

Oak Category Winner

THE UNKNOWN WORKMEN

As a student of Birkenhead Park, a concept I admire,
people often put to me – who was it lit the fire?
Was it the Town Commissioners, who summoned up the dream,
or the artistic zeal of Paxton, turning blank paper into schemes?

Or the diligence of Kemp who turned drawings into land,
nurtured novice plants, and saplings, into a singing, forest band.
This was before the tractor, excavator and machines,
who was it that turned marshland – into sweet sylvanic dreams?

Made the ravines, lakes and bridges, built the towering focal points?
Created havens for wildlife, space for archery and quoits?
It was honest navies' labour, sweat pouring to their knees,
who hewed and dug and shovelled, for well-heeled visionaries.

These calloused hands of steel, propelled the picks and spades,
Turned marshland into pasture, created rustling forest glades.
These men gave their daily body, to earn shelter and a crust,
and feed their starving family – then rest, just where they must.

Seldom praised for their effort, in numerous wordy manuscripts,
Like neighbours in the shipyard, who slaved and died – for ships.
Same treatment for the navy gangs, who mined the massive docks,
To berth the ships, that came and went, through the man-made locks.

So, I admire the simple workers, who hard and constant toil,
turned the bad lands of the area, into rich and fertile soil.
Like Wilfred Owen's foot-soldiers, Orwell's miners – feel the pride,
the honest workmen of the park – the finest men alive!

John Cocker