

Edward Capern Festival 2026

Postman Poet of the Year Award – Winners

WINNER

Drystone Wall

Alan Craddock

Each knuckled rock, each catch and snag holds its next in firm embrace,
All enduring, cold and brutal, but with unintended grace.
Stubborn straight, blindly brailing, 'cross the moor hard fingers read
the earth's soft pulsing, bedrock shifting, student of time's fickle speed.

Built when life was plain and spare, by mist-damp hearts with stunted lives,
stone on stone, year on year, kin on kin, the wall survives.
Built to last, built for order, sweat and hammer, pegs and cord,
raw blunt fingers, raw blunt minds, stripped of dreams by church and lords.

The wall today grows ancient greens of moss and lichen, patch and stain.
Pigment wash in summer heat, impasto oil in autumn rain.
No Banksy here, no DJ flier, guano splash the only tag;
No Sam loves Jude, no Names of the Fallen, no blue plaque for stoat or stag.

Dusk veils as weightless owl, softly beats and bobs and glides,
its stealthy hues speak its steel, what alchemy of tone abides?
October dawn, windswept beech, ochre brushed, racked but mute,
stagging drunk, the wall beside it lists from heave of straining roots.

A thousand years, shifting forest slips the rocks to scattered heaps.
Swelling oceans fish the nooks, moss undone by shimmering reef.
Fierce hot winds drive naked sand, covering all like blanket throw.
Floating spectral what-might-be-s in the crow black never-know.
Stirring mists of dark unease in the crow black never-know.

SECOND PLACE

What the Sheep Told Me, or A North Devon Lesson in Love

Frances Corkey Thompson

It was an over-the-fence conversation,
the fence on which she, or one of her sisters,
had left a yanked-out cloud of wool.
'That must have hurt,' I observed.

She eyed me with the one devil-eye
in the near side of her face, making it clear that
right now her business was concentrated chewing.
She heeded me as little as she heeded

the lamb bumping at her underneath,
tail going like a piston, and here was its twin
romping home to her over the field,
and not a sign from her of welcome or delight.

I asked her therefore if she thought that humans
sometimes acted out their feelings in rather
inflated gestures, and might love actually require
less display? And more proper attention?

This did not exercise her enough
to stop her munching, or trouble her lambs.
Love, she offered ruminatively, *is to be given
freely and from a full heart*

according to what is needed and when.
It can be nothing less. It is nothing more.
Her reply shone clear as the sun on the sea
that joyous North Devon spring morning.

THIRD PLACE

Changing Times

Paul Osborne

Sadly many things have changed,
since through this landscape Capern ranged,
horse and plough now long gone
as mighty tractors roar along,
no more flowers in the fields
as farmers strive to increase their yields,
pollution in our rivers and seas
causing a decline in fish species.
In the hamlets where he used to roam
every other house now a holiday home,
where the buzzards used to soar and swirl
now the giant turbines whirl
and to add to our dismay
in many fields a solar array,
even in the clear blue sky
the vapour trails as jets fly by.

But the beauty still remains
if you seek the quieter country lanes,
their banks of flowers under sunny skies
providing food for the bees and butterflies,
in the dappled shade of the trees
their branches whispering in the summer breeze,
or the fleeting aroma of petrichor
as fresh rain falls on the dusty floor.
And in the wild remoter places
you can still find the open spaces,
along the coast or on the moors
dotted with their rugged Tors,
or the valleys in between

where hidden gems still lie unseen,
wander the banks of the meandering stream
where sparkling kingfishers dart and gleam.
It's here we spend our leisure hours
and hope they will be forever ours,
not for developers to destroy
but for us all to enjoy.