



CATEGORY: World Events Have Rumbled On

WINNER:

Inoffensive Spring

Spring, 2014, a dusty square in Gravelines.
A group of grey-haired tourists struggle
from a coach to their hotel.
Saga holiday, I think; forget them.
But later, in the bar, I am ashamed
to realise that I have scorned a pilgrimage;
that these are they who did grow old.

I cannot see the physical and mental scars
they bear, just marks of age in time-lined faces,
faltering steps, deaf-aids, a wheelchair:
no sign there of what these people were
when, seventy years ago, they grieved
for slaughtered parents, siblings, friends -
or fought through man-made hell
in the ravaged death-dark fields close by,
this day, a peaceful, sunlit green
shot through with dark red poppies
and the song of birds.

Poppies, symbol of that earlier war, the war
so vile that some thought it would end all wars,
so vile that poets ceased to glorify the conflict, told the truth
about the waste of youth, the horror and the pity of it all
through images that shocked – as the media shocks us now.
Shocked, but did not, does not, halt the next aggression
nor prevent retaliation; we do not forget, but we ignore,
and as the ink of peace is drying,
human nature marches nations back to war.

Joan Potter

HIGHLY COMMENDED:

Two Woods

England: Autumn in a Wolds wood.
A leaf-kingdom, adrift on a woodland floor.
Skeletal canopy, filigree branches.
Sunlight, a sylvan solace-cloak of silence.
Yet, expectancy, hushed bird song.
Nature, breath-holding against Winter's onslaught.

A village close by: a church, sacred site in The Domesday Book;
The Cathedral of the Wolds. Generations recorded here of the quick and the dead.
Affixed to a wall, a roll call of honour;
A testament to village men, soldier-witnesses of war wastelands.
Enduring here in this sanctuary of remembrance.

An evocation: France, Oppy Wood, The Western Front.
A shattered landscape, carnage of casualties.
Opposing sides in a deadly embrace.
The trenches; death chambers, the barbs of wire,
Shell screams; sacrifice, fear, courage, camaraderie.
East Yorkshire men, some still tender of face
Were reaped in a harrowing harvest here.

England : Summer now in the Wolds wood.
Leaves; glossy, green, life-giving.
A flourishing canopy: fecund freshness, vibrancy.
Sweet, sibilant bird-song.

France: Summer now in Oppy Wood.
'No monstrous anger of the guns' *
A ravaged land, now rejuvenated.
Nature's nourishment, its wound-healing.
Its defiant rebirth.
An ascent of bird-song thrills on the air.

*Wilfred Owen. – Soldier poet of World War One – Anthem for Doomed Youth.
Spoke of his duty to tell the truth about the realities of war.

James Davidson