

1st Place – Peter Branson for “The Boat House”

The Boat House

London Rowing Club, Putney

This is the season for it, not when fields
are iced iron-rut or frayed brown corduroy
or loud with corn; rather when bells are pitched
to tune with living things, the rising sap,
white blossom, throstle, lark, hormonal rooks.
These days the stallion’s bolted, door distressed -
I’m speaking generally of course – and yet
it’s not died out nor been replaced. Young folk
don’t change that much, still feel the need to pledge
their troth in front of family and friends,
the world to judge. So what of this bright pair
who’ve pulled us here today, twin oars -one boat?
They’ve chosen well I think, each other, this,
the food and drink, the company, the view.

What the Judges said:

All three judges applauded the understated skill of this deceptively low-key, almost sepia-tinted sonnet. The voice (older, and we felt sure, male) muses convincingly on the unchangingness of the central ritual, endearingly captured in metaphor (‘twin oars - one boat’) amidst changing times (‘these days the stallion’s bolted, door distressed’). We sense his gruff approval at things being done, in his view, properly and in ‘the season for it’, as well as a countryman’s nostalgia for ‘rising sap’ and the lovingly listed, old-fashioned things of his youth: ‘white blossom, throstle, lark, hormonal rooks’. A beautifully constructed and slow-moving piece that feels to bestow both eulogy and blessing.

About Peter:

Peter Branson, a former teacher and lecturer, has run creative writing courses and poetry workshops for the last ten years in adult and further education colleges and for WEA. He was writer in residence for the first three years of the 'All Write' project run by Stoke-on-Trent Libraries.

His poetry has been published or accepted for publication by journals in Britain, USA, Canada, EIRE, Australia and New Zealand, including Acumen, Ambit, Envoi, Magma, The London Magazine, Iota, Frogmore Papers, The Interpreter’s House, Poetry Nottingham,

Pulsar, Red Ink, The Recusant, South, The New Writer, Crannog, Raintown Review, The Huston Poetry Review, Barnwood, The Able Muse and Other Poetry.

His first collection, "The Accidental Tourist", was published in May 2008. A second collection was published at the beginning of this year by Caparison Press for 'The Recusant'. More recently a pamphlet has been issued (May 7th) by 'Silkworms Ink'. A third collection has been accepted for publication by Salmon Press, EIRE.

Note: This poem was written for Peter's eldest son's wedding and Peter read it out in the Boat House.