Adlestrop Poetry Competition
Press Release

Winner Announced

The Adlestrop Poetry Competition attracted over 190 entries from all over Britain and the world. Poets were asked to write a 16-line poem inspired by the original one by Edward Thomas. The winner was announced on 24 June at Adlestrop Village Hall by the judge, P. J. Kavanagh. This took place during a special event hosted by the 'Friends of the Dymock Poets' which marked the centenary of Edward Thomas' memorable journey when his train stopped at Adlestrop.

P.J. Kavanagh presented David Sutton with a cheque for £400 as his prize and said:

'What I liked about the winner was a tactile memory. Steam train, being included in the steam (the writer I mean), the slats of the tarry footbridge that 'tingled underfoot', the cloud of steam (and the emergence from it), suggested to me the confusion of the war Thomas was about to go into and not emerge from... As for the standard of the entries, nearly two hundred, it seemed to me surprisingly good, considering the conditions of the competition, 16 lines, 'Adlestrop' etc. I was very impressed. This poem, to me, stood out, but the choice of runners-up was difficult, there were so many to choose from.'

He also commended the following poems:

Playing Trains by Vanessa Gebbie
A Premonition by John Mole
Medlow Bath by Denis Rice
Remembering 'Adlestrop' by Alexandra Davis
Adlestrop Unwound by John Whitworth

The organisers of the Poetry Competition hope to publish a short book later in 2014 incorporating all of the above poems plus many of the other entries.

David Sutton receiving his prize from the judge P.J. Kavanagh

David Sutton lives in South Oxfordshire and has published eight books of poetry, the last being *No Through Road* published by the Greenwich Exchange. He was inspired to write the poem after first visiting Adlestrop in 1961:

'I remember passing through Adlestrop on a cycling tour in the summer of 1961, when I was seventeen, and stopping on the railway bridge to take a drink from my water-bottle. A passer-by told me that a good poem had been written about the place. At that time I had never heard of Edward Thomas, and it was hard to see what there was about this very quiet scene to make a poem out of, but when I got back I managed to find 'Adlestrop' in an anthology, and that was the start of a lifelong devotion to the poet of all poets who spoke to me most clearly about the things that I loved in a language that I instinctively understood.

When I came to write my poem for the competition, this memory became fused with an earlier memory from my childhood: there was a railway at the bottom of the road where I lived, and a narrow bridge (long since replaced by a more modern structure) where we children (free to roam in those days) would stand to watch the trains go by beneath. So the poem is a little about me, but much more, I like to think, about the poet in that far off summer, and the heritage he left us, that if anything speaks to us ever more clearly with the passing of time: the years go by, but the song goes on.'

One afternoon of heat the express-train

To stand on the railway bridge – that was the dare
When we were children, while the last steam trains
Thundered beneath us, blotting out our world
With acrid gritty grey, and tarry slats
Tingled underfoot. When we came down
Pleased with our childish valour, earth and sky
Unclouding seemed the sweeter: I rejoiced
At sunlight on my face, the song of birds.

Now when I read your poem this comes back
But what I see is not myself but you,
The watchful traveller, nerving yourself
Soon to a more dreadful dare, but then
Getting it down at last, before your world
Was blotted out forever: haycocks, clouds,
While round you, near and far, and farther yet
Than you could ever know, the song went on.