






the Solihull Sonnets

A selection of poems and sonnets celebrating the Solihull Borough, produced as part of Festival 36.

Festival 36

Celebrating Shakespeare's First Folio in Solihull, part of the Everything to Everybody project




KNOWLE LOCKS




GORDON
THE MONKEY




NEWLANDS
BISHOP
FARM

The Solihull Sonnets

About The Solihull Sonnets and Festival 36

The Solihull Sonnets is a colletion of sonnets and poems written by local Silhillians. It is a celebration of our Borough, poetry and the legacy of Shakespeare on the written word. It forms part of Festival 36, a series of exciting events surrounding the Birmingham copy of Shakspeare's First Folio visiting Solihull.

Festival 36 is a part of the 'Everything to Everybody' project, an ambitious three-year celebration of one of the UK's most important cultural assets: the vast Shakespeare Memorial Library housed within the Library of Birmingham. Everything to Everybody will give the city's uniquely democratic Shakespeare heritage back to the people, and is a collaboration between the University of Birmingham and Birmingham City Council, with funding also contributed by National Lottery Heritage Fund, and History West Midlands.

Collating the Solihull Sonnets

The Solihull Sonnets were a real community collaboration, gathered through a series of workshops and individual contributions. The Festival 36 team were truly blown away by the amount and quality of the submissions received, and are very proud to present them in this limted edition book. A special mention must go to the organisations who hosted sonnet writing workshops with Rachel Sambrooks

- Castle Bromwich Historic Gardens
- Chelmsley Wood Library
- Dickens Heath Library
- Gro-Organic
- Knowle Library
- Lily's Tea Parlour
- Newlands Bishop Farm
- Olton Library
- The Core Library
- The Snooty Pooch Cafe

Poet's Foreword

As part of the creation of this book of poetry, I took the role of nomadic community poet, ranging across the borough to visit local community groups. The expanse and diversity of the settings was surprising and really interesting. I loved meeting everyone on my travels, visiting libraries, a pop-up tea parlour, gardens, a farm, shopping centres and was welcomed by all the groups with a generosity I didn't expect, given my slightly odd occupation. When you go to a knit and natter group you don't necessarily expect a poet to turn up! However, I found in these spaces and places in the heart of Solihull, people telling their stories in these moments, however they could. And I hope you enjoy the wonderful mix of lives that are represented in these pages.

Rachel Sambrooks, poet for The Solihull Sonnets



The Solihull Sonnets

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After Shakespeare

By Rachel Sambrooks

Shall I compare Solihull yesterday to today?
Thou art more contemporary and less rural.
The spread of land wider than the scope of streets
Stores that stand maybe not as pretty as the hedgerow,
but still the trees live on, oaks by ash, birch and maple.
Did William visit here where the Forest of Arden parted ways?
If music be the food of love, did he hear it on these streets?
Was it a day's ride from Stratford? Has this village seen better days?
If town is now filling this country and Shakespeare visited this village,
are the paths he trod on underfoot? What if the words arrived here first,
then travelled to London, met with raptured hearts,
listening to poetry that would make thy heart burst.
What world that hath such people in it?
Did Shakespeare stay here, and leave words with wit?



Once upon a soily hill

By Jasmine Brown

One day upon a soily hill they stood,
When Arden's forest cloaked the land in green.
The River Blythe cut through the ruling wood
That Roman roads did fail to pass between.
Beyond the hill they spied a clearing, bright,
Where settlers broke their fast with early smoke.
The first to lay a claim upon this site,
They would, one day, be known as Shirley folk.
And over time that clearing grew and grew;
"The Town in Country" woven through the trees.
The birds would see below them, as they flew,
A sea of roofs and leafy canopies.
One day upon our Solihull they stood,
And saw a future home, so green and good.



The Borough

By Andrew Barnes

Garden village, enclosed as "urbs in rure",
Half- timbered houses at the top of the town,
a planning clerk might lose all composure
over schemes which aim to hold their prices down.
When civic pride can come before a fall,
cast forever in the big City's shadow,
Birmingham, greedy, seems to take it all,
uses power and position like there's no tomorrow.
So the place seeks out its own unique role,
always pressing it's strong identity,
it's parts in sum making a greater whole,
history ensuring that it will always be
this planted borough laid out by decree
of the Lords of the Manor of Ulverlei.



Distinctive Character

By Paul Francis

Never quite sure – town/country? country/town?
While fortunes of great families fluctuate
as some soar up while others plummet down
we keep our steady, comfortable state.
Here's greenery and flowers, a sense of space
that's healthy. Doesn't mean that nothing's made.
This is a busy, working kind of place
which deals in fabrics, and the iron trade.
Never went in for gambles. Never backed
that "boom or bust?" Our feet stayed on the ground.
So here we are, prosperity intact,
untroubled by the tides where others drowned.
It's Urbs in Rure, as we like to say.
We're different, know it. Proud to be that way.



Knit and Natter in Olton

Co-written by Rachel Sambrooks
with special thanks to Sue, Joy, Geraldine and Kay

In the maze of books, the jigsaw table, studying and children's den
There's a community space where knit and natter knots together
Worlds and families in a space for those who chatter then
Cross stitch lives together with yarns and threads that gather
Interrupting knitting a message as grandchildren ride donkeys at Weston
Flea bitten they hope not, maybe the ice cream has gone to his head.
The world of family expanded, across to Leeds, over to Paris, all gone.
Geraldine's moved from Purley to York to Sussex and here to stay now.
While the needles are clicking and the stitches tight side by side,
each precise cross builds a Japanese garden, maybe this one will be framed,
the back as neat as the front. But they make them for others mostly,
hats for too young babies, for lives unravelled - refugees who left with
only the clothes on their backs, for the women who leave hell,
knitting weaves together more than a scarf or a cardigan – it brings hope.
Kindness arrives in the form of a yarn, a welcoming, warming antidote.



A walk by the lake

By Vivienne Russell

As the Sun reflects on the water so blue
This place is a haven of tranquillity
A shimmering light casts a beautiful hue,
While the sparkling light flows into infinity.
A walk by the lake can relax the soul
Your care and worries drift high into space.
The gentle ripples of the water can make you feel whole,
While taking in the glow slows down the race.
There is lots to see on a lakeside walk
Ducks and Geese float by in a daze
While anglers fish and do not talk
The trees look majestic in the haze.
A walk by a lake ends when it's dark.
But it brings hope to a lonely heart.



Cold Lands Wood

By Sue Barclay

Carefully stepping, ensuring not to tread
Or trample, fresh shiny green growth
Emerging from the decaying leaf strewn floor
Child wonderment at nature's call
Quickly walking on the soft mossy lawn
To inhale sweet perfume wafting on the breeze
From the sea of blue amongst the trees
Running, playing, care free times
Slowly moving down the uneven path
To cry, berate the changing landscape
Unruly brambles supress that wonderous blue haze
But memories remain of those happy days
This land, a special place of my childhood
This glorious, scented bluebell wood



Newlands Bishop Farm
A group poem by project workers

We see a brown and white horse in the field,
Too many doors that lead to the same part.
Pigs (they look tasty) Cheese the cat, Chicken the rabbit,
The horse's stable and a tractor.
We hear baby lamb's bleating, new goats going merr murr,
Chicken's clucking, footsteps in heavy boots
and vehicles off on their jobs. We can touch wood
and wood splinters, strong, rough and smooth.
The ground, the soil and after,
hands as smooth as a baby's bum.
Smell gas from the vehicles, flowers, food from the kitchen,
freshly cut grass like cucumbers and Christmas, school days.
Feeling happy, like fizzy lemonade clear in your mouth.
Lighter, body easier to carry, we are poets, happy and proud.



My Garden

By P. Ollivier

How precious is a garden
Giving pleasure as it grows
Spring brings such joy and fulfilment
Creating golden inner glows
A vixen displays her cubs so proudly
As they run and jump with relentless glee
While mischievous squirrels dart around profoundly
Like lightening striking an unsuspecting tree
Birds call out with independent charm
And in rapid return responsive songs they share
Filling the air with a blissful calm
As beautiful music fills the summer evening air
How lucky are we
To have such beauty to see?



Shirley Poppies

By Andrew Barnes

London bloom, cultivar, pinks and wild-field reds,
so swiftly raised from April scattered seeds,
true gardeners stoop, make efforts to deadhead,
distinguishing between the several species
that grow in counties not only of their own,
setting seed-winds 'cross disputed borders,
from Durham, Yorkshire, through Kent men were drawn,
enlisted to serve and follow orders.
Now in the Midlands we remember war,
sculpt flowers of French fields in garish scale,
bright as blood, black through every tortured core,
eighteen stand for each regiment that fell.
From air they would be as a meadow scene,
grounded, a gore-seeping echo of screams.



As I went to the door

By Anna B, Newlands Bishop Farm

As I went to the door it seem to light up
I never seen light up to my eyes so bright
I never thought so many lights.
The squeak unlocks the voice saying unlock, come in.
I can smell soap through all rooms
And home cooked meal.
I'm pushing heavy weight as go in the wooden door
And scared get splinters.
I feel happy to be in my own comfort zone,
I am a young lady with my own wishes and life.



A Poem

By Nargis Rashid, Dickens Heath

I'm standing looking out onto the river,
Sunlight dancing on water.
Gentle breeze moving the waves,
Sparkling like stars – mesmerising
Buzz of voices behind me,
Some hushed, some loud and laughter
Weaving in and out of consciousness
Like the breeze on the water
Smell of coffee being served in the room
And of bodies on a warm afternoon.
Mix of perfume and aftershave as people
Move closer to the window for a moment to look out.
This room and the people are mostly strangers
And yet here I am – that too is stranger still!



Newlands Bishop Farm
A group poem

We see a brown and white horse in the field,
Too many doors that lead to the same part,
Pigs (they look tasty) Cheese the cat, Chicken the rabbit,
The horse's stable and a tractor

We hear baby lamb's bleating,
New goats going merr murr
Chicken's clucking they sound like a duck
Footsteps in heavy boots and vehicles off on their jobs

We can touch wood and wood splinters
Feels strong, rough and smooth
The ground, the soil and after
Hands as smooth as a baby's bum.

Smell gas from the vehicles, flowers
Food from the kitchen, freshly cut grass
Like cucumbers and Christmas, school days.

Feeling happy, like fizzy lemonade clear in your mouth
Lighter, body easier to carry, fit and muscly
We are poets, happy and proud.



Past and Pleasant

By Andrew Barnes

The scent of wi-ld garlic on the nose
A distant hum of the M42
A town at peace with how to juxtapose
The Horse and Master bronze galloping through
A stretch along the Blythe quite prone to flood
Adorned with finches glist-ning in the trees
Through meadows to a small sun-dappled wood
Shimmering and swaying in the breeze.
Nearby, the remnants of a grand old hall
A story told by bright porcelain shards
Yet still a crumbling, ivy-riven wall
Stands proud above the mem-o-ries it guards
This town watched over by St Alphege spire
This "Urbs-in-Rur-e" of WestMidlandshire



Solihull Sonnet 2023

By Rachel Sambrooks

See the town in country, through window grid,
Medieval black and white beams that might
remind you of the village there hidden.
Villagers moved to more modern site,
and green ivy spills over concrete walls.
Box plants with decking, a comfortable seat,
shops beckon in airy light filled waterfalls,
the square opened out for people to meet.
With grass covered cars, throne and gorilla,
greet, meet, eat is the only community task.
In the library the public gathers, tai chi and choir,
theatre, comedy, tragi-comic mask
This place hides a village in market square.
Displaced but villagers still gather there.



An ode to Solihull

By Naomi Qureshi

Our world is a fabulous gift, this is true,
Very few parts are boring or dull,
Yet still the most lovely of places I've known,
Is right here, in our own Solihull…

From Fen End to Dorridge, the trees are so lush,
Down in Berkswell, the grass is so green,
The shopping in Shirley and Chelmsley is fun,
And the Bickenhill air is so clean…

If your hair needs a cut, or your eyebrows need shaping,
Then Knowle is a place you can go,
You could finish your day with a takeaway treat,
From the friendliest restaurants I know!

There's Hillfield and World's End, there's Kingshurst and Eastcote,
There's Smith's Wood, to name but a few,
Wherever you go out in Solihull, there's always
something quite special to do…

There's Elmdon and Fordbridge, and Hob's Moat as well,
There is Olton and Solihull Lodge,
There's Meer End and Meriden (right in the centre of England,
so not one to dodge!)

In Hockley Heath, just as in all Solihull,
Any stranger will soon be a friend,
Embrace your new pals as you meet them in Longdon, or Monkspath,
Or down Cornet's End…

Whilst Whitlock End's train stop is easy to get to,
Copt Heath's very nice for a walk,
Dicken's Heath's cosy, and Bentley Heath's cute,
Bacon's End isn't really all pork!



The White Lion Pub up in Hampton-in-Arden,
Has hosted a 007,
Catherine de Barnes isn't far up the road,
Wow, our town is a small slice of heaven!

Marston has parts that are lovely and green,
Balsall's not really Common, or trite…
Sharman's not Cross, and the Castle at Bromwich
Is marked by its own 'Pimple Site'!

So, as you can see, Solihull is a town,
So filled up with such charm and true mystery,
Come take a look, fall in love with the splendour,
And help make some more local history!

Mitchell Round
The scent of wi-ld garlic on the nose
A distant hum of the M42
A town at peace with how to juxtapose
The Horse and Master bronze galloping through

A stretch along the Blythe quite prone to flood
Adorned with finches glist-ning in the trees
Through meadows to a small sun-dappled wood
Shimmering and swaying in the breeze.

Nearby, the remnants of a grand old hall
A story told by bright porcelain shards
Yet still a crumbling, ivy-riven wall
Stands proud above the mem-o-ries it guards

This town watched over by St Alphege spire
This "Urbs-in-Rur-e" of WestMidlandshire



Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens

By Annette Barber

How bright the sun reflecting paper bright,
Reveals the blankness of an empty mind.
Ideas are flowing limited and slight,
And poking into corners fondly find,
A favourite word, long hidden deep in shade
Presents itself, and promises such joy,
All other words begin to gently fade
And I must bend my mind to new employ.
The words begin to flow and open door,
I gently tread forgotten paths with pleasure.
The new words join in company adore,
And I have found a wonderful new treasure.
So here I sit in lovely gardens free,
Enjoying words and shrubbery and tea.



Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens

By Rachel Sambrooks

Old and new the same space inhabit.
Gardens here long here before the planes
overhead, on their landing path to the airport,
As the whine from cars joins birdsong,
the beat of music, live and urban, feeds the air.
All part of the gardens here. Even a corgi in a pushchair,
The gardens beyond the gate hold secrets, an orangery and
cool to the touch music room. Ancient limes and modern
bees. The old and the new combined. A door into a
secret world. And new arrivals here are shown vegetables
as memories of home. What veg do you recall?
Where is home in this place? A garden for centuries; for all.



Solihull Extras

By Paul Francis

In history's margins, bit parts do their thing.
Hordes of Throckmortons, plotting, do their worst
to bring down Parliament, blow up the king.
Royalists must have thought this region cursed.
Disraeli, the most resolute of men
minding romantic business of his own
must always be in touch with Number Ten,
insists this town should have The Telephone.
Always a pleasure, moving up the queue.
At Oxford, Auden sits at Tolkein's feet,
those ancient rhythms throbbing through his skull -
Old English poetry. Neither has a clue
there's one more setting where their stories meet –
those uneventful days at Solihull.



Silhillians

By Andrew Barnes

Auden round the corner, house in Homer road,
frequenting St. Alphege's Sunday service,
brought me no fire, no inspired divine code,
just restraint that boils beneath the surface.
Lettice Floyd wept for her sister suffragettes,
hunger-strike force-fed for a charge upon the House,
Berkswell's conscience, with no worldly regrets,
in death-bed defiance, held hands with her gay spouse.
and Alfred, whose father was strictly for the birds,
built mansions on his custard foundations,
leaving his gardens in Solihull's suburbs
for the borough and all its vacations.
Communal history -of its class, at times intense, myopic,
such characters, these gentlefolk, benign and philanthropic.



Gro-Organic Group
A co-created poem

In the garden with Nicky and Kerryann, we are having a chat
Potatoes are growing in the bed, hoe it, water the soil make it wetter.
A sweet potato has long roots dangling like ribbons, what do you think of that?
Plant tomatoes in the sunshine – makes everything feel better.
Debbie loves it here – the sunshine, birds singing, doing the gardening
Really happy, it's lovely and hot. Proud of herself, she gardens at her own place
She doesn't like snow but she is used to the cold, put a cardigan on
Tidying up, weeding, feeling the wind on her face.
James is a Blue Nose. Blues fan. He speaks the Blues. He can see the match
Big crowds, cheering and singing –'keep right on to the end of the road'.
He's given football shirts at the end, takes them home, a fine catch.
Feels happy at the match, even in the garden he loves to talk of the Blues.
Having a laugh over melons that are growing, watching the seeds flower.
There's wild bees in the beehive, keeping the garden alive,
Sharing their news, bought new shirts from town, holidays soon, a brother
gone to Amsterdam. Let's go to the Victory garden, another place to thrive.
The victory is over gloom and misery, happy in the sunny green.
The victory is a garden, singing, being part of a team.



A Smith's Wood Sonnet from Lockdown

By CARS together

A few streets locked in a crescent, a small estate with big dreams.
Lottery funded community project, we do everything.
Sports and theatre, wellbeing and events,
We love an event. Auckland Hall house us, yoga, bingo
Playgroups all, trails and Fun Day, Easter egg trawl.
Sports on Bosworth Field. We ask the residents:
What do you want? Snug streets in Smith's Wood,
that had mixed messages in lockdown. Do not post
an event they will gather. No posting through doorways.
But we are mother now – a food bank for them,
bright yellow t shirts the colour of the sun, of hope
We meet outside but Bingo doesn't work in a storm,
papers fly in the wind, words lost on the mist.
Whatever we lay on the people will come.
We are the Smith's Wood of dreams, we are home.



Roger

By Emma Banks, at Lily's Tea Parlour

The ring looks like a tear and it makes me happy,
And I'm so happy that I meet Roger,
Because all my worries disappear,
And make me free to do what I want
Because he is at my side and
He loves me to the moon and back forever.
In loads of rings and jewellery,
There was mine and Roger's song
Playing 'I swear'.
I smelled roses and his aftershave,
The touch of his heart when he gave me a big hug
I feel happiest and makes the sunshine in my heart
So happy to look forward to the wedding day.
For a happy ever after.



Chelmsley Wood Library

By Rachel Sambrooks

Tea and coffee to welcome you in
The staff are book wranglers, cup finders, artists.
The view from the sky-high windows is
of trees and tall tower block. A tree indoors
displays ribbon and blossom, grey as a silver birch,
hanging Coronation wishes from its branches.
It's not always quiet, someone comes in with
phone on speaker, another asks about
the stars, they've seen the moon every night with a
cluster of stars glowing in a glittery circle.
There's a book for that.
Here are newspapers where they looked
for the dead. Now these paper days are numbered too.
But this library thrives as a community hub,
come on in and join the club.



The Gift - Lily's Tea Parlour

By Rachel Sambrooks

The volunteers are giving time
and friends are giving gifts.
A dressing gown, food for
those that need it – no forms,
no embarrassment.
Time is given – a listening ear,
natter more than knit, the latte's lovely.
One is getting married, another spins
magic turquoise sparkles into tiny squares,
a blanket that takes forever, with
a rainbow of crochet needles.
Outside it's sunny, inside warm, watched
by an Elvis clock in a hug of fuchsia and pink.
The sparkle of glitter wool and biscuit barrels
of Jemima Puddleduck.
The toast is always spot on.
This time and place is a gift.



A Moment of Beauty
By The Cage

I can hear the darkness,
I can hear the silence,
I can hear the void,
I can hear the birds.

I can feel the emptiness,
I can feel the space,
I can feel the pain,
I can feel the dawn.

I can see the loneliness,
I can see the mess,
I can see the gloominess,
I can see the dawn of light.

I am here on my own BUT
I am fine.



Brueton Park

By Andrew Barnes

Where once we walked in summer's golden fine,
to spy heron perch upon Blythe branches,
over water, still ripples, slow-combined,
dragonflies bold in squadron-rank tranches,
now linking arms we stroll into false time,
along the path towards a fading sun,
age in a duffle coat shambling behind,
future too certain, our ending begun.
I still seek out hope in nature's surrounds,
this parkland cycle of managed life and death,
each spring with new life brings insight profound,
winter aches ice and a shortening breath.
Once we loved this place for freedom and hope,
now it holds a solace helping elders cope.



The Snooty Pooch Café CIC

Co-written by Rachel Sambrooks, with special thanks to Rory & the Hong Kong Community Group

Honey, beautiful music, lemon and ginger.
A comfortable chair and table.
The grandma of everyone, because
My name is Grandma.
Then Kaylie sees Karena
hears pigeons, smells chocolate,
She feels happy. Yoel sees family
Hears happiness, tastes Grandma's scone.
At Lion Rock the people sing,
The scent of milk tea.
In our hearts we are together,
Hong Kongers.
Flowers, a dog barking,
warm hands. We are people.



The Core Theatre

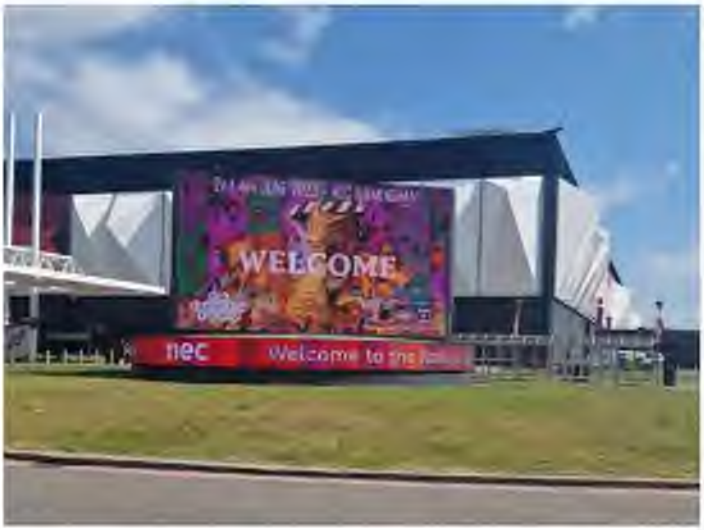
By the marketing team at The Core

At the heart of Solihull stands The Core,
a theatre that is beloved by all.
Whatever show you might be looking for
you'll be sure to find it within these walls.
If you like music you're in for a treat,
with bands of all kinds, from country to pop.
You'll spend all night long dancing in your seat.
You won't want to go home when it all stops!
Our team sure know how to put on a show;
you will be ever so glad that you came!
There's musicals, drama and films, you know,
not forgetting our great pantomime dame!
So pick up a brochure, and flick through each page
to find out what's coming soon on our stage.






THE CORE

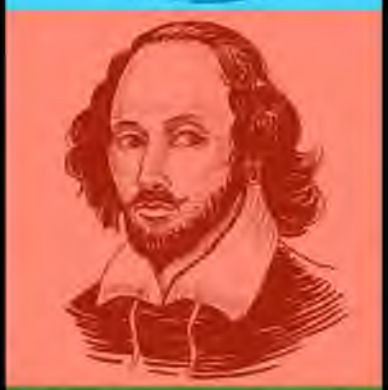

WELCOME
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LIBRARY












Festival 36

Festival 36 is presented by Culture Solihull with The Core and Solihull Council, part of the Everything to Everybody project

THE CORE

Culture Solihull

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

Everything to Everybody

Using Birmingham's forgotten past to inspire our future:
Unlocking the world's first great people's Shakespeare Library for all

University of Birmingham College of Arts and Law

Birmingham City Council

Heritage Fund

West Midlands History

Sponsored by

Resorts World Birmingham

TOUCHWOOD

SOLIHULL BID