

# Plot Lines



● Wellington Vale  
Care Home



London  
Road ●

● Silverthorne Way

Orchard Mead



St George's  
Church ●

● Coffee Ville

Newlands ●  
Community  
Hall

Ashmead Arcade

● The Boulevard

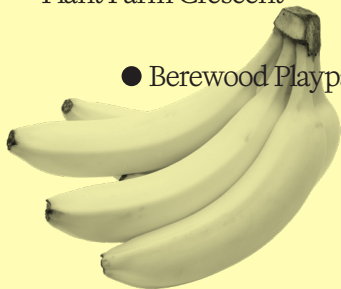
● Waterloo  
Library

● Forest End

● Plant Farm Crescent

● Berewood Playpark

● Mill Road



# One

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Colophon

Volume 1 is dedicated to Tony and Paulette Bennett

## Introduction

Welcome to the first of three publications from Plot Lines, a creative project happening all this year in your area! You might have seen us around, handing out daffodil yellow postcards and manning stalls at a few local events. Our project is aiming to gather, listen to and share your stories and anecdotes from living in and near Waterlooville. Plot Lines is about creating space for you to share your ideas and help to guide creative activity in Newlands, Berewood and the wider area.

So far we've been offering free workshops and events and also providing informal opportunities to meet with our Plot Lines writer in residence Aoife Mannix. Aoife is an award winning poet and writer who is keen to chat with you all about your personal experiences of moving to or living in the area, your feelings about what home means to you, and your memories, and dreams for the future.

All our publications will contain writing from Aoife and other writers who are helping with our events and workshops as well as contributions from members of the local community. Within this edition you will find writing which was inspired by conversations, events and observations from February to June 2025.

Please be aware that some pieces in this collection explore themes such as illness, loss, and conflict, which may be sensitive for some readers.

## About Volume One

This anthology is a celebration of how a sense of community helps to unite us in the face of life's challenges as well as an exploration of how our stories connect us. An address is more than a postal destination, it is the name we give our home and our identity. Where we live is the point at which we intersect with our neighbours, as well as our families and friends. It is where we put down our roots and build our futures. We teach our children to know their address so they won't get lost, not just physically, but also emotionally and spiritually. The places we have lived, the home we have now, and where we will move to in the future mark the major plot lines in our lives. In sharing stories, we can map what makes us who we are, our connections to the past as well as our hopes and dreams for the future.

Aoife Mannix

# 1

Newlands ●  
Community  
Hall



## *Nature's Little Secret* Amelia Simpson

We are sitting in the car taking in the landscape when... a fanciful bird pops out of the long grass. It enters the ditch beside us and my colleague Matt says, "It's an egret!"

I confess this is my first time seeing one in person. Egrets have ridiculous yellow feet and a ponytail. I suppose this is not only a perk of living here but one of its main attractions; nature on your doorstep...

In the warmth of Newlands Community Hall, as lunchtime draws to a close, I eat a really spectacular tangerine; the fragrance of their squishy pore-filled peels can almost alleviate anxiety. This small joy. There is a cacophony of building work going on, cement mixers and the radio... go on and on. February-cold, with a certain iciness following. We return from our walk around the site before everyone else. Not from a lack of interest in the task, but a testament to the general trials of living here. If you turn one way you will be greeted by expanses of trimmed green grass, walk another way and it's all deadends and building sites. Next time I am here, I will ask the people I meet if they have seen an egret recently, and if they haven't- I'll say they are West Waterlooville's little secret. I take home two tangerines.

# 2

*Timeless*  
Aoife Mannix

The surprise of the heron  
as we turn into the wind.  
Pterodactyl in his wingspan,  
he could be a scarecrow  
or a child's escaped balloon.

He swoops down to the strip  
of marsh. A statue of stillness  
against the red smudge  
of the newly built houses.

Indifferent to the grinding swing  
of a crane's long arm, the rattle  
of construction, the stretch  
of fence past the half-built school.

He watches our return before launching  
onto the splendour of a grey stage,  
built for the feather perfection  
of a dipped wing soaring over the rooftops.

# 3



Newlands ●  
Community  
Hall

●  
Plant Farm Crescent

● Berewood Playpark

● Mill Road

*Newlands*  
Aoife Mannix

On my first trip to West Waterlooville to start as writer-in-residence, I caught the bus from Cosham to Mill Road on a freezing grey February morning. As we pulled into the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, a woman behind me said, ‘this is the hospital where you were born, where you came into the world.’

The child’s reply was lisped and unclear. I presumed he was a toddler but when they got off the bus together, I saw he was more likely eight or nine with special needs. He started to sing ‘quickly, quickly’ as the bus driver smiled at him.

It made me think about the beginning of stories. How the story of our birth is told to us by our parents, how we tell our children about how they were born. How we make assumptions about other people’s families when we know so little of what they face in their day-to-day lives.

As a writer, I love to observe others, to imagine their joys and sorrows. This tiny interaction on the bus contained so much love and humour as well as questions. Why were the mother and child going to the hospital? Was it connected with the child’s disability? Had the bus driver seen them before?

To write is to have an endless burning curiosity about the world, the people and places in it. I got off the bus and followed my phone through a park with a crane in the distance. Fences warned of no entry and apart from a man walking his dog ahead of me, there wasn’t a soul as I battled against the wind and a rain so fine it was more like mist. I turned on to Plant Farm Crescent.

Had this been an actual farm before the arrival of the newly built red brick houses? Many of the houses were still half-formed and there was a rather desolate sense of a vast construction site. A sudden blast of radio hinted at high vis cheery builders as a large open lorry lumbered past. There was a single tree, which loomed enormous on the edge of patchy grass. One of its branches was so huge and low, I knew if my son was with me, he would not have been able to resist jumping up on it.

Much of how we see the world depends on our perspective. I had a sudden flash of being five years old on the housing estate in Dublin where we lived. A gang of us kids loved to play daring each other to climb the half-built staircases of houses still open to the sky as no one had put the roof on yet. This was strictly forbidden but I guess there were less fences back then!

I turned the corner and could see 'Newlands Community Hall' in the distance. A small grey block with large windows. I hurried towards it as a chill was starting to settle into my bones. In my eagerness to get out of the cold, I was up against the glass before I realised if I opened the door, I would walk straight into a class of tiny ballerinas spinning in their pink tutus. I smiled in the shock of such sudden colour and enthusiasm in a place that had a moment before seemed bleak and empty. Then I beat a hasty retreat as I didn't want to interrupt, and I knew I was early.

I headed back down Grainger Street, peering into what looked like part stream and part marsh. One of the houses on the opposite side had a striking wreath in the shape of a love heart hanging in the doorway. There was a flash of fluorescent yellow as a jogger went

past in brilliant trainers. I admired his courage as I shivered wishing I could find a bench. The only shelter was at a bus stop with those narrow seats designed to discourage loiterers. I perched myself out of the wind and began to write in the notebook I carry everywhere.

Despite the wind and the threat of proper rain, I felt excited. My writer's residency had begun. I was about to discover a world that was not just brand new to me but is still being formed for the people who live here. This community only began fifteen years ago. It is still rapidly expanding, and no doubt in another fifteen years it will look completely different. Those preschool ballet dancers might be the first generation to grow up here. What would their parents tell them about their births, about their first home, about where they came from and where they were headed?

Stories help us to understand who we are, what we value in making our homes, what we want to pass on to our children. For me, to be a writer is to listen. It is to collect small observations, quotations, images, jokes, tales of humour and heartbreak. I see myself as a magpie constantly in search of everyday treasures. My hope for this residency is to hear from as many different voices as possible so that I can accurately reflect and share what makes this place unique. To build a true picture of what life is like here as well as keeping a childish sense of wonder and fascination about what I might find. I will hold on to that image of small ballerinas twirling in pink on the greyest of Monday mornings as a sign of how it is always good to be open to the surprise of inspiration.

Below is the poem I wrote at the bus stop –

## *Newlands*

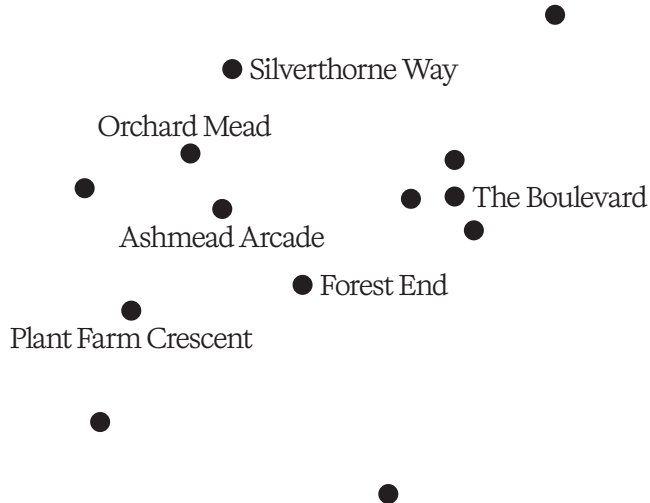
Pink baby ballerinas  
twirl in a glass window  
on the edge of red brick roads.  
Following the sign of the crane  
through a bleak February morning  
when the builders blast their radio  
against the deep chill of just missed snow.

The buses hunker down in a prayer  
for daffodils. A mother tells her child  
this is the hospital where you were born,  
where you came into the world.  
He sings younger than he looks,  
quickly, quickly as a white-haired lady  
tells her neighbour, so we are waiting  
to find out what we've lost.

Only the dog walkers call to each other  
on the empty streets. A single brave jogger  
in fluorescent trainers, stripes of sunshine  
against the deep grey. A doorway  
holds a wreath of a love heart  
whispering of Valentine's.  
How this place is a lighthouse  
for the storm of new homes.

The children laughing as they tumble  
out of the community centre.  
Ribbons in their hair, the cry of seagulls.  
How they are building a dance of feathers  
across a sky fluttering with spring.

# 4



## *West Waterlooville* Aoife Mannix

Place names are not just about location; they are about ownership and power. They can have deep and often painful historical roots. They tell us about the past as well as who controls the future. Names such as Silverthorne Way or Ashmead Arcade may refer to a past natural beauty that has been replaced by the developers' plans for new houses. The labelling of these roads also appeals to a deep human need to build a home in tune with the environment. 'Berewood' holds not just a nod to the historic Forest of Bere but also a promise for the future that the dwellings currently being built include plans for green spaces, community nature reserves and the restoration of the River Wallington. Names can be about what is to come as well as a link to an obscure past.

Names conjure up images that may be surreal or full of horror, they hint at stories of people who have lived there before. They also help to make connections between communities. They can instill a sense of pride and belonging. They are rarely neutral. 'West Waterlooville' has been called 'West of Waterlooville' which some felt made it sound like it wasn't a proper place, but just a bit beyond the original town, an add on development without an identity of its own. Yet Waterlooville was also named after somewhere else, a town in Belgium made famous by the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. English soldiers returning from victory against the French dropped into the local pub to celebrate and the name was changed to honour their bravery. Perhaps some of them never left 'the

Heroes of Waterloo', later renamed the 'Waterloo Arms', before closing to be replaced by shops and hairdressers. Perhaps these ghosts continue to haunt the beauty salons of 'The Boulevard', the echo of a French avenue in the name of a twenty first century shopping centre. You don't have to believe in ghosts to love ghost stories. None of us live in a vacuum, we all have a history that is both personal and political. To build a better future, we need to understand what has come before. We need to have conversations about who we have been, who we are, and who we wish to become.

### *West Waterlooville*

We moved here in the night  
when the wind whipped our bones  
into the curve of brick.  
By the River Wallington  
which is never the same  
from one second to the next.  
Head west they said,  
past that final battlefield.

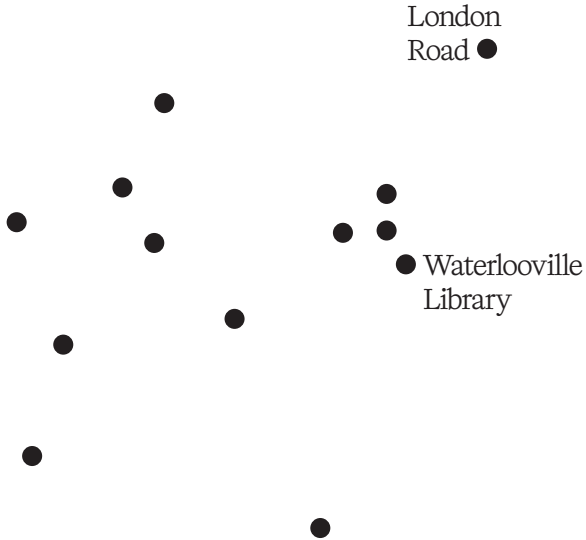
Once this was all Forest of Bere,  
now the roads hold the echoes of trees.  
Orchard Mead, Ashmead Arcade, Forest End.  
Sometimes there are too many roundabouts,  
vast stretches of half-built houses,  
empty nightmares. But this morning  
when the storm lifted, the starlings  
cleared their throats and sang of victory  
as a sliver of moon winked behind the dance  
of a giant oak. This year we will come home.

# 5

## *Clearing* Aoife Mannix

When the forest fell  
to the two up two down  
China tea boxes of splintered rooms,  
we were building staircases  
from spiralling suitcases.  
The windows at first were wild  
with red kites but they boarded  
them over till we could only hear  
the screech of traffic,  
the sorrow of wolves evicted  
from fairy stories as the children  
walked the new paths to school.  
Their hands clutching pencil drawings  
of sunflowers breaking through  
concrete towards the light.

# 6



## *Waterlooville Library* Aoife Mannix

It's a beautiful morning and the April sunshine lights up the London Road. The sat nav on my phone isn't working so I stop to ask a man where the library is. As he tells me to go round the corner by the road works, another passerby shouts, 'look up, it's right there.'

I turn to see 'Waterlooville' in large letters high above me, embarrassed to discover that in peering at my screen, I have missed the bloody obvious. The men chuckle and wave me in the right direction proving that in this town the kindness of strangers still has a sense of humour.

# 7



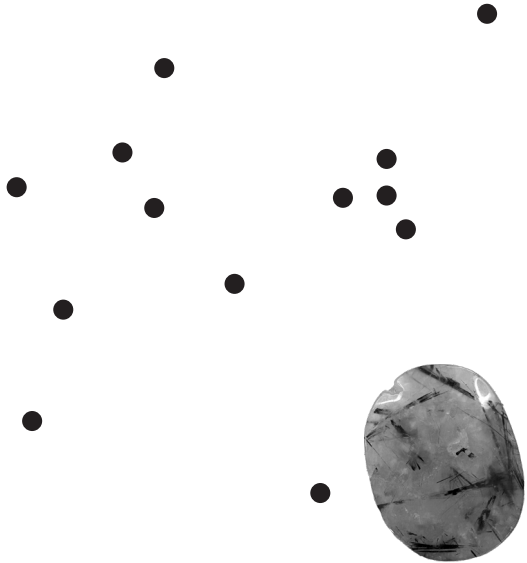
## *The Puzzle*

This morning, she is building flamingos,  
one carefully placed piece of pink  
at a time. The long stretch of their necks  
is easy but she struggles with the endless  
dawn, the subtle tinge of the water.  
She sits alone in the library,  
but she is not lonely,  
for there are four of them  
solving this jigsaw.

Sometimes she works with another woman,  
who sends her husband to the park,  
so she can grab some peace.  
The other two she hasn't met,  
but they pop in regularly to do their bit.  
It is a small joy to come in and see  
how the picture has grown in her absence.

She's been here over two hours  
as the sun ripples through the window,  
the books bathing in the light.  
She smiles at this stealing of time  
from the chaos of traffic, the rush of  
shopping, electricity bills, lost mothers.

Finally, she fits with perfect satisfaction  
the final missing fragment. The birds  
shift their wings, soar out over  
the shelves with all the elegance  
of April blossom, as if they know  
how she longs to take flight with them.



*Small Treasures*  
Aoife Mannix

There is an art to listening,  
to letting the questions settle  
so that a stone reveals itself  
to be an emerald from a wizard  
whose spells are just waiting  
to be reborn in the eyes  
of a small boy clutching  
a dinosaur book.

His Mum says they moved here  
in December, didn't even unpack  
before getting the tree up  
so they could have a proper Christmas,  
even though she'd just given birth  
to triplets born months premature.  
It was hard when they were  
in the hospital, so tiny and unsure,  
but now all three girls follow  
their four year old brother  
round like little ducklings.

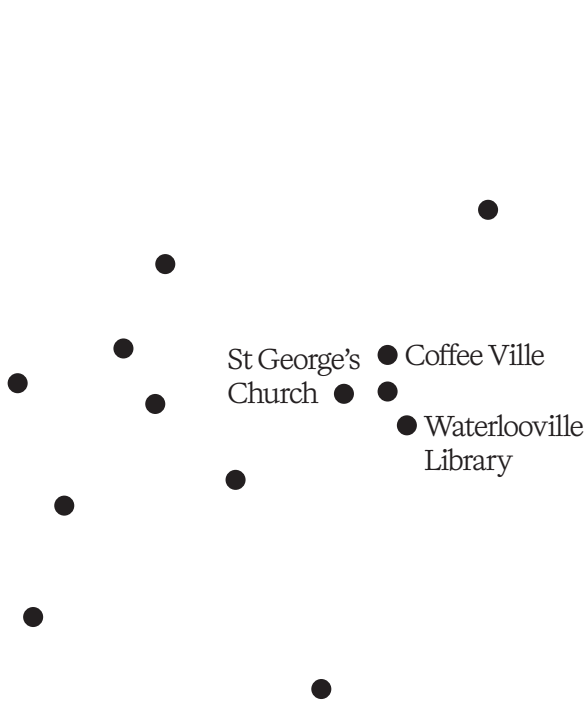
He smiles when I ask if he's waiting  
for the letter from Hogwarts.  
His Mum says she doesn't know why  
he's so obsessed with all things magical,  
but as he shows me the dark flecks  
deep within his wizarding jewel,  
I think of how much mystery  
he has already witnessed.

# 9

## *Not So Silent Library* Amelia Simpson

We make our way into West Waterlooville and as usual on the drive there I notice more new things– old things: a graveyard tucked by the edge of a loud main road. I hope they are not disturbed in their perfect peace, I think. We park up in the centre and make our way to the library, stopping briefly to get a pasty from the local cafe. Having just returned from Cornwall, this is just what I need. Aoife spots us (I finish my pasty) and we make our way into the stylish and modern library. We meet Ken, a local radio station host who moved here for love in the 90s. He is happily betrothed to both his wife and to Waterlooville all these years later. Maryna, an artist from Ukraine, joins us. She tells us about a three-day exhibition of Ukrainian art called Hearts of Hope, held earlier this month in nearby Havant, where her work was displayed. She speaks passionately about her work in the community with Creatful, a local arts organisation, and Ken asks her if she'd like to be on the radio.

Aoife works effortlessly with everyone and explains the activity planned: write about a taste of home. What is your favourite thing to cook? What is your favourite object in your home? We ask each person who comes to the table to add something. Quite a few children and parents come by our table, asking us about the project. I meet a young family of five, and the mother talks to me about home education. I grew up home educated so I am eager to learn her experience of parenting and she is eager to hear my experience of being parented! They are here because their eldest



daughter is upstairs doing a coding class. As we speak her youngest daughter fashions a really intricate mask using the paper and pens supplied, it is impressive. Her middle daughter weaves in and out of our conversations. We talk for at least twenty minutes, musing on youth, freedom and what makes a place worth putting roots down. She tells me that Waterlooville is perfect for what they currently need. We leave for lunch with a bowl full of snippets and insights into the inner lives of those who joined us: a favourite pasta dish, a beloved dog, an emerald gem.

We get lunch at the same cafe as the pasty from earlier. We are joined by the other writers for this project, they've just had their first look around West Waterlooville, Matt vents that it feels like a very different place in the sunshine. I feel sad to have missed it. The cafe is a fantastic place, great food, and kind service. And whilst I'm on about recommendations the local church is playing Conclave<sup>1</sup> at their next film club, something that they run monthly. I found this out in the RATEPAYER magazine that I picked up as we left the library. It's filled with pages of things going on locally. As we wait for our food, we are charmed by the sun's warmth. The precinct then grows warmer as we eat, and I think about renaming it 'Costa del Waterlooville'. My soup is red and reminiscent of lava.

We head back to the library with the other writers and Matt in tow. Aoife treats us to a writing workshop, we do some introductions and are then tasked to write about childhood objects. This lights up my imagination, and I remember all sorts of charms, things I was obsessed with, things I never thought I would let go of.

All of course now lost in time. Luckily though being a writer means they are not totally lost because I can write about them: my shiny blue wallet, my old camera, the poster I had of David Tennant as the 10th Doctor. It is really lovely to be with the other assistants, I am paired with Han during the workshop and she is great. She tells me all about a set of scented pencils she used to have, it makes good story material; very colourful.

1. The Pope sadly passed between me writing and editing this piece. Then we had a real Conclave that took place. Sadly not in this Church though, one in Rome, which is miles away.

# 10

## *Migration* Aoife Mannix

You moved here in the heat of summer,  
when no one understood the language  
of bombs. You were searched for stolen  
streets, the translation of tarmac melting  
in the wave of July as you ate the newspapers  
for breakfast and prayed to go home.  
Even though you knew it no longer existed.

That this clipped country of China teacups  
was where you must build your mornings  
from the maze of lost forest. You were haunted  
by the reflection of train windows, roads that led  
nowhere, until one morning, across a small  
stretch of water, a heron called your name.

You watched his wings swallow the sky.  
How he soared over the red roofs, the patter  
of gardens, the ghosts of trees, as finally the heavens  
broke open and the rain fell fresh as a  
fisherman's song on your upturned face.

# 11

*Brave*  
Aoife Mannix

I sit with my back door partially open so my dog can sleep with her nose half out in the beautiful spring sunshine.

The sky is a blue so deep it's almost shocking after such a long, grey winter. I'm looking at the website of Maryna Melnyk, a local Ukrainian artist with her gorgeous paintings of sweeping beaches and women with wings. On her blog, she says she was inspired to concentrate on her art during the 'long silence' of lockdown. She had been working in Kyiv as a makeup artist in television before Russia invaded Ukraine. As I log into our google meet, I wonder how difficult it must be to carry on being creative when the stillness of covid has been so quickly followed by the roar of war. It is hard to know where to begin to ask a stranger what it was like to leave their home, to lose all that was familiar and move to a foreign country. I really want to understand but I don't want to be insensitive.

I needn't have worried. Maryna immediately puts us all at ease by asking how we say our names. I explain that my name is considered unpronounceable to anyone outside of Ireland. We talk about how quickly children from Ukraine have become fluent in English. Her daughter was eleven when they first arrived and used to argue that she had no need to learn anything other than Ukrainian when she had Google translate.

Now at fourteen, she is passionate about languages because you can't make friends through a translator. She not only speaks English but is learning Spanish and Korean, inspired by her love of K-pop. In the three



years since she has left her home country she has changed from a child into a young woman. Her father has not been able to observe all this, he can only listen to stories of how their daughter is growing up, because he is on the front line. He was a solicitor before the war with no connection to the military. In what feels like the blink of an eye, he has gone from a foot soldier to a commander in the Ukrainian army. His wife can't believe the speed at which the years are passing. It still shocks her to think how she lost everything in just a couple of days. At the time she had thought it would all be over in a few months. She says if she had known it would still be going on three years later, she would never have managed to be so brave.

When the Russians first invaded, she left Kyiv with her mother and her daughter to go to a village in the west of Ukraine. She was convinced they would move back within a month. Then came the shelling and air raids. Often, they had no internet, and it was extremely stressful waiting for news. The Russians began shooting along all the roads from Kyiv and supplies started to run low. She was forced to go from pharmacy to pharmacy searching for the medicine her mother needed for her high blood pressure. Yet despite all this worry and anxiety, she found she couldn't cry. She says she needed to be strong for her family, so her tears were frozen inside her. Only when she arrived in the UK on the 16th of April 2022 did she feel safe enough to cry. And once she started, she found herself crying every day. Instead of feeling better about being out of immediate danger, she felt worse. She went to see her GP who prescribed antidepressants.

This reminds me of what a Bosnian playwright once told me about surviving the siege of Sarajevo. When she had been out every morning for months dodging snipers to get milk, she was never scared. But a few weeks after she escaped to London, she was in Victoria Station and the sound of the train pulling in was like a low air raid siren. Suddenly she found herself having a complete panic attack, drenched in sweat, her heart racing as she threw herself to the ground. She said it was only when she was no longer in survival mode that the fear caught up with her.

This experience of depression has made Maryna realise that when the war is finally over, there will be a lot of people in desperate need of psychological support. This is why she is training to be a child psychologist and art therapist. She passionately believes in the healing power of art. She tells the parents of child refugees not to judge whether a particular painting is good or bad, but rather what it says about how far their child has come. She quotes Picasso, 'It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child' to demonstrate how modern art is not so much about the skill of perfection as it is about discovering the imaginative freedom of our inner child.

Her group meets in a church every week where she uses electric candles to create a warm atmosphere. There is a mix of generations that echoes the traditional Ukrainian *vechornytsi*, evening parties where people came together to share stories as well as practice arts and crafts without the distractions of phones or TV. Her mother has volunteered to teach a crochet class, and the group are also learning how to make Motanka dolls. In the past, these were more than toys for children as

they were believed to have protective powers. She says with a smile that not only the girls, but also the boys, are starting to show a keen interest in this connection with their traditional culture.

I am struck by how someone who is continuing to go through such terrible anxiety and trauma can be so generous, kind and creative. It seems to me that this determination to continue to make art when your world is under such threat is what constitutes true courage. It is not about repressing the horror of what is happening in a stiff upper lip kind of way, but rather expressing how it feels to have lost so much and yet find the strength to rebuild your home from scratch in an alien place.

You can discover more about Maryna Melynk's wonderful art here:  
[www.maryna-melnyk-artist.com/en](http://www.maryna-melnyk-artist.com/en)

# 12

*The Art of Courage*  
Aoife Mannix

When you pack your days into a suitcase  
after a time of great silence and head west  
to escape the gunfire on the roads.

When you translate your wings  
across borders, leaving your heart  
on the front line, so that your nights  
are knitted into the knots of a Motanka doll.

When the months become embroidered  
with memories of lost medicine, your father's gift  
for fine suits, your mother's tales  
of needlework. When your daughter  
searches for the jokes of a foreign land  
while you fill the church with candles.

When your prayers paint themselves  
into the folding of three years, as if time itself  
were a child's drawing. All Picasso blues  
and the yellow explosion of the home  
you once brushed in straight lines  
of bricks and mortar.

Then the sky becomes the bruise  
of a spring afternoon where the light  
cries for a long healing,  
for a return to the art of peace.

# 13

Newlands ●  
Community  
Hall

● Waterlooville  
Library

*Caring*  
Aoife Mannix

I'm just back from taking the dog for a run in the wild gusts of an April wind, and I rush to get online for my conversation with Paulette Bennett, a local community volunteer. We've met before in person at Waterlooville Library where she told me about all the incredible work she does for Newlands Community Group, but today we are speaking on zoom about something more personal. How her desire to give something back has been inspired by the challenge of her own experiences.

After her husband was diagnosed with cancer of the larynx, she and another woman decided to set up the Carers Companion Café. They wanted to create a safe and welcoming space for carers and those who are cared for. Somewhere that not only offers practical advice but where people can talk about their anxieties and frustrations. They meet every fortnight in Newlands Community Hall. As well as tea and coffee, they always have board games, from scrabble, word puzzles, quizzes to tabletop football and colouring to relax. Often they find that in chatting to each other, they are able to share a wealth of information on how to get practical help as well as emotional support or advice on mental health issues.

She explains that before her husband's diagnosis, they were both in good jobs with active lives, so it was a terrible shock to suddenly lose their income along with everything else. They went from being busy, independent people to being stuck at home trying to apply for PIP while dealing with huge mental anxiety

and physical pain. It has made her profoundly aware how difficult and lonely being a carer can be. There is often a lot of guilt as it can be utterly exhausting yet you feel bad for complaining while the person who may be seriously ill, perhaps mentally or physically disabled, or suffering from dementia, can feel guilty for being a burden. But carers need to care for themselves if they want to be able to carry on caring for someone else. She's found it really helps to develop a dark sense of humour and to spend time with those who also understand what you're going through.

This reminds me of how after my own diagnosis of breast cancer, I worked with Maggie's Oxford to run writing workshops in their beautiful centre for those with cancer and their families. We had tears but we also had a huge amount of laughter as well as a deep feeling of warmth and support. Facing a life-threatening illness is very scary but it makes a huge difference to know that you are not alone in going through this.

You can find out more about the wonderful Newlands Community Group here:  
[www.newlandscommunitygroup.com](http://www.newlandscommunitygroup.com)

Tony Bennett sadly passed away in May 2025 shortly after I had interviewed his wife, Paulette Bennett.

# 14

## *Carers Companion Café*

A bit of a cough that wouldn't go away,  
and, just like that, all his guitars took flight.  
You lie beside him in the fear of two am,  
the shadow of the feeding tube, the loss of teeth,  
hair, memories till he's down to half a tumbler  
of water a day. His throat burns with a language  
neither of you wanted to learn. Chemo, radio,  
palliative prisoner-of-war trapped in the barbed wire  
of a cancer that's the falling off a cliff  
between the before and after of a diagnosis  
you had to fight to get, and now can't give back.  
He says in the ying and yang of all your years together,  
the only thing on his bucket list is a trip to the railways.  
To sing again that song of rhapsody,  
Freddie Mercury on stage, rockers to the end.

Or maybe just to sit looking out at the egrets  
along the river. Wave to the dog walkers,  
the joggers, the children escaping  
their parents, a fox coming to say hello.  
That time the magpie swooshed in to warn  
the moorhen how close the cat was creeping.  
A heron landing in the middle of the garden,  
the bats in the evening. The wonder  
of those garden-gnomes he loves so much,  
and you have always hated. Your kids kept  
buying more to wind you up.  
Birthdays, Christmas, all those days out  
at the garden centre. You have to laugh.

Your daughter has created his funeral flowers,  
he's chosen the pictures he wants. It's his farewell,  
he might as well have his say. The hardest part  
is to watch him suffer, to lose each morning  
a little bit more of the tune you shared.

You were always the glass half full, but now  
his lips are dry. The balance has been spilt,  
so you make a space to share with others the cost  
of caring, the price of love, when there is no cure,  
but there is still so much music between you.



# 15

## *The Cost of Living* Aoife Mannix

When you build your home  
from the placing of a football net  
upon the lawn, the whistle  
of a shuttlecock on an April evening  
as the primroses return to the world,  
a small boy conducting the orchestra  
of Easter eggs, the dog keeping guard  
against the cries in the field,  
you discover that the shuffle  
of pounds and pence, the heavy sigh  
of broken seatbelts, what's written  
in the small print, all the For Sale  
signs you swallowed as a child,  
are the price you pay for that song  
on the radio as you cook  
your grandmother's fish curry.  
The waft of love around  
the table, your son's appetite  
for laughter, second helpings.

# 16

● Wellington Vale  
Care Home



*The Memory of Music*  
Aoife Mannix

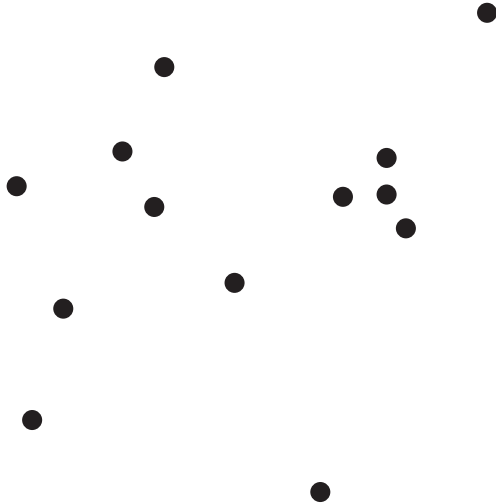
On a beautiful sunny Sunday morning, I drive through gorgeous countryside to reach Wellington Vale Care Home. I am here to run a session with residents on who they would like to thank in their lives and what gift of music or song they would give them. Fellow Plot Lines writer, Hannah Newton, and I hand out blank cards to illustrate as we ask about songs and stories from their past. We're told cheerfully by one of the care workers that they might be a bit tired because yesterday there was a party to celebrate VE80. Yet as I move around the circle, I am struck by how keen these women, most of whom are in their late eighties or early nineties, are to speak of their experiences.

One explains how she remembers the war vividly because at the age of five she and her sister were evacuated from Portsmouth to a small village because of the bombing. For over three years, she lived with these nice people who took them in, but she missed her home. Her mother and her baby brother went to stay with her uncle while her father was in the RAF. Then it was discovered her father was deaf in one ear, so he was discharged. Her mother told her they were all moving to Coventry. She said they had been split up for so long that even if they got bombed, at least they'd go together. Miraculously, they all survived. She was eight or nine by then and her own father had become a stranger. She says he got on better with her brother, but she was never close to him. The war had put too much time and distance between them. It makes me think how even for those who did make it back, the conflict continued

to impact them long after the celebrations for peace were over.

Yet there is little or no bitterness here. A woman from Northern Ireland tells me with a chuckle, 'I'd do it all again if I had to. Well, most of it anyway.' Several light up when they talk about how they met their husbands while out dancing. One moved to England from South Africa and tells me how lucky she was to marry the most wonderful man and have three amazing sons. She says she and her husband are still very much in love. I ask her if they had a particular song they liked to listen to, and she asks me to wait a moment while she looks in her diary. She has written down Jimmy Justice's 'Ain't That Funny' because she was thinking of it just the other day. Then her eyes well with tears as she reads out 'Roy, 11th October 2024, pancreatic cancer of the stomach' and remembers that's how her husband died last year. I realise that for many of these women the past is as clear as day, but the present keeps slipping away from them. It doesn't stop them telling fascinating stories, or making jokes, or loving music. They are wonderful company, and it is a privilege to speak to them.

# 17



## *I'll Be Seeing You*

Thank you for Billie Holiday on that Tuesday afternoon  
when we danced in the kitchen as red arrows  
spun through the sky and I knew I'd be seeing you soon,  
as the song promised we could win back the moon,  
even after so many stars had been stolen from the sky,  
And, of course, it was bittersweet because no one  
could really tell us why there were those  
who managed to live and those who had to die.

The chestnut trees blooming in May  
as children played in the park, cricket on the green,  
marbles lost in the dark, teddy bears falling from a train.  
The stitching of your name on to a handkerchief,  
letters you never received. A roof caved in,  
the wail of the air raid siren before the doodlebug,  
A stranger's hug on the day our wish came true,  
the peace of knowing I'll be seeing you, I'll be seeing you.

# 18

- Wellington Vale Care Home



## *How to Survive Rations* Aoife Mannix

It's a stunningly beautiful May morning as I drive from Winchester to Wellington Vale Care Home. I arrive as Adam and Mel from Southern Music Project are unpacking their collection of samba drums, pBuzzes, ukeleles, keyboards, and other wonderful instruments. Soon parents are dropping off their excited children. Mel leads a warmup game of names, clapping and beats as the residents are brought down to join us. Many of them I recognise from the last time I was here. I explain how inspired I've been by their life stories and perform a poem I've written for them and the children. It turns out that a love of sweets and the experience of having your belongings stolen by a sibling are shared across the generations!

The children work hard to create a musical score for one of the resident's stories about being evacuated as a child during the Second World War. During the break, they happily eat biscuits and chat to the residents. Faces, young and old, light up when we all learn how to play Bill Haley and his Comets 'see you later alligator, in a while crocodile' on the ukelele. Mel has taken the first verse of my poem and put it to the same music so we can sing about the wonders of bread sop, a favourite treat one of the residents enjoyed during rationing.

Parents have been invited to the last twenty minutes of the workshop to listen to our musical creation and beam with pride as their children take us through the horror of bombing and family separation to the celebration of peace as the war ended. Before we leave, everyone is given a tote bag with a copy of my poem

inside. Helen Cox, Wellington Vale's home admissions advisor, thanks Chloe and all her events team for making this truly joyous morning possible. She talks about how important it is for Wellington Vale to be seen as part of the community where everyone is welcome. It is an inspiring end to what has been a moving demonstration of how cross-generational work, and a shared love of music, can build a real sense of connection and belonging. I leave still humming 'see you later alligator, in a while crocodile.'

Find out more about Southern Music Project's incredible work here:  
[www.southernmusicproject.co.uk](http://www.southernmusicproject.co.uk)

Discover the impressively warm and welcoming Wellington Vale Care Home here:  
[www.cinnamoncc.com/care-homes/wellington-vale](http://www.cinnamoncc.com/care-homes/wellington-vale)



### *How to Survive Rations* (poem for children)

You ain't tried nothin' till you try bread sop,  
I'm telling you it's absolutely top!  
Take a slice of white, smear the margarine,  
so thick and yellow it's almost obscene.  
Shake salt and pepper for plenty of spice,  
dip in hot water, it's ever so nice!  
But don't you try to hug a doodlebug.  
Maybe a doodlebug sounds like a sweet,  
but a doodlebug ain't no treat to eat!  
It's a flying bomb with a killer buzz,  
the most evil creature that ever was.  
First time I ate a banana, my Mum  
went bananas cos we'd never seen one.  
She screamed the little black pips inside  
were rotten, just poison trying to hide  
in the weird curve of a boomerang fruit  
but I ate it cos I thought it was cute.  
In the war food was hard to find you see,  
you needed a book for sugar and tea.  
Even for meat, milk, eggs and cheese,  
no matter how many times you said please,  
no matter if you got down on your knees,  
they'd only give extra cod liver oil  
or what veggies you'd grow in your own soil.  
We dreamed of pear drops, lemon sherbets,  
Barley sugar twists, jellybeans, flying saucers,  
cola cubes, candy sticks, rhubarb and custard,  
dolly mixtures, brandy balls, Fry's Five Boys  
chocolate bars, nougat, liquorice, toffee  
and more. Peace was a dream of sweets  
and all the treats we longed to eat!

# 19

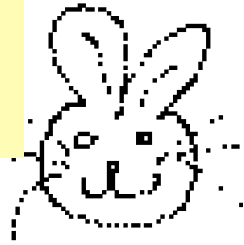
## Online Words & Images

At Plot Lines we also want to hear from you! Visit our 'Join' page at [plotlines.co.uk](http://plotlines.co.uk) and submit your words, pictures or photos online and in our next issue see your contributions featured in this section.

Since March we've posed four questions to help start the conversation, read some of the submissions so far on the following pages.

20 March 2025 at 19:11

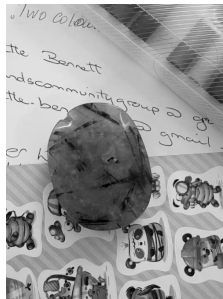
My stereo and records – I inherited the stereo after a break up, and it was very much worth the heart ache!



# What thing from home holds the most meaning to you?

20 March 2025 at 16:53

My 20 year old cactus that I was gifted as a tiny cutting and is now over 2 meters tall!



20 March 2025 at 18:46

Probably my books. They reflect all of the different stages of my life and I couldn't do without them (even if each time I moved house, I despair at how many there are and how long it takes to pack and unpack them!)



21 March 2025 at 9:00

Photo in silver, my mother pushing a pram, I am the baby!



21 March 2025 at 11:56

For me, home is about people not things. Home is not home without my partner (in crime ha!)

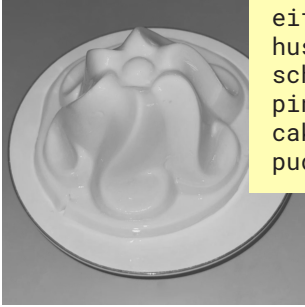


24 March 2025 at 11:14

Handle smooth with years – earth still clings to the metal like it won't forget.

23 April 2025 at 12:03

Sunday roast cooked either by my Dad or my husband, with an old-school pudding too, like pineapple upside down cake, or bread and butter pudding. Yum!



# What food makes you feel at home?



20 March 2025 at 17:10

My mum's red lentil dal



20 March 2025 at 18:17

A fish supper :)

20 March 2025 at 17:12

Tomato soup with cheese on toast in the winter months.



20 March 2025 at 18:40

Curry! Though I can never properly replicate the flavour of my favourite Indian restaurants...

# 20

## Workshop Words

This spring we took part in some fantastic events in the local area, a drop in session at Waterloo Library, the VE 80 Fete organised by Newlands Community Group, a Careers Pathway event at Berewood Primary organised by Grainger, and a truly uplifting (and loud!) intergenerational musical workshop at Wellington Vale Care Home with young people from Southern Music Project and care home residents. We used magnetic words and letters to create unique poems at these events and in the following pages you can read some of the creative responses from these sessions.

In our next issue we'll share words from our Plot Lines in the Landscape walk with Dragonfly Arts and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust as well as more from Wellington Vale residents. If you want to take part in any of our events or contribute your words to the next publication please get in touch with us at [hello@plotlines.co.uk](mailto:hello@plotlines.co.uk).

the sky hot wind  
the garden life is music

gorgeous forest pink fluff  
chocolate moon rock beneath  
sweet honey

we swim together as friends

happy flowers  
jumping together  
with big dreams

a little boy whispered to me because  
he pretend ed he was fly ing he was  
flying like a magic al bird

## Get Involved

If you would like to contribute a piece of writing to Volume 2, or to take part in the project or speak with one of our writers please get in touch with us at [hello@plotlines.co.uk](mailto:hello@plotlines.co.uk). You can also submit words, drawings or images online via the 'Join' page on our website where we are inviting you to respond creatively to questions inspired by the project.

Visit our website [plotlines.co.uk](http://plotlines.co.uk) to find out about our upcoming events.

## About Our Writers

Aoife Mannix was born in Sweden and grew up in Ireland, Canada and the US. She now lives in a tiny hamlet in the Cotswolds with her partner, twelve year old son and a pomsky puppy called Marsha. She has previously published five collections of poetry and a novel as well as being writer-in-residence for the Portsmouth Museum, the Gosport Gallery, BBC Radio 4's Saturday Live and the Royal Shakespeare Company amongst others.

Amelia Simpson is a writer based in Southampton. She runs a poetry open mic night at the city's only independent bookshop, facilitating a welcoming space for local poets and writers. She also works with ArtfulScribe.

## Credits & Thanks

Adam Denman and Melanie Tanner  
from Southern Music Project CIC

Coffee Ville

Grainger Plc

Helen Cox, Chloe Billing and all the staff  
and residents at Wellington Vale Care Home

Ken Sim from The Flash radio station

Maryna Melnyk

Paulette Bennett and Newlands Community Group

Waterlooville Library

Winchester City Council

### The Plot Lines team:

Aoife Mannix

Amelia Simpson

ArtfulScribe

Anna Jones

Gail Howard

Hannah Newton

Henry Mulhall

Kym Devine

Siân Rosa Hunter Dodsworth

SOUP

Studio Response

Colophon

Editors:

Eira Szadurski

Aoife Mannix

Jo Breckon

Publication design:

SOUP

Typeface:

Kalice by Margot Lévêque

Printing:

Angel Press

Plot Lines is funded by a developer's contribution which was agreed as part of the planning permission for West Waterlooville via Winchester City Council. The Agreement states that the contribution has to be spent on art.



**Winchester**  
City Council

This is a free book just for you, about where you live.

Inside you'll find some poems and stories about Waterlooville from our writers as well as words from your neighbours and other people in the area.

We hope you enjoy this first edition and please do get in touch to tell us what you think or to take part in our next issue at [hello@plotlines.co.uk](mailto:hello@plotlines.co.uk)

