

Introduction to Poets' Corner

Poets' Corner in Horsham Park was a project run by Friend of Horsham Park for the Year of Culture. It had three main aims:

- To celebrate our local poetry heritage
- To encourage new talent via three poetry writing competitions
- To create a visitor attraction and meeting area for small groups by installing twelve tree trunk seats in Horsham Park each displaying a poem.

There were three poetry writing competitions – for adults, for senior school aged entrants (12-18 years) and for children (6-11 years). The poems had to be written either about the park or about nature and were restricted to 14 lines.

We were delighted by the response with over 100 entries. Many were superb and it was difficult creating a shortlist. We had three panels of judges. The diverse backgrounds of the judges aimed to ensure that the winning poems appeal to a wide variety of people visiting the park.

- Anne Smith (local published poet)
- Kim Tucker (Principal librarian, Family services)
- Martin Nichols (former Head of English at Collyer`s)
- Amy Mallows and Holy Elford (Collyer`s students planning to read English at university next year),
- Jo Nixon, Lynda Cheseman and John Marder from the Parks and Countryside team.

The original plan was to have a poetry trail with the winning poems and showcase just three winners at Poets' Corner alongside favourite published poems nominated by the public. However, at the shortlisting stage it became apparent that there were so many high quality entries that it would be better to have a more extended trail and to use nine of the twelve tree trunk seats at Poets' Corner to display 1st, 2nd and 3rd placed poems for each of the categories. These winning poems are displayed alongside poems by our local famous poets: Percy Bysshe Shelly, Hilaire Belloc and Julia Donaldson. The winning poems are included in this book along with the judges' comments.

These poems, along with the shortlisted poems displayed on the poetry trail, form a delightful record of the importance and enjoyment provided by the park to locals of all ages. They celebrate the park as a place for escaping the stresses of life, for connecting with nature and the changing seasons, for having fun and keeping fit, for memories created and friendship enjoyed there, and even for its noises. Several focused on environmental and conservation themes and the importance of this much-loved space in our town and district.

We hope you enjoy the poems.

Sally Sanderson
Chair, Friends of Horsham Park

Adult competition winners

HORAS NON NUMERO NISI SERENAS*

Well, that would be a very simple thing to do
If, like Freud, you could discard the pain
Of memories sad, taking the optimistic view,
And only see the happier times again.
Be that as it may, we lived a pleasant hour
Among the lavenders and thyme and sage
And pretty things that late in Summer flower;
And for a time we forgot the weight of age
And talked of happier things and moments droll
Snatched from a past that cannot change,
For which even Nature cannot charge a toll,
Discussing things both rich and wondrous strange.
What earthly pleasure is there quite so sweet
As gentle friends conversing on a seat?

Maurice Packham

Winner – Adult Competition

*The title means 'I only count the hours that are happy' It is taken from the motto on the sundial, by John Skelton, in Park House garden where the poem is set.

Judges' comments

The judges thought this was the most stylish entry, a classic Shakespearean sonnet. They liked the reflective tone, the suggestion of the Park as a place of refuge and enjoyment of old friends' company. It is convincingly thoughtful. The initial melancholy is gradually and sensitively assuaged so that the final couplet feels like an achievement. Although the sonnet is a demanding form, Maurice very skilfully maintains a gentle colloquial register whilst adhering to the formal constraints. A lovely achievement.

Maurice died last year and the poem was submitted on his behalf by his family – it is a wonderful tribute both to him and the park.

Swallows in Horsham Park

Those airborne, East Street acrobats,
Whose dancing forms fill shining sky,
Above this the place which left grass stains
On the bare knees of my childhood, and mind.

Where distress, and time, and moving day
All pause.
For breeze lifts leafs, lifts spirits, brushes trees,
Tears words from my page and blows them away,
Leaves me here with sun-soaked gaze, looking up
Through tousled branches, to see them; fly.

How they turn, and turn, and turn in air,
Return in summer from who knows where,
As I will do, when I am done. Return, I hope
To peace, and grass, and summer sun.

Hannah Valente

Second place – Adult Competition

Judges' comments

The judges found this a thoughtful and genuine poem - the structure echoes its subject delightfully. It nicely balances hope and inspiration with a gentle reflectiveness. Language is heightened in places but not obtrusively. The judges were moved by the lovely images of swallows, the breeze lifting leaves and spirits, the connections made with the natural and human world.

Overall it is an effective and reflective poem, capturing the view of how the park is a constant through a life, how time spent within it, offers a break to everyday stresses and how this will continue to be the same for generations to come.

Plenty to do

There's plenty to do in the Park.
Start early, don't wait until dark.
You can bowl, you can kick, you can run till you're sick,
Take rubbings of trees, well their bark.

There's fun to be had all around.
Swim inside and out, I have found.
You can scoot, you can skate, crash into your mate,
Mind you don't hit your head on the ground.

There's tons of fabulous things.
You can slide, climb on ropes, go on swings,
Have a bash at the gym and get fashionably slim,
Get out there! Enjoy! Spread your wings!

Rod Cuming

Third place – Adult Competition

Judges' comments

Rod's poem is light-hearted and his use of rhyme and uncomplicated language makes it suitably accessible for all readers of all ages. It is fun, dynamic and encourages us all to enjoy the wide range of facilities in the park.

Senior School competition winners

Eye-contact

Nature can't be narrowed down
to colour. A by-product of summer.
Its light is sight; our plastic infinitely finite.
In eye-contact with the forest is a feeling
that you'll blink and miss the sunrise before you.
If only it weren't true.

You pause, and birdsong breaks through.

What if forests were slipped
behind shop-window glass?
What if skies were splashed over the underpass,
with its cold graffiti, oxygen-starved?

Let's shatter the barrier and see;
seeing is all it takes to shatter something.
Let's look, let's breathe.

Nadia Henning – aged 18
Winner – Senior School Competition

Judges' comments

The judges liked the way Nadia related her poem directly to Horsham park with reference to the underpass, and her use of questions which encourages us to consider the way we see and treat the park. It is strongly written. The sentences are skilfully handled and phrasing is memorable: "seeing is all it takes to shatter something." It is a thoughtful mix of senses with a challenging conclusion – an awakening moment. A strong voice.

Nature Finds Refuge

Nature finds refuge
In a picturesque expanse.
Enthusiastic trees watch over-confident grass,
The complete beat of the earnest surreal sunbeams
Piercing, warming the heart of the haven of beauty.
Happiness radiates around the pulsating scenery,
Giving us tranquillity, expecting nothing in return.
Getting nothing in return
Except the fire that we burn,
And the bulging, bullying, built-up bug
And its tendrils of litter gnawing on the serene scene,
Infecting the wildlife-filled veins.
Nature finds refuge,
We need to as well.

Luke Jackson – aged 12
Second Place – Senior School Competition

Judges' comments

It is impressive how Luke has managed to share an important lesson on the necessity to respect and protect nature in only 14 lines. We liked the juxtaposition of the sublime and the messy.

Memory Lane

Drifting along memory lane, I can hear my own laughter,
from a time when I was happy, when I was free.
Each intricate game amongst the flowers getting dafter
and each merry-go-round dance enticing my glee.

My feet scrape forward on the path I used to play,
entranced in a land of nostalgia and tranquillity.
The ghost of a child happily leads the way
to the park that taunts me with familiarity.

My childhood sings its siren song along with the birds,
A harmony of happiness, a symphony of sweetness.
My salty tears clash and claw against it, in droves, in herds,
but my heart succumbs to its forgotten weakness.

Somewhere in the mind of a poet, cold and dark,
lie the lost but resurfacing memories of Horsham Park.

Jess Hollingworth – aged 16
Third place - Senior School Competition

Judges' comments

The judges thought this was a richly expressed and sensitive poem. It shows an enthusiastic response to the park enjoyed as a carefree child and an effective combination of simple and complex language and rhymes.

Junior School competition winners

Autumn and Winter

The wind whistles wildly
As it blows across the park.
The trees rustle roughly
As they whip from side to side.
The leaves dance as a child runs through;
They turn, browns, and reds, oranges too.
And the swans are like graceful angels,
Flying across the sky.
The sun shines brightly,
More brightly than the moon.
And the lazy winter wind
Goes right through you.

Izzy Cadman – aged 8
Winner - Junior School Competition

Judges' comments

The judges liked the descriptive language which really conjures up the scene in Horsham Park. Some beautiful images of the leaves that 'dance as a child' and the swans like 'graceful angels'. They also liked the ending. The abruptness of the 'lazy winter wind that goes right through you' really makes you think of sitting in the park admiring the scene and then all of a sudden you notice how cold you are and realise it's time to move on.

Noises in the Park

Birds tweeting,
Crickets cricketing,
Dogs barking,
These are the noises in the park.

Ducks quacking,
Geese honking,
Leaves rustling,
These are the noises in the park.

Swans' feathers,
Bright as the sun,
And when the sun comes out to play,
Children stay outside all day,
These are the noises in the park.

Hannah Shelton – aged 9
Second place – Junior School Competition

Judges' comments

The judges like the way Hannah has highlighted noises that we tend to ignore on our walks in the park. The poem is a reminder to us to take the time to sit and listen.

Raindrop

D
el
licate
raindrops
silky and bright
falling fast and fearless
trembling tense and twinkly
looking at yourself in the puddles
wellie boots stomping and splashing
all the puddles are different sizes
damp dented and cold
dark and frightful

Saffron Ayley – aged 7
Third place – Junior School Competition

Judges' comments

The judges thought this a lovely picture poem in the shape of a raindrop with some great alliteration and a wonderful image at the end of 'damp dented' puddles after you've stamped in them.