

## OFFICIAL RESULTS

**First Place** is awarded to the poem **‘Gold Rush Embers’** written by Sean Duffy of Victoria.

*‘This is an excellent poem - very well written! The imagery is awesome! The rhyming structure is very interesting - both impactful and effective. I really enjoyed reading ‘Gold Rush Embers’. There was something haunting and compelling about it. Congratulations!’ – BB2024 Co-adjudicator Rupert McCall AO*

**Second Place** is awarded to the poem **‘A Gallipoli Rosary’** written by Peter O’Shaughnessy of Western Australia.

**Third Place** is awarded to the poem **‘The Rivers I Knew’** written by David Judge of Victoria.

### Highly Commended

My Country Show – David Judge VIC

The Mystery of the Granites – Terry Piggott WA

White’s Crossing – Chandra Clements QLD

The Shearers Strike – David Judge VIC

Street Stray – Brenda Joy QLD

### Commended

Young Wal from Wongawol – Peter O’Shaughnessy WA

Condamine Tree – Glenny Palmer QLD

Captain Thunderbolt – Tom McIlveen NSW

Saying, “Goodbye” – Jan Facey QLD

Stepping Stones – Mal Beveridge QLD

Organisers are grateful for the service and poetic due diligence of members of the BB2024 Panel - internationally renowned Australian Poet Rupert McCall AO and previous Blackened Billy winners Catherine Lee (2011, 2018, 2020) and Irene Dalgety Timpone (2022).

Congratulations to all entrants for the high standard of wonderful works and broad array of storylines. Special congratulations to the 10 poets awarded this year. For your reading pleasure, the winning poem follows. Note that Walhalla is pronounced as Valhalla. Adjudicators recommend reading this poem aloud to enhance the experience. Enjoy!

Gold Rush Embers      © Copyright 2023 Sean Duffy

In the southern Baw Baw foothills  
    when the looming winter schemes,  
and cicada sounds fall silent  
    as the sleeping summer dreams;  
when the early frost prepares to  
    hunt the remnants of the heat,  
and the shades of dusk awaken  
    where the light and darkness meet –  
in Walhalla's twilit spaces  
can you see their haunted faces?  
As the valley rim grows fainter  
    and the sickle moon takes flight,  
with the shroud of dusk descending  
and the shapes of shadows bending  
do you see their pale forms blending  
    with the velvet edge of night?

For this quaint, historic hamlet  
    with its forest-scented calm  
has a beauty laced with sadness  
    and a chill beneath the charm.  
Pause awhile amid the graveyard  
    on Walhalla's eastern hill.  
Read the epitaphs on headstones  
    in the eerie evening still.  
Though the gold rush years have drifted  
and the scourge of death has shifted  
    even now the bygone perils  
    leave their poignant graveyard scars.  
When the dying day grows dimmer  
do you see their ghostly shimmer  
as the last light's tender glimmer  
    stirs the coals of countless stars?

In your mind's eye see them toiling  
    for the gold their souls still seek,  
as their spirits intermingle  
    with the mist above the creek.  
Hear the sounds of steel on rock face  
    in the deep and blinding black,  
where the light of lanterns barely  
    holds the crushing darkness back.  
Hope and promise fanned a flame here –  
loss and sorrow staked a claim here –  
    there was wealth, though many battled,  
    their existence hand to mouth.  
But for some the jobs were steady,  
willing workers always ready,  
courting danger in the eddy  
    of the gold rush in the south.

Mining metal in Walhalla  
was a war against the stone,  
where the hard-won spoils were tarnished  
by the miners' blood and bone.  
Mortal man has few defences  
when the flesh and rock collide,  
or when dust – the airborne killer –  
wastes him slowly from inside.  
Fiscal gain for callous bosses  
justified the human losses  
(though the entries in the ledgers  
never counted those who died).  
For the worker, fate was fickle,  
reaping blindly with the sickle,  
till the rush became a trickle  
and the golden river dried.

While the miners knew the menace  
of the tunnel and the cave,  
merely living in Walhalla  
meant a fast burn to the grave.  
There was filth and overcrowding  
with disease and death run rife,  
when the hills were incandescent  
with the fires of gold rush life.  
This was once a place of drama  
but the ambience is calmer  
now – a century of seasons  
since the sunset of 'the rush'.  
From their haunts among the hollows  
shadows spill and nightfall follows  
as the hungry darkness swallows  
what remains of twilight's blush.

In the afterglow of sunset  
sense the presence of the dead.  
Feel the brooding, brittle tension  
as the day hangs by a thread.  
Where the graveyard trees stand sentry  
at the verge of now and then,  
does it seem, for just a moment,  
that the past might live again?  
In the stillness time is slowing  
and we share the fate of knowing  
not the manner of our passing  
to that place no mortal sees.  
Mystic veils suspend between us  
and the spirits who have been us:  
fleeting phantoms who have seen us  
at their graves among the trees.

For a while Walhalla flourished,  
but the fortune could not last.  
Now the ghosts of those who died here  
draw us back into the past.  
Feel the heartache and the anguish;  
taste the salt of bitter tears –  
painful memories now softened  
in the endless flow of years.  
Though the atmosphere grows colder  
still the gold rush embers smoulder  
as another autumn settles  
in the valley's verdant fold,  
while the sounds of death and dying  
echo sadly in the sighing  
of the trees that watch the lying  
place of men who died for gold.

© Copyright 2023 Sean Duffy

#### **Sean Duffy's inspiration for *Gold Rush Embers* -**

Of all nearby locales, Walhalla is my favourite destination. It's a beautiful place. Once a thriving gold town with 4,000 inhabitants, it now survives with a population of 20, sustained by tourism, volunteers, and a shared passion for its history. I first visited Walhalla 28 years ago; the old buildings and the tour guide whispered tales of a bygone era.

Later, reading the personal accounts of Walhalla's early residents, I empathised deeply with them. Despite the hardships, they spoke fondly of that time, revealing life's dual nature: beautiful yet brutal, replete with joys and sorrows, pregnant with promise and laden with loss.

This dichotomy (also characteristic of modern life) inspired my poem, in which I have attempted to bridge the past and the present through vivid imagery. I have also tried to create emotional depth by evoking a sense of history, melancholy, reflection, and the passage of time.

#### **A MESSAGE FROM THE COMPETITION ORGANISER**

Congratulations Sean Duffy! Tamworth Poetry Reading Group organises the Annual Blackened Billy Verse Competition to inspire and encourage modern writers of rhymed and metered verse. The Competition celebrates all wordsmiths who strive to capture Australian stories in this traditional style. Modern interest in this competition remains strong and builds upon the legacy of the legends who have won 'Billy' in prior years.

#### **IN MEMORY OF MILTON TAYLOR – 3 TIME BLACKENED BILLY WINNER**

The 2024 Billy trophy plaque features a memorial nod to the late Milton Taylor's writing of 3 Blackened Billy winners. It is 20 years since 'The Saga of Cecil' won in 2004 with an entertaining tale of sewage being used to extinguish a bushfire. 9 years later, in 2013, Milton won with 'The Passing of a Legend' - a larrikin tale about a community and their resident thief. In 2024, we acknowledge the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Milton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Billy win in 2014 with 'Remember?' - a beautifully crafted and poignant human interest poem exploring dementia and care.

You can discover poems by Milton Taylor and other great Australian poets on the Australian Bush Poets Association website. ABPA's free online gallery includes winning works from 2008 onwards, from a range of Australian writing competitions – including the Blackened Billy. Start exploring the Award winning poetry available by searching [www.abpa.org.au/award](http://www.abpa.org.au/award) . Enjoy !