

The Bangor Literary Journal

Issue 22

FORTY WORDS Competition Winners

Featuring the winning entries from the 2025 Forty Words Competition.





We are delighted to showcase this year's 12 longlisted entries, including this year's Poetry Winner Denis Mayne: 'The garden of an early nineteenth century farmhouse in the grounds of a first millennium settlement rath.' And this year's fiction winner: Chris Cottom: 'Fewer than Ever at the Regimental Reunion'

The call for this competition asks writers to create and then enter a piece of prose or poetry written within the stranglehold of a 40 word limit. Year upon year, we are astounded at the abilities of these writers to produce pieces which are deft and impactful.

We hope you enjoy this year's selection and the two winning pieces, as much as we have! Thank you to every single one of you who supported us by entering this demanding competition.

2025 FORTY WORDS POETRY WINNER

Denis Mayne: ‘The garden of an early nineteenth century farmhouse in the grounds of a first millennium settlement rath.’

2025 FORTY WORDS POETRY RUNNER UP

Siobhan Ward: ‘In the queue at the post office’

2025 FORTY WORDS FICTION WINNER

Chris Cottom: ‘Fewer than Ever at the Regimental Reunion’

2025 FORTY WORDS FICTION RUNNER UP

Heidi Edmundson: ‘Everything Leaves its Mark’

2025 FORTY WORDS LONGLIST

Seán Carlson: 'Stranded'

Denis Mayne: 'Night on the Coastal Path'

Peter Adair: 'Dr Finlay's Casebook, 2025'

Rhona Stephens: 'Sijo'

Chris Cottom: 'When they came for the mime artists, I did not speak out'

Marie Studer: 'Love Song'

Rhona Stephens: 'My Next Pair of Shoes'

Kay Cuthbertson: 'String of Perils'

NOTABLE MENTIONS

Peter Gardiner: 'Untitled' (SS Guard)

Rosaline Callaghan: 'please'

J. W. Surface: 'Rain and Diapers'

Stephen Smythe: 'Upstairs, Downstairs'

Terry Hickland: 'Moving Worlds'

Chris Cottom: 'They both worked in Sofas and Armchairs'

2025 FORTY WORDS POETRY WINNER

Denis Mayne



Denis Mayne lived most of his life in Groomsport before moving to Bangor. After a short period as a tea planter in India he became a Belfast bookseller. He later graduated from Queen's in archaeology. Denis began writing more seriously following the death of his wife in 2021. He was then 82. He writes short pieces of memoir, some fiction and very small poems.

FIRST PLACE

**The garden of an early nineteenth century farmhouse
in the grounds of a first millennium settlement rath.**

Dusk
Stillness and silence gather
Like siblings.
From the gloam
A sensing
Of men coming in from the fields.
We, interlopers in time,
Withdraw to the house.

2025 FORTY WORDS FICTION WINNER

Chris Cottom



Chris Cottom once lived next door to JRR Tolkien. He's packed Christmas hampers in a Harrods basement, sold airtime for Radio Luxembourg, and served a twelve-year stretch as an insurance copywriter. He liked the writing job best.

FIRST PLACE

Fewer than Ever at the Regimental Reunion

The man opposite can't handle the terrain, dips his medals into his soup.
He'll never make it through the Black Forest gateau, so I have to leave him.
Unless we get reinforcements, next year will be a table for one.

POETRY RUNNER UP

Siobhan Ward



Siobhan's poem 'Convalescing at the Kent Coast' won second prize in the Westival International Poetry Competition 2024. Other poems have been commended in competitions and published in journals including Acumen, Dreich, Ink Sweat & Tears, Porridge, Poetry Worth Hearing, Wildfire Words and Cannon's Mouth.

In the queue at the post office

two small boys on the move.
Mum says their names -
you're so badly-behaved lately -
it's very disappointing.

I picture *bad* and *disappointing*
as seedpods
landing, germinating.

Outside, the daffodils,
early this year,
try to keep their heads up.

FICTION RUNNER UP

Heidi Edmundson



Heidi Edmundson was born and grew up in Portrush. She is currently an Emergency Medicine consultant in London. However, she never forgot her love of writing and in 2011 joined a weekly writing group. Her debut novel 'Darkness in the City of Light' was published in February by Constellations Press. Her second book Belly Full which is narrative non-fiction is due to be published in May. www.heidiedmundson.co.uk

Everything Leaves its Mark

“Don’t get a tattoo” they said.

I ignored them and got the moon on my foot. One day I nearly died and everyone in the hospital loved it. So, when I survived, I got a flame on my wrist.

Longlisted

Rhona Stephens



Rhona Stephens grew up in Northern Ireland and now lives in Scotland. Her pieces have been short-listed for *Wells Festival of Literature Open Poetry Competition*, long-listed for *Bangor Poetry Competition* and *Rialto Nature and Place Competition*, and appeared in *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Bangor Literary Journal* and in a few anthologies. Her poems for children can be found in *The Toy*, *TygerTyger*, *Parakeet*, *PaperBound* and *Dirigible Balloon*.

Sijo

August, the swallow drama deepens, builds to the final act.
They steal the warmth and light, gather summer in their wings.
While I grieve their leaving, somewhere someone waits to greet them.

Longlisted

Seán Carlson



Seán Carlson is working on his first book, a family memoir of migration. His essays and poetry have appeared in *the Honest Ulsterman*, *the Irish Independent's New Irish Writing*, *the Irish Times*, *the Oxford Review of Books*, *Ragaire*, *Sonder Magazine*, *Trasna*, and elsewhere. He was awarded with a 2024 Elizabeth Kostova Foundation poetry fellowship in Bulgaria.

Stranded

Childhood, waves lap beneath
bluff shimmers into cliffstone
caves cut and the casting
of jellyfish like bags strewn,
slit, shovels in the sand.

Longlisted

Denis Mayne



Denis Mayne lived most of his life in Groomsport before moving to Bangor. After a short period as a tea planter in India he became a Belfast bookseller. He later graduated from Queen's in archaeology. Denis began writing more seriously following the death of his wife in 2021. He was then 82. He writes short pieces of memoir, some fiction and very small poems.

Night on the Coastal Path

A potbellied moon
Bouncing along the rim of the
Scarp.
We travel together.

Ships anchored
On the black water
Lit up like spangles.

Below
Rocks caressed
By a sleepy sea
Softly softly

Longlisted

Peter Adair



Peter Adair is a multi-award-winning poet who has also been shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing. Peter's poems are published widely in a range of Irish and international anthologies and journals. He has performed at Aspects Festival and Open House Festival. Peter's e-pamphlet, *Calling Card*, is available from Amazon here:

<https://amzn.eu/d/1tP0sny>

Dr Finlay's Casebook, 2025

It's 8.30
and after

a minute
I hang up.

But spare a thought
for those who

won't wake tomorrow,
who won't hear

that precious
voice tomorrow:

*All our telephone appointments
have reached full capacity.
Please call again tomorrow.*

Longlisted

Chris Cottom



Chris Cottom once lived next door to JRR Tolkien. He's packed Christmas hampers in a Harrods basement, sold airtime for Radio Luxembourg, and served a twelve-year stretch as an insurance copywriter. He liked the writing job best.

When they came for the mime artists, I did not speak out

When they came for the horse-whisperers, I did not speak out.

When they came for the laryngitis sufferers, I did not speak out.

When they came for the trainee lexicographers, I did not speak out.

Longlisted

Marie Studer



Marie Studer is widely published in journals and anthologies. She is a past winner of the Trócaire/Poetry Ireland Competition. Her poems have been placed in many competitions, most recently in the Francis Ledwidge International and The Denis O'Grady International Poetry competitions. Her debut collection, *Real Words* was published by Revival Press (2023).

Love Song

We watch a mallard –
Elvis flashes of emerald-sapphire
jet skiing spumes

while unruffled, his intended,
prim in understated fine feathers
bobs on glitter ball prisms

of spotlighted staves.
I turn smoothing my red dress.
Hum our song.

Longlisted

Kay Cuthbertson



Kay Cuthbertson is a new Scottish writer based in Edinburgh. She writes in a range of fiction formats, from poetry to flash fiction to a debut novel. Her work has been published by The Dead Cat Poetry Prize and Cranked Anvil.

String of Perils

In Scotland, the word 'pearl'
is pronounced like 'peril'.

This is what I think
as I compliment her necklace,
cutting like dimpled scar
tissue across her throat.

What I say is "My,
what a beautiful string
of perils."

Longlisted

Rhona Stephens



Rhona Stephens grew up in Northern Ireland and now lives in Scotland. Her pieces have been short-listed for *Wells Festival of Literature Open Poetry Competition*, long-listed for *Bangor Poetry Competition* and *Rialto Nature and Place Competition*, and appeared in *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Bangor Literary Journal* and in a few anthologies. Her poems for children can be found in *The Toy*, *TygerTyger*, *Parakeet*, *PaperBound* and *Dirigible Balloon*.

My Next Pair of Shoes

will be red and I will wear them somewhere I have not visited before. I shall go alone, for who would travel with someone whose shoes are an elegy to a broken heart.