boys would not go to sleep  
Watching the tractors ploughing - by headlamps,  
In autumn my boys would not go to sleep  
Watching the combine harvester working by  
headlights.

I lived on a farm  
Yet I did not farm it.  
I walked in its fields,  
I meandered in its woods,  
I drifted along its river bank,  
And I loved it.



### The Farm by Joyce Sutphen

(American poet who served as Minnesota's Poet Laureate  
from 2011 to 2021)



Jack-in-the-Pulpit

My father's farm is an apple blossomer.  
He keeps his hills in a dandelion carpet  
And weaves a lane of lilacs between the rose  
And the Jack-in-the-pulpit.  
His sleek cows ripple in the pastures.  
The dog and purple iris  
Keep watch at the garden's end.

His farm is rolling thunder,  
A Lightning bolt on the horizon.  
His crops suck rain from the sky  
And swallow smouldering sun.  
His fields are oceans of heat,  
Where waves of gold  
Beat the burning shore.

A red fox  
Pauses under birch trees,  
A shadow in the river's bend.  
When the hawk circles the land  
My father's grain fields whirl beneath it.  
Owls gather to sing in his woods,  
And the deer run in his golden meadow.

My father's farm is an icicle,  
A hillside of white powder.  
He parts the snowy sea,  
And smooths away the valleys.  
He cultivates his rows of starlight  
And drags the crescent moon  
Through dark unfurrowed fields.