And the winners are - bread and Mauritania

13 Jul 2009 by Jancis Robinson

The winner of this year's Geoffrey Roberts Award is a 26-year-old baker, Dilly Boase, pictured here. She is absolutely passionate about bread and will use her prize of £3,000 to travel round Italy learning all there is to know about baking in Italy. She is currently working at the artisanal Born and Bread bakery in south London but plans to spend a month in Italy visiting bakeries to record bread-making processes and the life surrounding the loaf, concentrating on Valle d'Aosta, Tuscany and Puglia. An artist by training, she fell in love with baking and began a course in Bread Technology at the National Bakery School but, disaffected by the technologies and additives involved, she abandoned it in favour of practical experience. She found Born and Bread by literally following her nose as she cycled past an industrial estate. 'They couldn't turn down someone so enthusiastic', she says.

With her increased knowledge, she would like eventually to set up her own bakery with her brother, 'a bakery linked to a cafe for students in Sheffield (start with the young..). For me, on the bakery side, this will be the chance to put into practice what I've observed. I intend to build a practical argument against the teachings of the National Bakery School, not because of a personal vendetta, but because we should have much better bread than is generally commercially available... The bakery "scene" is very exciting at the moment, but I want it to be more than a fad. I'd like to spread awareness of the delights (and good sense) of good bread.'

The runner up, Alison Thomson, will receive £1,000, enough to fund her air fare, to travel to Mauritania in West Africa. When she passed through the country on her motorbike ride from London to Timbuktu last year, she was struck by the poverty of this forgotten nation and would like to return to research the potential of the country's fishing industry for creating more wealth.

She explained to judges of the Award, 'Mauritania seems to have been forgotten by the world. The first democratically elected president in the country's history was imprisoned after a coup last year. The capital, Nouakchott, is made up largely of shanties, street upon street of wooden huts, as thousands of people pour into the city away from the desert in the hope of creating some sort of life. I saw dozens of people praying on the street outside their huts - they had no mosque. On our visit to the Plage des Pecheurs (pictured), I was overwhelmed by a teeming mass of humanity, all desperate to eke a life from the sea. I would like to win this award for them - to raise awareness about their plight.' The judges hope that, as chief sub editor of one of the London *Sunday Times*'s magazine sections, Alison will be well placed to achieve this worthwhile objective.

The Geoffrey Roberts Award is an annual international travel bursary open to applicants from any country (it is unusual that in 2009 both winners are British). To find out more about the Award, the pioneer wine importer after whom it is named and how and when to apply, visit www.geoffreyrobertsaward.com