

Poetry Group report by Marilyn Normanton

"I started Early - Took my Dog -

And visited the Sea –

The Mermaids in the Basement

Came out to look at me -"

So wrote Emily Dickinson, whose imaginative poem was the first to be shared in this month's poetry group where our theme was The Sea. Dickinson herself became a virtual recluse who never saw the ocean but like many other poets used the sea as a metaphor. This is very clear in Tennyson's poignant "***Crossing the Bar***", written after the premature death of a dear friend and which begins "Sunset and evening star/And one clear call for me!/ And may there be no moaning of the bar/ When I put out to sea." There were a few wry smiles of recognition when we reflected on Stevie Smith's "***Not Waving but Drowning***", as the dead man moans "I was much too far out all my life/And not waving but drowning." We've all been there at times.



In contrast the wonderfully rich imagery of John Masefield in "***Cargoes***" takes us on a journey across the seas, describing the exotic "Quinquireme of Ninevah...", "With a cargo of ivory/ And apes and peacocks...", and the Spanish Galleon "Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green shores", carrying "diamonds/ Emeralds, amethysts ...". Bringing us back to home territory with a bump, the last verse describes a "Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack/ Butting through the Channel in the mad March days/ with a cargo of Tyne coal/Road-rail, pig-lead/ Firewood, iron ware and cheap tin trays."

We also shared poems which were descriptive and deeply evocative, such as "***Islandmen***" by RS Thomas. He writes of "the crusted men/ of the sea, measuring time/ by tide fall, knowing the changeless/ seasons..." and whose "dark hull bites/at the water, crunching it/to small glass..." In ***Sea Longing***, Sara Teasdale describes how "With the old murmur, long and

musical/The windy waves mount up and curve and fall/And round the rocks the foam blows up like snow”. Philip Larkin’s *To the Sea*, presents us with a scene many of us will be familiar with from childhood, when a seaside holiday was “half an annual pleasure, half a rite”.

We had a stimulating and enjoyable morning, not always agreeing as to meaning and interpretation, which is the beauty of poetry. It entertains, enlightens, stirs the emotions and makes us think.