

## Train of Thought Poetry Challenge

We invite you to write your own poem, or choose another with a railway theme, to be included in our exhibition and poetry readings at Station House, on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> and Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June, as we celebrate the 165<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the East Suffolk Railway.



The East Suffolk Railway and its stations were officially opened on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1859. This was the section of railway that joined Halesworth to Woodbridge, to link Lowestoft to Ipswich along the mainline, and Framlingham, Snape, Leiston, and eventually Aldeburgh, along its branch lines. The rest, as they say, is history, but it is also our heritage. Let's celebrate!

We are excited to have Vanessa Raison on board who has recently completed an MA in Poetry at UEA. She teaches in the Aldeburgh Library and is Suffolk's Champion for Poetry Together. Vanessa compiled this Poetry Pack and is co-curating the exhibition and Poetry Readings.

- ◇ The challenge is free to enter and open to all ages.
- ◇ We're looking for poems short and long; funny, serious, whimsical or true.
- ◇ The Poetry Readings, if you would like to join in with these, will take place on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> and Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2-4pm. You might like to read your own poem, or another on a railway theme, or just listen to others reading. Perhaps you and some friends could prepare a group performance?
- ◇ We will be able to display everyone's poems and there will be a few give-aways to!
- ◇ The exhibition will run from Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> to Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June.

Please email your poem as an attachment to:

[rosamund@stationhousecampseaashe.co.uk](mailto:rosamund@stationhousecampseaashe.co.uk) or hand it to a member of the Station House staff

- ◇ Deadline for submissions is midnight on 15<sup>th</sup> May

Please mark the subject heading: Poetry Challenge, and include in the body of the email:

1. Your name(s)
2. Title of the poem
3. The poet's name (this could be you or someone else)
4. Your e-mail address
5. Age, if under 18
6. Print 'yes' or 'no' if you would like to read your poem at one of the poetry readings.
7. If 'yes', please indicate which day you would prefer: Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> or Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June

If you have any poetry specific queries please don't hesitate to contact Vanessa on 07720 292104 (WhatsApp is best) or e-mail: [vanessa.raison@btinternet.com](mailto:vanessa.raison@btinternet.com)

### ***Train of Thought***

by Robert Webb (Station House)

165 years of iron, steam, and rhyme,  
Our Station House stands, a testament to time.  
Mark your calendars, poets one and all,  
A weekend to celebrate, big and small.

From seasoned souls to budding bards enthralled,  
Share your love for trains, and let the spirit call.  
The challenge of poetry beckons your might,  
Limerick or sonnet, haiku take flight!

Odes, clerihews and elegies, acrostics too,  
Unleash your creativity, fresh and new.  
At Station House, a platform for your verse awaits,  
On Saturday and Sunday, share your poetic trait.

Screens ablaze with words and rhythmic chime,  
Easterling walls adorned, a poetic climb.  
Musical whispers, a harmonious blend,  
Printed poems, their stories transcend.

So join the chorus, let your verses soar,  
Bring your train of thought, and put us all in awe.  
For details and more, put your writing at stake,  
Contact us, a simple request we make.

## Some ideas for writing train poems and some poems for inspiration

1. Draw a train with carriages. Not a spidergram but a train-of-thoughtagram. Can you remember your first train journey? Was it a rite of passage? Put words in each carriage. Write a poem in the shape of a train.
2. Write about a real or imagined 'Brief Encounter' on a train. Sit opposite a friend or family member and imagine you are two characters on a train. Write your conversation as a poem.

3. What animal could you describe a train as? In the poem, *Sheep in Fog*, Sylvia Plath writes,

*The train leaves a line of breath,  
O slow  
Horse, the colour of rust,  
  
Hooves dolorous bells -*

4. Edward Lear said: "The true test of imagination is the ability to name a cat." (*Making Knowing and Judging*, Auden, W.H. OUP, 1956).

What would you call the one-eyed, black and white cat who tightrope walks the track every morning at Campsea Ashe station? Why? Write a poem about him/her. You could draw or paint a picture to illustrate your poem.

See the excerpt below from *Skimbleshanks* by T. S. Eliot.

5. Can you write a poem about a train journey that sounds like a train? Use onomatopoeia (a word that sounds like what it is describing like 'pop' or 'bang' or 'splash') and rhythm and rhyme to make the sound.

See below *From a Railway Carriage* by R.L. Stephenson, and the excerpt from W.H. Auden's *Night Mail* which can also be found on YouTube

6. What is your earliest memory of a song, poem or story about trains? Can you write a poem for a child, or a funny poem, or an absurd poem, or a nonsense poem?

See below *Piggy on the Railway*

7. Robert Webb has written *Train of Thought* to promote the Poetry Challenge. Can you write a clerihew about a character from the history of the East Suffolk Railway? For instance, a character such as architect Francis Thompson, born in Woodbridge, who designed all the station houses on the line from Melton to Halesworth and Lowestoft.

The clerihew, is a biographical poem of two rhyming couplets which don't scan. The first line must include the name of a person. The following is an example by Edmund Clerihew Bentley, who invented the form:

*Christopher Wren  
Said, "I am going to dine with some men,  
If anyone calls  
say I am designing St. Paul's."*

8. You could pick up one of our Poetry slips from Station House and write a haiku at every station in the time it takes for the doors to open and close. What do you see and hear along your journey?

9. Write a poem about the excitement of meeting or greeting someone at the station. Try to recreate the sense of anticipation.

See below *At the Railway Station* by Sir Charles George Douglas Roberts

10. Sit on a station platform early in the morning or at sunset and describe the sounds, sights, smells, taste and texture that you encounter.

See excerpt below from *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* by John Lennon/Paul McCartney

Search the internet for examples of the many different forms of poetry.

## Examples of poems inspired by trains and the railway

### ***At the Railway Station***

by Sir Charles George Douglas Roberts

Here the night is fierce with light,  
Here the great wheels come and go,  
Here are partings, waitings, meetings,  
Mysteries of joy and woe.

Here is endless haste and change,  
Here the ache of streaming eyes,  
Radiance of expectant faces,  
Breathless askings, brief replies.

Here the jarred, tumultuous air  
Throbs and pauses like a bell.  
Gladdens with delight of greeting.  
Sighs and sorrows with farewell.

Here, ah, here with hungry eyes  
I explore the passing throng.  
Restless I await your coming  
Whose least absence is so long.

Faces, faces pass me by,  
Meaningless, and blank, and dumb,  
Till my heart grows faint and sickens  
Lest at last you should not come.

Then—I see you. And the blood  
Surges back to heart and brain.  
Eyes meet mine,—and Heaven opens.  
You are at my side again.

### **Excerpt from *Night Mail***

by W. H. Auden

This is the night mail crossing the Border,  
Bringing the cheque and the postal order,

Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,  
The shop at the corner, the girl next door.

Pulling up Beattock, a steady climb:  
The gradient's against her, but she's on time

Past cotton-grass and moorland boulder  
Shovelling white steam over her shoulder,

Snorting noisily as she passes  
Silent miles of wind-bent grasses.

### **Excerpt from *Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat***

by T. S. Eliot

There's a whisper down the line at 11.39  
When the Night Mail's ready to depart,  
Saying "Skimble where is Skimble has he gone to hunt the thimble?  
We must find him or the train can't start."  
All the guards and all the porters and the stationmaster's daughters  
They are searching high and low,  
Saying "Skimble where is Skimble for unless he's very nimble  
Then the Night Mail just can't go."  
At 11.42 then the signal's nearly due  
And the passengers are frantic to a man—  
Then Skimble will appear and he'll saunter to the rear:  
He's been busy in the luggage van!

### **Excerpt from *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds***

By John Lennon/Paul McCartney

Picture yourself on a train in a station  
With plasticine porters with looking glass ties  
Suddenly someone is there at the turnstile  
The girl with the kaleidoscope eyes

### ***Piggy on the Railway***

Anon

Piggy on the railway,  
Picking up stones,  
Along came an engine  
And broke Piggy's bones.

"Oy", says Piggy  
"That's not fair."  
"Pooh," says the engine-driver,  
"I don't care."

### ***From a Railway Carriage***

by Robert Louis Stevenson

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,  
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;  
And charging along like troops in a battle,  
All through the meadows the horses and cattle:  
All of the sights of the hill and the plain  
Fly as thick as driving rain;  
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,  
Painted stations whistle by.

Here is a child who clammers and scrambles,  
All by himself and gathering brambles;  
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes;  
And there is the green for stringing the daisies!  
Here is a cart run away in the road  
Lumping along with man and load;  
And here is a mill and there is a river:  
Each a glimpse and gone for ever!