

Plot Lines

● Wellington Vale
Care Home

● Dragonfly
Arts Centre

Jubilee Park

Queen's
Inclosure ●

●
Newlands
Community
Hall

Waterlooville High Street

●
● Coffee Ville

●
Waterlooville
Boxing Club

●
Hurstwood

● Hopfield House

TWO

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Introduction

As Plot Lines continues to grow, so too do the stories, voices, and connections that have shaped this project across the year. From conversations in libraries and care homes to walks through the local nature reserve, we've been discovering the many ways people make sense of the place they call home.

This second volume gathers together new writing inspired by Waterlooville and its surrounding landscape over summer 2025. Alongside work by our writer in residence Aoife Mannix we're delighted to introduce new work from Han Newton and Kym Devine.

Han and Kym spent summer 2025 running creative writing and collage poetry workshops with residents of Wellington Vale Care Home. In this issue we share some of the beautiful and thoughtful works which the residents made. Both Han and Kym have a local connection to the area, and their work for this volume was shaped by memories of place – revisiting familiar streets, landmarks and landscapes with fresh eyes. Together with the residents, they've created writing that captures humour, memory, and belonging – small stories that open windows onto the past while celebrating the shared act of making something together in the present.

This volume continues our commitment to listening, collecting, and celebrating the creativity found within our community, preserving fragments of everyday life that reveal something larger about what it means to belong to a place and a community.

Please be aware that some pieces in this collection explore themes which may be sensitive for some readers.

About Volume Two

As the 7b lurched the winding slope from Cosham, I fixed to the breath-glazed window, waiting for the vast gasp of green that sits above the city. As a child, my dad told me the hill was home to 'Portsdawns' - little furry folk who dwell in those leafy caves that dot the plain, where trees stoop to kiss grass and root weeds. My dad told me they had one leg longer than the other - optimal for hill-side thriving. 'But what if they forgot something and needed to go back?' I'd asked. He confirmed the worst: 'They'd have to go around'. I, always in a hurry yet never on time, thought this must be very annoying for them. Dad said they took it in their stride.

It had been some time since I'd visited Waterlooville, and I'd not realised it had grown a 'West' in my absence. The day struck a fine balance between brisk and bright that blushed the red brick and hedgerows of the Newlands estate. It was a funny feeling, walking around neat streets that seemed to have burst into existence in a place I'd remembered as a field.

The town, too, was tinged with things that had been. Cafe Mocha, fondly remembered by my brother and I for the lime milkshakes, had closed down, as had the Shoe Zone that had been a cost-effective school-shoe accommodation for my rapidly growing feet. There wasn't the sharpness of a city - some lounged on benches, families ambled, the town babbling and soft. I met the Plot Lines team who were spilled onto glinting table sets outside a Caff, basking in a day that finally felt like spring.

There's something about observing change that induces a little frenzy in us, I think. Something

empowering about having that point of comparison—
‘See this, here? I remember when it wasn’t!’ As I find
myself biting down the words ‘back in my day’,
I wonder if this trait of reminiscing and reporting
is uniquely human. Do the birds, nested in the thick
oaks and bracken that wrap the sleepy dwellings,
chirp and chatter comparisons of the past?

Our connection to a place lies not only in our
memory, but in the memories of those who exist in
it beside us. I have no memory of the previous residents
at number 35. They left before I arrived. But David next
door told me the street is a darned sight quieter for it.
And that’s part of my memory now, too. I like to use
it as a reference point for when the merry Albert Road
revellers traipse past: *Wow. I can’t even begin to imagine
how loud it was before #35 moved out.*

And without a pinch of these first-hand quips
and renditions, local history would be dry and
likely flavourless. This project is about capturing
Waterlooville, past and present, through the memories
and experiences of those with their roots in the soil.
With a dash of art and a hearty glug of our human
reminiscence, Plot Lines aims to preserve memory
so future generations may connect with the town in
its entirety, quirks and all.

Han Newton



Portsdowns, digital collage, 2001 and 2025
Contains field sketches by Han, aged 6,
made on a research excursion c. 2001
Han Newton

Memories of Waterlooville

Portsmouth
Han Newton

Wellington Vale is a delightful retirement home that rests in the peaceful suburbs of the Newlands estate. It's spacious, tranquil, and wrapped on three sides by rolling grasslands. Not to say this is exclusively a place to rest. The residents have a well-packed activity calendar, and in the morning, gather in the lounge to drink barista-standard mochas and discuss options for the day ahead. When I first visited, I joked that I'd like to retire there now. Over the course of my summer residency, I realised how unoriginal that was: each visitor I met said the same.

My collage poetry workshops were one of the plethora of sessions on offer, so I was grateful each time I was chosen over a visiting singer or a yoga class. I was there to collect personal stories and anecdotes from the people of Waterlooville. I theorised that collaging local pictures of past and present day, along with locally-gathered natural materials, would help to jog recall for those who struggle with memory. It worked better than I'd imagined. These little windows sparked memories of forgotten times, people and places that were fondly shared. The pressed flowers and leaves, dainty shells, and dried seaweed tethered recollections and prompted the poetry that was added to the collaged works.

It was truly wonderful becoming friends with the residents of Wellington Vale, and I'll always treasure the memories we shared and made around the craft table.

1

● Wellington Vale
Care Home

Waterlooville High Street

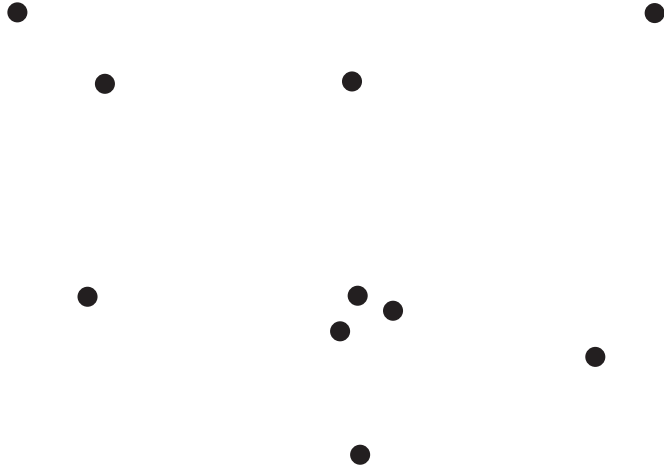
Remembering the dancing
Han Newton

The first workshop at Wellington Vale Care Home began on a bright Friday morning. The residents filtered in between 11:15 and 11:45 and seemed bright too. Retirees are not an age group I've experienced working with before so I was grateful for my co-facilitator, Kym, who set the tone, playing an age-appropriate playlist through an age-appropriate speaker (a bluetooth device disguised as an old-timey radio). Kym chatted with the group as we set up baskets of craft materials. She spoke in rhetorical questions, and I soon realised why this was important. I have my own memory problems, and know the fluster of an unanticipated question demanding an unattainable answer.

I read from Blake's *Auguries of Innocence* and handed out a selection of old images.

The collaging followed, and we helped residents select images of Waterlooville High Street, retro magazine clippings, sweet wrappers from a bygone era, and paper dappled with vintage patterns. The torn paper pulled up some pieces of the past - shopping at M&S, a suit shop on Elm Grove, a career spent in the civil service. They'd all patched up clothes too costly to replace. They recalled the rustling of paper shopping bags, bicycle bells undrowned by engines. They recalled the dancing. I've since realised they always recall the dancing. I should dance more.

2



The body remembers trauma (& dancing)
Han Newton

At the care home
we recalled memories
called to memories
like that man called to
FENTON
memories slipped
down the back of the sofa
somewhere with greengrocers
bicycle bells louder than traffic
then Agnes mentioned dancing
A unanimous stop
lost in found thought -

they all remember dancing

The body remembers trauma
but it's not just trauma
sure there's falling in your fibres
but focus on the feel of falling
you'll forget the feel of flying

later we played Sinatra
a bluetooth device shaped
like an old timey radio poured
lightness into stiff joints sparked
a shaky sway that spread
to a man whose memory
was unetched
he returned to the outside,
wide smiled, moving in time

like his body knew the score

The body remembers trauma
and soaring
it remembers dancefloors
cut rugs and thrusts and
the good kind of night fever
it remembers summer nights
moving in unison
with the earth itself
going home
moon-baked and aching
but human

to dance is to human

Trauma rests
in quick breath
restless legs
stands large
and guarded
splits through
bone and sinew, but
two things can be true:
I bet sometimes
you feel euphoric too

The body remembers dancing
in the care home they know
to groove is divine
to groove is to god

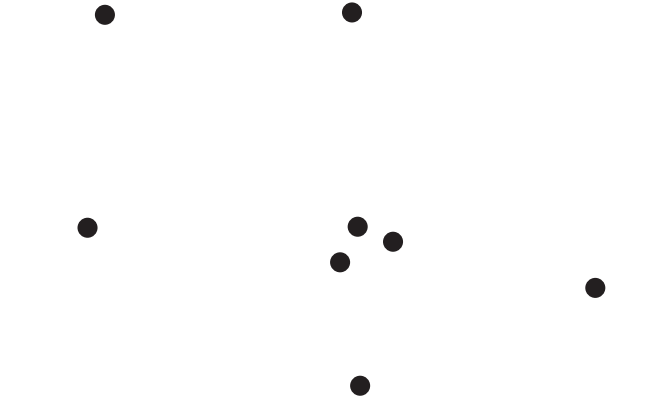
and I vow
I will dance more



Groove, collage, 2025
Accompanies the poem *The body
remembers trauma (& dancing)*
Han Newton

3

● Wellington Vale
Care Home



We really must be getting on
Han Newton

I have trouble operating time, fumbling the ignition and knowing when to hit the brakes. Months, seasons, semesters all seem to slip and stick together, coagulating vaguely into two categories:

1. Now.
2. Not now.

Not that I'm *not* time-conscious. Time is an impatient dictator present in all areas of life - huffing and tapping its feet at meetings, family occasions, when you're too long inactive on a webpage.

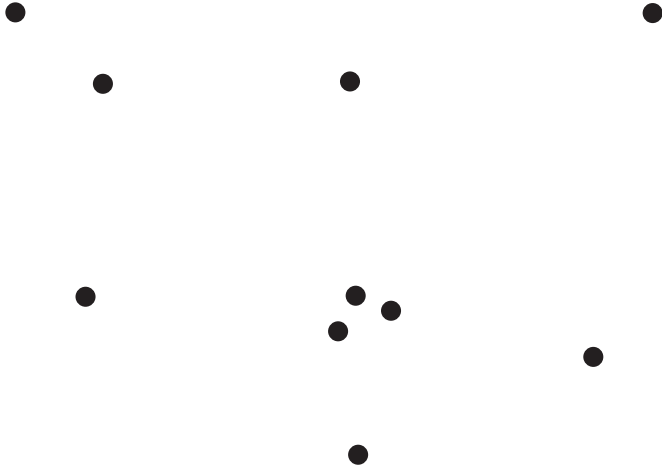
As such, many of us experience the passing of time as sporadic and agonising pangs of anxiety. When struck by said pang, the ritual begins: hands flap to locations that a pocket might be, across tables and chair seats in search of impish belongings that hide when you need them most. Clocks, watches, until this moment strangers, now closely regarded by involuntary flicks of the eyes, neck and wrist. We might say something like, *My goodness, look at the time!* or *I really must be getting on*. We might then lightly jog to the train station, despite being dressed in a shirt and suit jacket.

I learnt at Wellington Vale that having free time does not mean you are free of time. I watched residents with schedules clear as summer skies fly into ceremony, rhythmically tapping, performing rites in vain hope of making it to that non-existent appointment. In one workshop - a chatty woman, all wit and wryness with a glint in her eye - repeatedly flit between keen interest

and existential crisis as if time were delivering some out-of-date reminder for something no longer due. She never took her coat off and kept both hands fixed on the clasp of her bag, as though some dithering item might burst free and cause a delay. I saw myself in her. I wondered if she was late a lot too.

The problem with panicking about time is that it prevents you from ever being fully present. How can you enjoy the moment when the next one's already announcing its arrival time, screeching *you better not forget me* inappropriately loud through the tannoy? I don't have an answer. I hurtle through life like I can't wait for the finish line. But now, I'm trying to turn down the tannoy.

4



A long road to nowhere in particular
Han Newton

It's a long road to nowhere in particular
and I can't help picking up the pace
if I go slow I might notice
how a crow's feathers shine iridescent
how seeds settle in cracks in the pavement
grow in spite of their placement
Burst lace against grey
I might notice
The blush, ache
your gaze lingers in wait
How the evening light falls on your face.

I make haste.

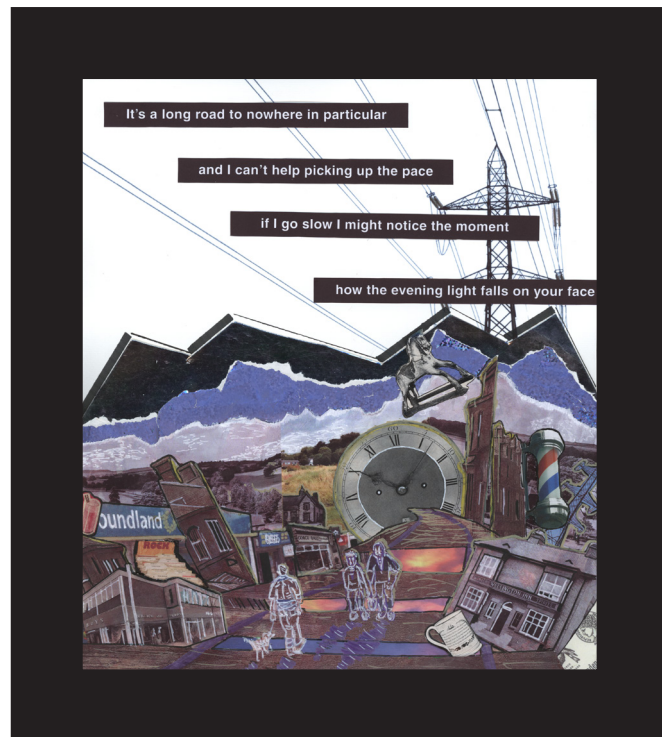
Each moment tainted
one eye on creeping expectations
if I go slow I risk lateness.
Life's so fast. I've been dreaming
of cold coasts
thick groves
and tall grass
you and I timeless
knowing finally
what quiet means.

These days my worth
feels like a sum of moving parts

back at it again
complete life now and rest at the end

It's a long road to nowhere in particular
but if I'm quick I might make it to
Nowhere in particular
I wonder what's waiting at
Nowhere in particular

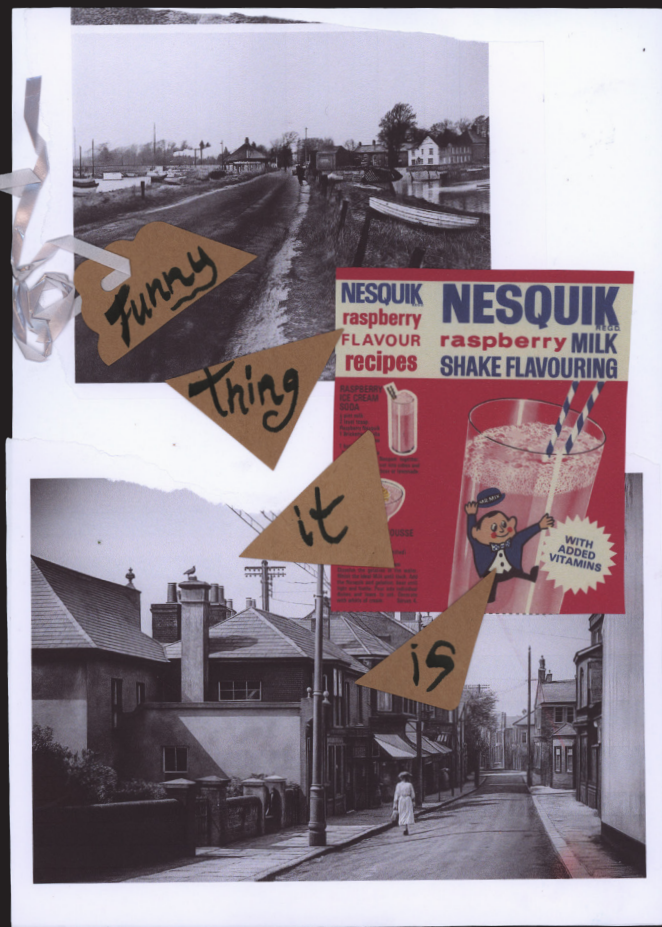
Will you wait?



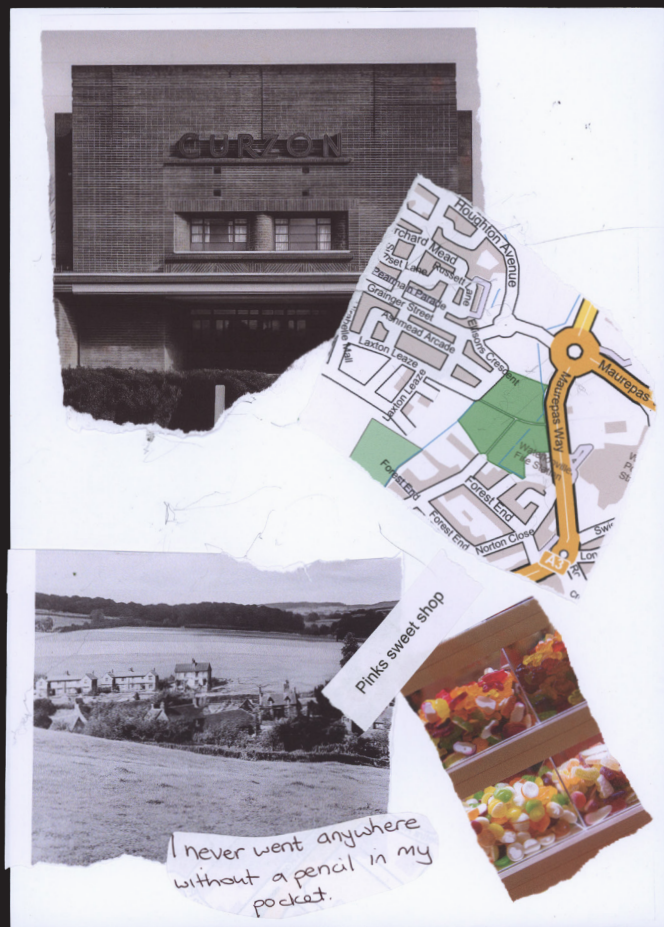
Presence, collage, 2025
Accompanies the poem *A long
road to nowhere in particular*
Han Newton



Memory collage, 2025
Barbara W



Memory collage, 2025
 'Funny thing, it is'
 Mary



Nature collage, 2025
 'I never went anywhere without my pencil'
 David



The Green Spaces of Waterlooville

And Earth was our playmate again
Han Newton

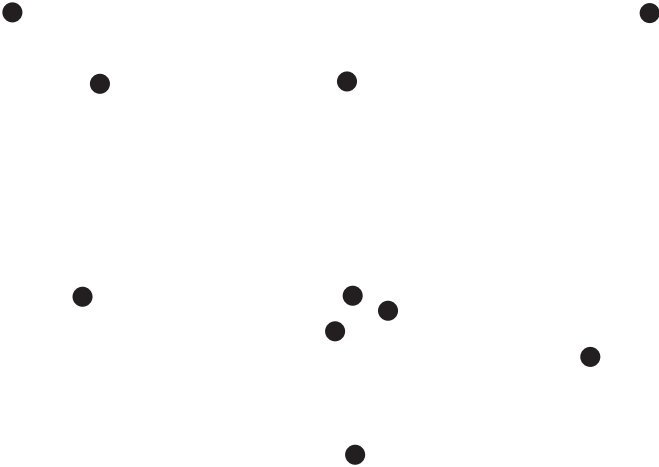
Our second theme, The Green Spaces of Waterlooville, began in late August, during that transient and temperate period when crimson-copper begins to tint green. I'd gathered leaves, buds, and flowers since spring, and brought them to Wellington Vale, along with images of local green spaces to use in the collages. Daffodils and bunches of spring blossoms mingled with summer's snapdragons and roses. The week prior, helicopter seeds had begun twirling from sycamores and quickly became a popular addition to the mix.

As adults, our relationship with nature becomes so serious. We observe landscapes like gallery art—distant, detached by the frame. We armour against elements and 'hike' (not frolic) like we forgot nature was our playmate—forgot seasons spent grubby and tumbling in long grass. Helicopters, conkers, dandelions, buttercups—all memories of a time when we knew the earth to be a friend who shared her toys with us.

In the workshop, the excitement was childlike and contagious as we explored the little pieces of our world. From one box, I drew a single, miniature fuchsia—delicate and flat, like an adorably squashed fairy. Unable to contain myself, I squealed, 'Awwww—Look at the tiny dancing lady!'

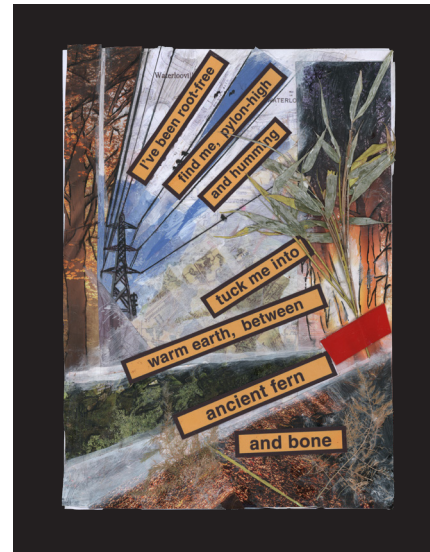
The resident beside me did a double-take, cried, 'Owh!', and began to laugh. This made me laugh, which in turn made her laugh harder. A few others caught the giggles, and soon enough, the handkerchiefs were out—while I, of a far less resourceful generation, dabbed tears of senseless hilarity with my sleeve.

6



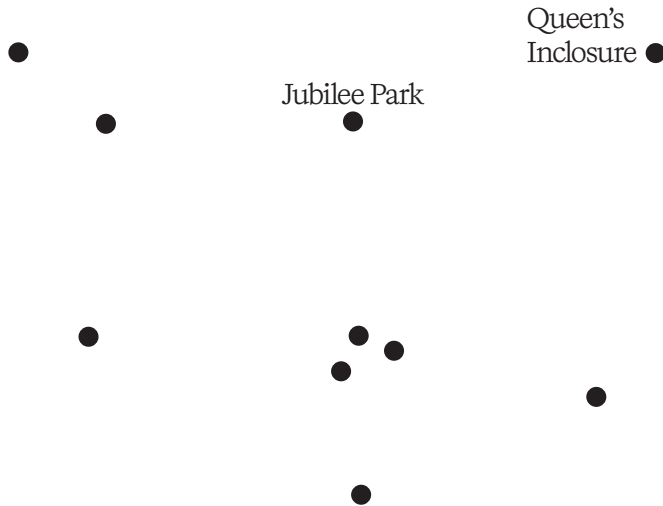
Sleeping until Spring Han Newton

Sleeping Until Spring
Grass shakes seed
sows next summer's lawn
I've been root-free
find me
pylon-high and humming
tuck me into warm earth
between ancient fern and bone.



Root-free, collage, 2025
Accompanies the poem *Sleeping until Spring*
Han Newton

7



Where spirits linger
Han Newton

Waterlooville grew from land once belonging to The Forest of Bere – a vast wildland that once stretched across Hampshire, a patchwork of trees, heath, and pasture. For centuries, people lived within the forest boundaries, carving clearings into settlements and spending their lives beneath the canopies. The town stands on the old Portsmouth-to-London turnpike, a wooded road once notorious for the robbers and bandits lurking among the great oaks.

Over the years, these crossroads became the heart of local life, and The Forest of Bere lives on in the surrounding pockets: Jubilee Park, Queen's Inclosure, Newlands – all capsules of our natural past. Like all good crossroads and ancient woodlands, the place is steeped in folk and forest lore. It's said that spirits linger in these parts. Reported hauntings include a mysterious disappearing hitchhiker on Hulbert Road and a century-long series of strange happenings at nearby Hopfield House.

I'd researched the crossroads after hearing a resident's account– corroborated by several others – of a wayfarer of worlds: a formidable, liminal figure found in one of two places – the crossroads, or the bus. Apparently, the bloke menaced passing cars and pedestrians like nobody's business. Menaced complimentary drinks into his hand. Even managed to menace his way onto free bus journeys– which is my favourite part of the tale (largely due to the method-of-menacing). When asked for the fare, he'd turn to the unfortunate rider behind and exclaim,

'Oh!' - a perfect picture of hurt and hostile confusion, delivered in a tone thick with contradiction - 'I thought YOU were paying?'

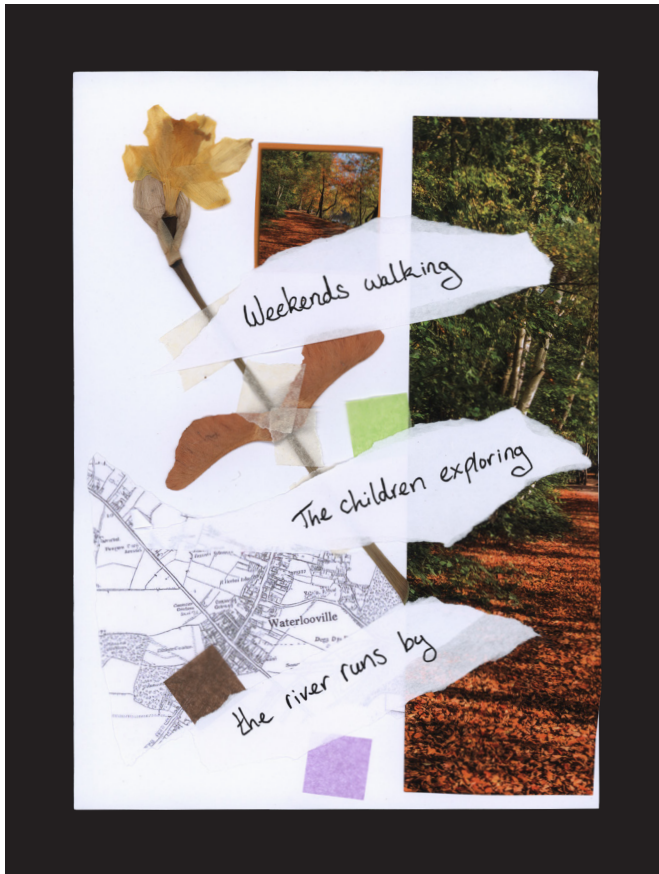
And I think it's the audacity I find entertaining - having the guts to attempt such a brazen swindle. But imagine how dull life would be if not a single person chose to go absolutely rogue? The stories we tell, the people we meet - they all teach us something about ourselves, our fears and dreams, who we were, are, and might become. We might not particularly like our teachers, but it's important to pay heed to the lessons they offer and the legends they leave behind.



Nature collage, 2025
Olive



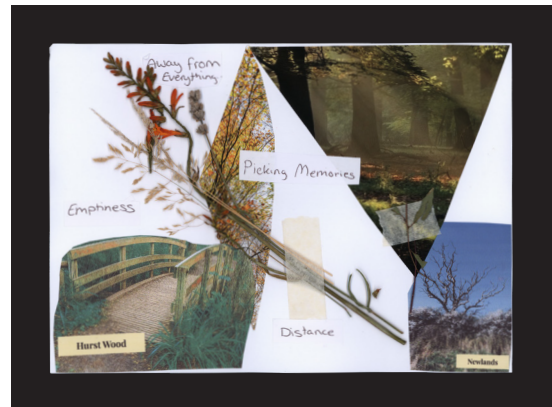
Nature collage, 2025
'A place of character with people of character'
Paul



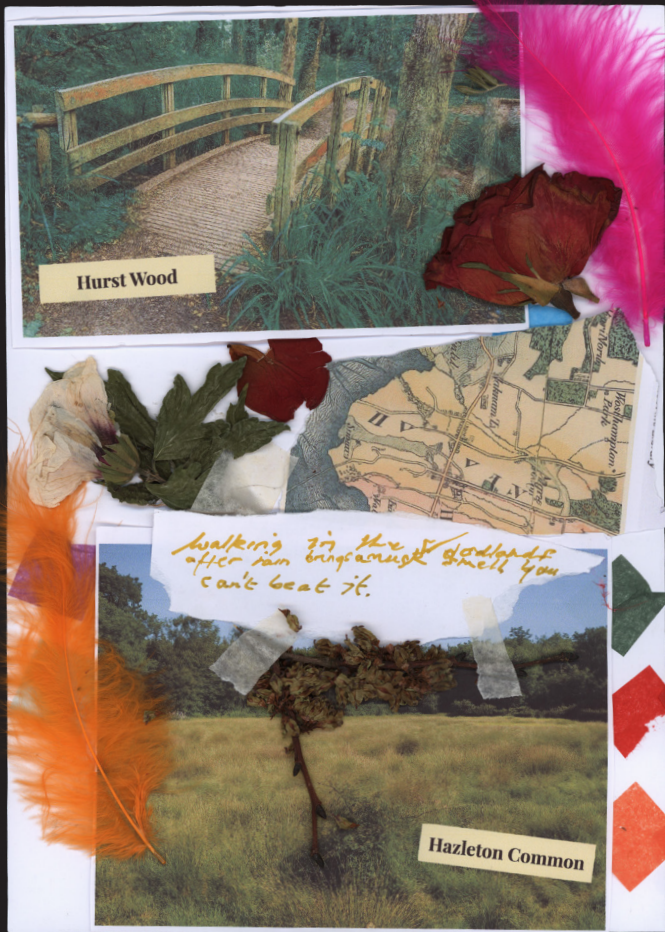
Nature collage, 2025
Eileen



Nature collage, 2025
'My daughter and I used to visit a different park or woodland and we'd each pick and take home a little flower, or a leaf or a seed or even a branch... wonderful memories'
Christine



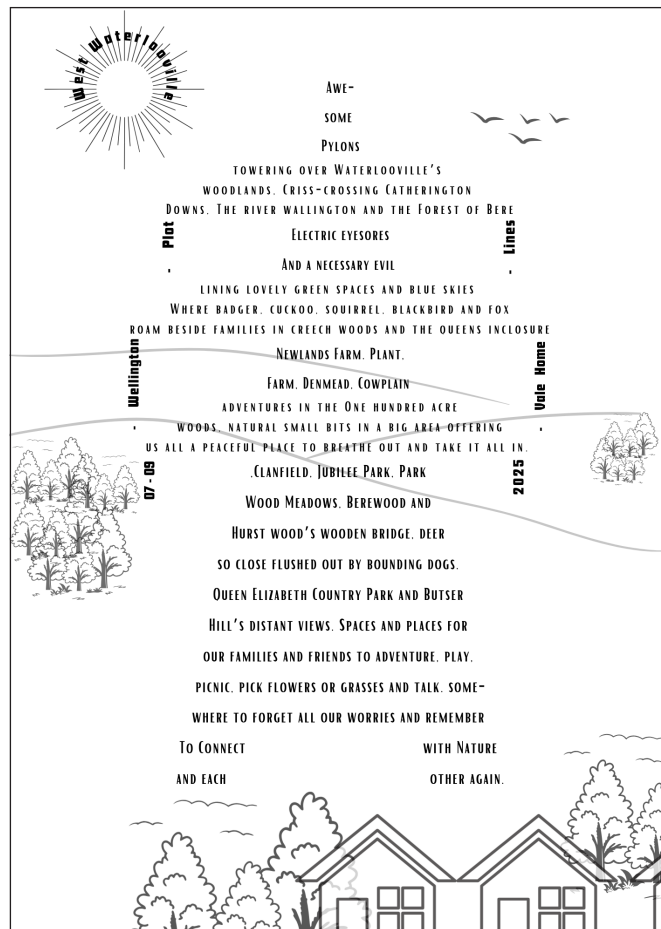
Nature collage, 2025
Wendy



Nature collage, 2025
 'A peaceful place to breathe out'
 Pat P



Nature collage, 2025
 'I'm surprised by what I have created!'
 Jane



Trips to the Seaside

Here, we're sea folk
Han Newton

The final round of workshops crashed in as the harvest moon tugged and turned the tides, and it may have been the coastal winds or the assorted beach trinkets, but at Wellington Vale, we were Sea Folk. Seaweed, driftwood, and mermaid's purses had been drying around the house for weeks, and their pungency had finally ebbed, leaving behind the faint and familiar smell of salt.

(It is here I'd like to both thank and apologise to my partner, Jess: I am not always easy to live with.)

Our proximity to the ocean is more than a part of us. It's as if the deep blue got into our DNA somehow – the roaring call runs through us, and our eyes require an endless horizon to fully adjust. Needless to say, the theme went down a splash with the crew.

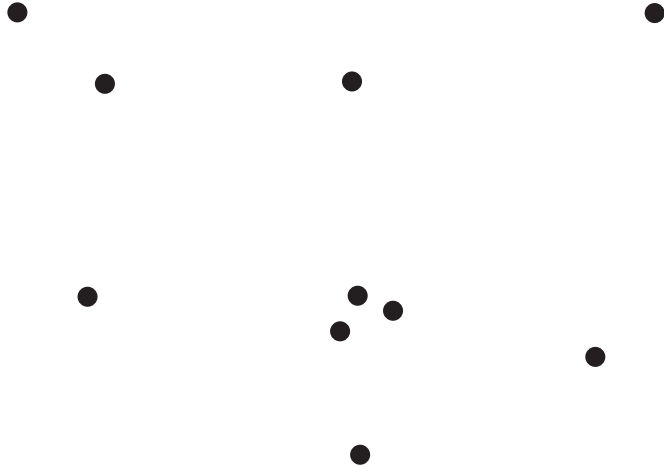
We spoke of sea air and shingle, long swims and summers, fish and chips, ferry rides, the strange mysteries that hide in rock pools when the tide reveals its shore – and how the waves bring with them a stillness, something ancient and hard to name.

So, we tried naming it.



I know about the sea, collage, 2025
Jess, raised in the water and woodland outside of
Waterlooville, insists she cannot take full credit
The Trees and Jessica Hunt @tackypop

9



Sea folk
Han Newton

At the seaside I'm
horizon-wide and one
million pebbles long
I am gullcry
I am spume
I am home

As the moon pours a path
towards me
I am salt and dust and stone
I am so much more connected now
and so much more alone

Went to the beach, me and you
Just for a second,
I felt you there too..

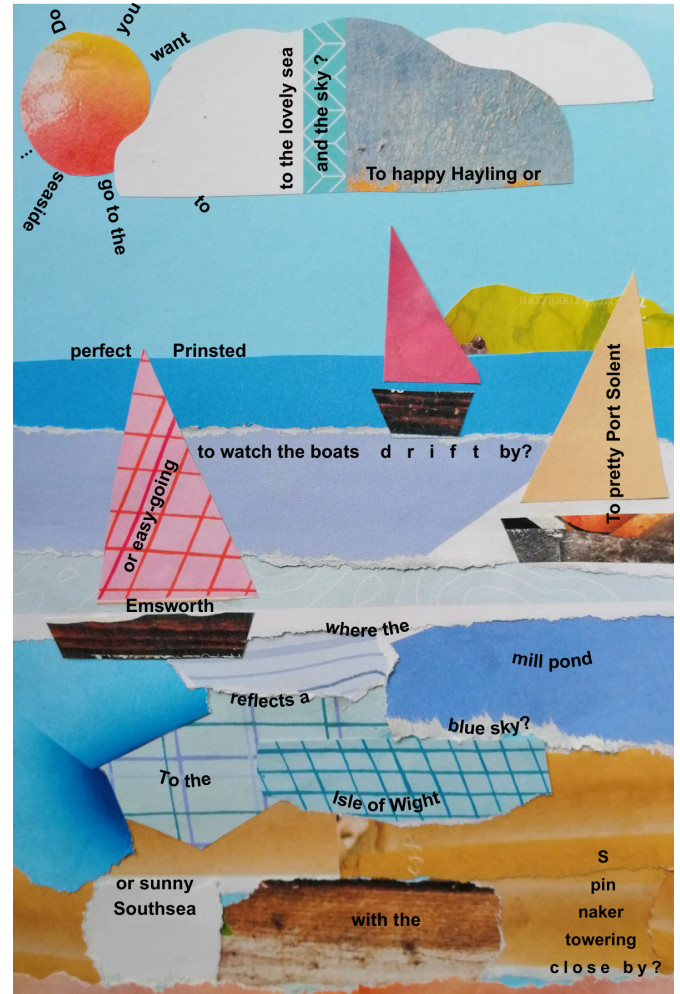
Waves Whisper "I love you"

And here you'll stay
Just for a moment...
Until the sea has my body
As well as my heart.

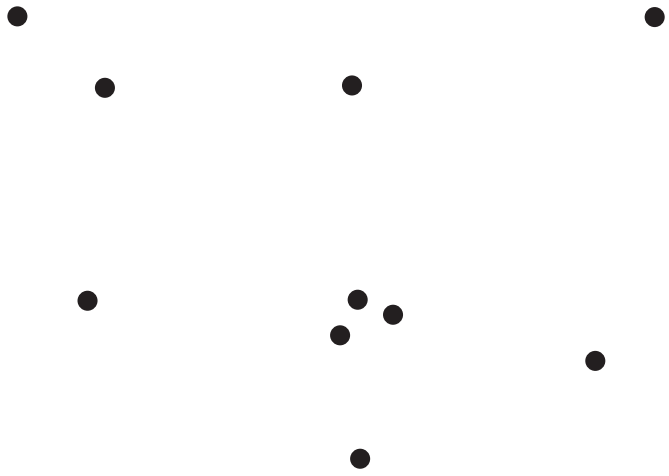
Seaside collage, 2025
Chloe

10

Do you want to go to the seaside?
Kym Devine



11



Green beach hut Kym Devine



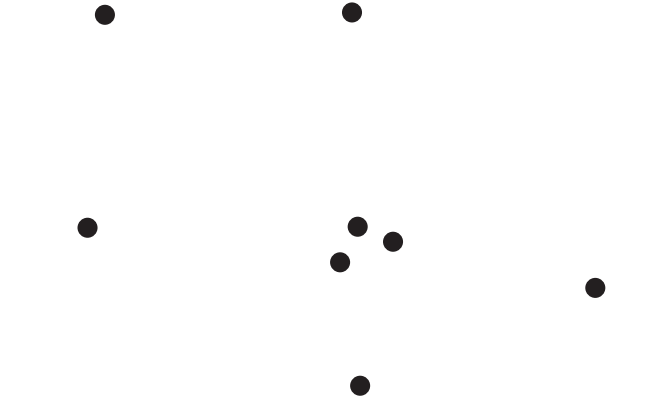
My
family
had a green beach hut
down at Lee on Solent. We'd
pack our bags first thing and drive there,
excited to spend the day together
by the sea, only packing up and
going home once the sun had gone
down. It was on a pebbly beach
over looking Cowes on the Isle
of Wight. Some days it was

w n y n t e e w s
i d a d h s a a
o t n e y h p y
f e v r c o p .

Inspired by Eileen's memories of family visits
to Lee on Solent

12

● Wellington Vale
Care Home



But I suppose it doesn't have to be
Han Newton

Memory is a slippery little devil: sloping off when you call, with all the nonchalance of a house cat – swiping names from faces and hiding the reason you walked into a room. Despite memory's prolific trickery, it's taboo to admit you just forgot. So we mask the absence of an answer – pretend, deflect, or make excuses to conceal the lack of presence, reason, or a better one.

But Memory isn't necessarily an obstacle to creativity. Studies show that even as factual recall fades, intuitive, emotional, and sensory creativity often remain intact. What stops people from making isn't memory loss – it's shame.

If Memory is a pest, then Shame's a despot – hurling roadblocks and stop signs and you're-not-good-enoughs. It rocks up to workshops uninvited and slides from lips shaped as:

I'm no artist – as if we need a disclaimer to play. Shame – especially the fear of inadequacy or judgment – blocks creative risk-taking, self-expression, and flow far more than cognitive limits do.

The residents grew up in quieter times, without the hyper-convenience of the present. Queuing at the phone box. Rewinding tapes. Facts confined to encyclopedias, not a Google away. The manual past bred hardy folk – resilient from the labour of the home, patient from the dial-up modem – but often buried in duty, family, and expectation. Creative exploration belonged to hours that rarely came.

Time's passing changes how we spend it, and we take for granted the on-demand-ness of our existence.

For all its faults and fears and frivolity, the present offers automations and algorithms that carve out spare hours. Time to make. To find community. To fail, and then begin again. We can find our teachers at the click of a button – pre-recorded people who won't tell you you're no good.

Over weeks at Wellington Vale, in the judgement-free zone that Kym and I created, we heard Shame shift. Slowly, the words *It's not any good...* trailed into, *But I suppose it doesn't have to be*. In the final session, I set up the intro slides and turned to give the introduction – and found there was no need. The residents had already got stuck in, gathering paper and seaweed and scissors. I gathered paper scraps, a small bouquet of bladderwrack, and joined them, happy to sit and chat and make. The residents laughed and collaged, knowing it didn't matter what they made – only that they made it.

And as muscle memory guided glue sticks across two-dimensional pieces of history, none of us were our age: we were children making pictures for the love and joy and hell of it.

I'm so glad I know now that the body remembers dancing – and crafting, too.



If you stop responding, visual poem, 2025
Han Newton

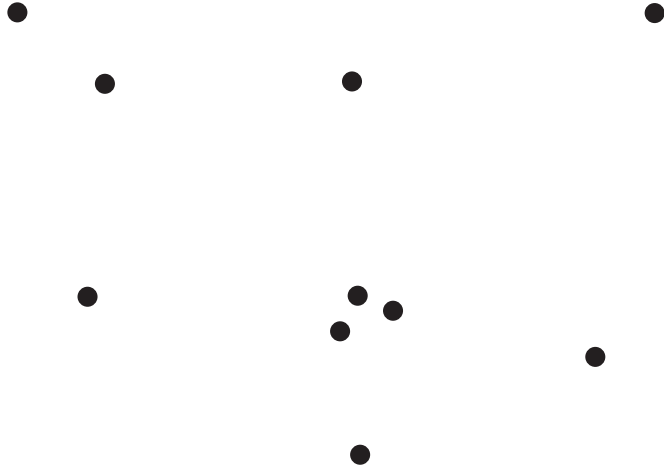
How to Plot Lines, Kym Devine

1. Gather friends and smiles
2. Choose teamwork and laughter
3. Bond with beautiful memories
4. Add confidence with words
5. Mix with sticks, seaweed and seeds
6. Display feelings with imagination
7. Create artists
8. Admire



Untitled, collage, 2025
Created during the final celebration session
by visiting family member and local artist
Mike Pearce @malignant_art

13



Gathering Kym Devine

A gathering up
of sunshine,
pavement and
warm strangers
sat with smiles
and stories
and sides of
salad,
sunglasses,
and beans.

Lifted together
before listening
to home
stories radiating
on the top floor
held with
gold clasps, strings,
fur, clicks, ants
and unknowns.

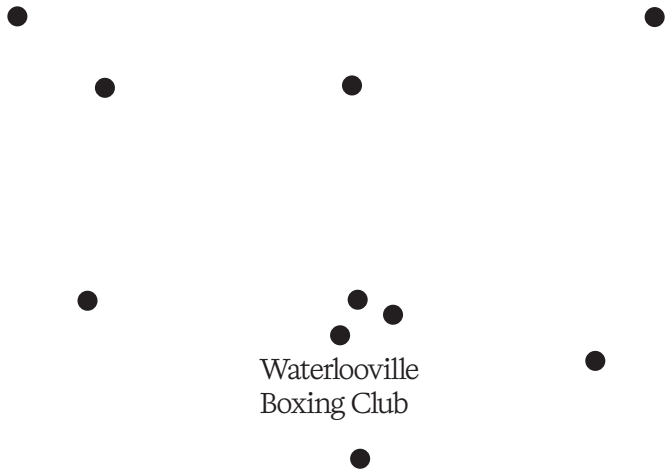
A beautiful
project
plotted on a
purple floor,
blue sky
April afternoon.

Writer in Residence Words

As Plot Lines writer in residence, Aoife Mannix continues to explore the voices and stories that make up Waterlooville – from moments of everyday courage and creativity to the quiet connections between people and place.

In this selection, Aoife shares new writing inspired by local conversations, events and encounters – from a young boxer finding her confidence in the ring, to community acts of care, and reflections on nature and belonging.

14



Waterlooville
Boxing Club

Waterlooville Boxing Club
Aoife Mannix

I speak to Bella and Chelsea, Bella's Mum, on one of those autumn days that are still holding the warmth of summer as the leaves begin to blush red. Bella tells me how she first got into boxing because of her uncle, who was a semi-professional boxer and is now a coach. He thought she might enjoy it so encouraged her to start when she was ten. She's now twelve and has found that boxing's not only great fun, it has hugely increased her self confidence. One of her best moments was when she won her first boxing match. It was away from home so she was surrounded by strangers who supported her opponent. To be able to stay calm and emerge triumphant under those conditions gave her a real thrill.

Bella trains three times a week and Chelsea says it has given her daughter an amazing level of fitness. At school, they've had to move her into a higher set in PE. At first it was hard for her to find other girls to spar with. There were only two when she first joined Waterlooville Boxing Club but now more and more girls are getting into it. She says sometimes boys can be a bit dismissive and not take girl boxers seriously because traditionally it was seen as such a male sport. But she's hopeful that this is changing. She describes a real sense of community at the gym where they're like a little family. They have a great laugh together but are also serious about supporting each other. She says her coach is her hero and like another grandad to her. He's really funny but also strict when he needs to be. She has a deep respect for him and knows that she's

learning all the time under his guidance. She explains that she doesn't want to box professionally but has dreams of one day being in the Olympics.

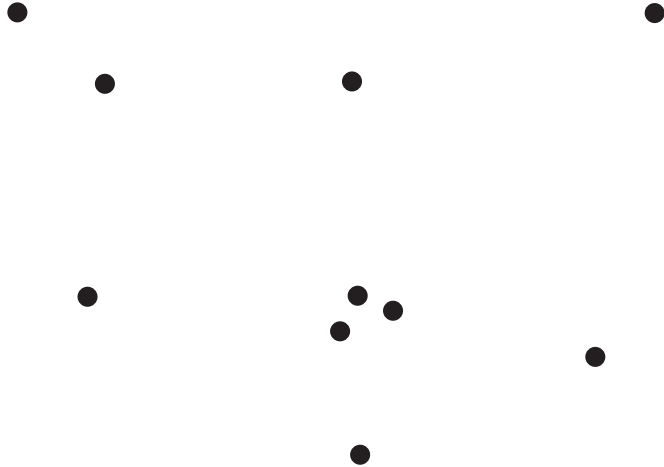
Bella feels most herself when she's doing what she loves. She finds boxing relaxing and she says it tires you out as you burn up a lot of excess energy. She really enjoys the focus and discipline it gives her. Also people don't mess with you when they know you can defend yourself! Chelsea says she found it a bit hard to watch her daughter at the beginning and Bella admits that some of her friends were worried she'd get hurt. But she's never been injured so far. She says she'd definitely encourage girls to consider boxing because it gives you a sense of self belief as well as respect for yourself and others that are part of this really friendly community. I am struck by how grounded and self assured she is, she has a maturity that seems way beyond her years. Her Mum is clearly extremely proud of her and with good reason.

Bella the Boxer

Aoife Mannix

In a clearing stands a girl,
cool, calm, collected.
All sting, no butterfly,
she dances to her own beat.
Ignoring boys who think
a queen can't be taken seriously.
This is about fitness, strength,
the confidence to be her own person.
Proud, part of a family, her coach
is her hero, another grandfather,
as funny as he is strict.
Training three times a week,
some worried she might get hurt,
but this is her safest space,
the place where she is a champion,
an Olympic dreamer, but most of all,
where she has found the self belief
to be whoever she cares to be.
Nobody is putting her in a corner.

15



Local Hero
Aoife Mannix

I had been put in touch with Angela Tuck by Olena Merkushyna (a local mental health and well being support worker) who in turn I had met through Maryna Melnyk (a local Ukrainian artist). Angela won a BBC Great Neighbour Make A Difference Award in 2023 for her work with local Ukrainian children supporting them with language classes in Ukrainian.

I speak to her on a beautiful summer's day as sunshine floods through the window. She tells me how in 2022 she received a phone call early one Sunday morning from Sasha, a 16 year old Ukrainian girl who had fled with her mother, Olha, and four year old sister, Elina, to Poland when the Russians invaded. Angela offered to host them in her house believing it would be for a few weeks, but they were still with her 21 months later. She didn't want to make them homeless so has bought a flat and is now their landlady as well as continuing to help with childcare and other support. It has been a challenging but deeply rewarding experience. She realised early on that when people have lost their homes, they feel like they have lost all control of their lives. Regaining some control even in small ways is incredibly important. For example, being able to choose their own food and cook what they like to eat.

When Elina started in reception, they discovered there was a great deal of support to learn English, which she did with incredible speed. However, her father, who is still in Ukraine, was worried how she would learn to read and write in Ukrainian. Angela realised how important it was for these children who had lost

their country to have opportunities to speak their own language and remember their culture. She and Olha decided to set up a Ukrainian language club. As well as organising Ukrainian language lessons they began to collect books, give parties, and organise arts and crafts. Together, they recruited teachers, volunteers, and children.

They started with four teachers giving one lesson a week but have expanded to twelve dedicated teachers with nearly 40 children on their books. They have received funding from BBC Children in Need which has been wonderful but also involves having to put in place many policies and procedures. Angela explains how there's a lot of hard work that goes on in the background paying the bills and making sure it all runs smoothly. All this administration is worth it though when she sees the children laughing and playing in their own language. They now also have a fantastic choir with more performances planned. Hearing them singing always makes her smile and appreciate what they have achieved. She believes being of value to this new community has stopped her from becoming old and boring. She says it is wonderful to be part of something bigger, to be part of a team. She has recently received quite a grim diagnosis of cancer, but she remains hopeful. She feels a real sense of value and achievement in helping others. I am struck by how concerned she is by the challenges the children and their families continue to face with no end to the war in sight. It seems to me her selflessness, empathy and compassion are deeply needed in these dark times when racism and hatred are on the rise throughout the world. She is very much a local hero to the Ukrainian community.

Host
Aoife Mannix

You open your house to an early Sunday morning call from a strange girl in the in between of Poland, inviting the untranslatable pain of people who have lost all that they thought they knew. Not just bricks and mortar, kitchen sinks, but the taste of home so that dinner time becomes an alien ritual in a language over which they have no control.

You find new ways to weigh the words of war as the months turn into years. You discover you can't make your heart homeless, so you learn how to teach the children what their country is called, to keep alive connections to the past when their future is still being demolished.

To dance and sing and share the smiles that stop you getting old. You quietly carry the uncertainty of visas, the long road back to Kyiv, the bombs, the drones, the missing fathers. You find ways to win back the lost labels for love so they are still fresh on the tongue of childhoods spoken in exile. You are a door that dared not to close, a place of refuge, an education in kindness.

16

Ukrainian Ladies Club Aoife Mannix

Thunder rolls in the distance as I sit down to interview Olena Merkushyna, a local Ukrainian mental health and well being support worker, who has set up a ladies' club for Ukrainian women. She tells me how she came to the UK after fleeing the war in Ukraine and spending three months in Poland. She arrived with her husband, four daughters, two cats and one dog thinking how lucky she was they had all got out. But the pressures of being refugees only made the domestic abuse she was secretly suffering worse. Back in Ukraine, she'd felt that if she attempted to leave her abusive husband, he would succeed in ensuring she had no access to her children and she would end up penniless on the streets. But through the help of a local UK domestic violence charity, she discovered the support she needed to leave a situation that was making her suicidally unhappy. She no longer feels ashamed but empowered to share her story so that other women know they do not have to suffer in silence.

Her family came to the UK with only one bag, so a local charity set up a 'boutique' to provide school uniforms, clothes and even dog food. As one of the first Ukrainians to arrive, Olena soon found herself volunteering to help others. Back home, she had worked as a teacher of literature as well as etiquette showing young ladies how to fit into high society. Under very different circumstances in the UK, she discovered she could put these skills to use helping Ukrainian women feel confident and glamorous once more. The war had not only taken their homes and belongings but left

them feeling grey, depressed, worn out, and full of guilt for enjoying any kind of pleasure. With her themed evening gatherings, Olena has shown them that they can still look stylish from a charity shop, that through simple activities like cooking together or singing or hand massage they can make profound connections through their shared suffering. A lady told her that her face muscles hurt after one evening because it had been so long since she had smiled. Another that no one had touched her, not even for a hug, in over two years.

Olena explains how many of these women had been professionals, such as teachers or lawyers, before the Russian invasion, but now find themselves struggling in a foreign language in a country where their qualifications count for nothing. Just to be able to swap stories in Ukrainian has given them back this lost sense of identity. As well as deep personal friendships, it has helped to rebuild their self-esteem and mental health. They have learnt to support one another in all aspects of their lives. They can be honest about the struggles they face and seek out counselling and professional help if needed. A few of them have even applied for university places and are finding the strength to rebuild their shattered lives.

It seems to me that Olena is a survivor of two wars, the external invasion of her country as well as the internal violence of an abusive relationship in her own home. Her quiet elegance, warm manner and generosity of spirit are as inspiring as her steely determination to make life safe for children. She tells me with a smile that she is inspired by Paddington Bear, a famous refugee taken in by a host family who charms everyone with his simple politeness even if he

makes a few mistakes along the way. She is planning a movie event to celebrate this wonderful story of British welcome and how it is possible to find joy even when you are lost and far from home.

Ukrainian Ladies Club

Aoife Mannix

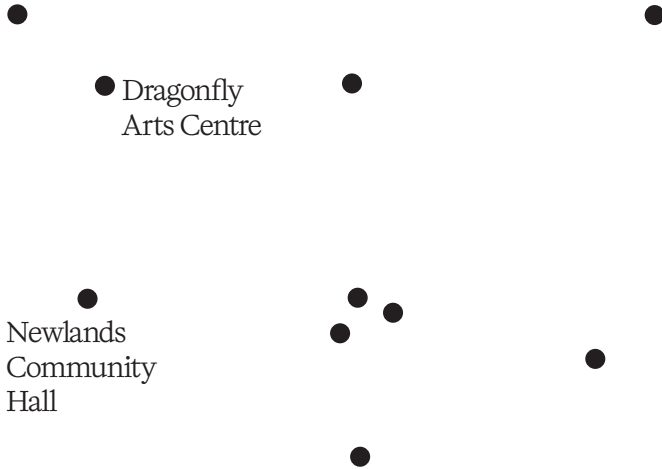
The bones of butterflies are in your mouth:
you speak of the silence
of sitting in your own house,
having fled one war only to fight another
on the home front behind closed doors.
Your kitchen a battleground
where your daughters suffer
a language you dare not speak.

Your white dress flutters
with the elegance of bullet proof armour
as you resurrect your wings.
You wear your court cases without shame
and build your ark for women lost
in the translation of a spider's web.

You cook and sing and teach them
how to smile again. Even when
their muscles ache with the lost meaning
of what it is to be hugged, you give them
back the people they used to be.

The grammar of eyelashes, red lipstick.
You sew your ashes together, white lace,
intricate connections. Gorgeous
and proud as you emerge from the flames.

17



Protected
Aoife Mannix

It's Father's Day and the sun is shining brightly as we gather outside Newlands Community Centre for a community walk/artistic workshop with Hampshire Wildlife Trust and Dragonfly Arts Centre. We are given spotter sheets to keep track of what we discover which gives an immediate feeling of heading off on an adventure. My pomsky, Marsha, makes friends with another little dog and everyone is in good spirits. As we head across the road, Steve Bolton, Wilder Communities Officer, explains how important mapping where species live is to their conservation. You can only save what you know is there. He tells us how ragwort with its vivid yellow is a native wildflower that is of great importance to pollinating insects. Some object to it because it's poisonous to horses, but actually, it has a bitter taste that animals don't like. The real danger is in leaving pulled dead weeds on the ground as the flavour is gone but the poison remains. He points out the yellow green of a brimstone butterfly and the fluttering orange of a meadow brown as a skylark soars overhead. It strikes me how in naming these species, he has made me look at them in greater detail. What a moment before was just a patch of grass by a pond near newly built houses is suddenly a place of fascination and discovery.

I ask one of the young boys what creature he is most hoping to see and why. He replies without hesitation, 'a frog, they're my favourite. They're semi-aquatic. They start off as eggs with no parents around so as soon as they're born as tadpoles, they're just independent, free to swim wherever they like.'

His enthusiasm and knowledge are contagious. As we peer through the slats of the boardwalk into the dark mystery of the water below, I really want to see a frog too.

The River Wallington is being restored from a concrete channel into a free-flowing waterway where wildlife can thrive. We sit down by the bank as Emily Dewhirst, founder of Dragonfly Arts Centre, pulls out an assortment of paints and paper. We use stems as brushes to capture this beautiful June morning.

There is great excitement over the emerald wonder of a large emperor dragonfly hovering over the reeds.

Steve points out how a marbled white butterfly is sucking salts from the mud as its chequerboard wings shimmer in the sunlight. As we head back, we listen to the trill of green finch and spot a heron majestic in his flight from the river over the rooftops. There are swifts making their homes in the eaves and a kingfisher who lives along the banks. It's wonderful to see how much nature is thriving in the middle of this new housing development.

An older man tells me how he used to work for NASA helping to design the rockets that sent the first astronauts to the moon. He says he loves to write, and he has never lost his interest in discovering new worlds, including natural ones. Back at the centre, we sit outside and create our own maps using ink stamps and letter stencils. We are shown the nest of a harvest mouse, a creature so tiny a fully grown adult weighs no more than tuppence. They weave their homes from living grass into a hollow tennis ball that sits high in the reeds. It makes me think how as humans we've managed such massive technological developments,

built vast cities, travelled into space, yet we still need to respect the wonder of the planet we live on. In bringing together scientific knowledge, art and a love of nature, this morning's walk has bonded us in an appreciation of how precious local habitats are for insects, birds, animals, plants and people of all ages.

Bird Watching
Aoife Mannix

Housemartins feed on the wing,
drink from the deep of the pond,
make their homes in the eaves
of other people's roofs,
having swooped in from Africa
to the applause of gold finch,
chattering in their yellow summer suits
as they suck the seeds from thistles
before heading to Spain for the winter.
Though you and I must keep our feet
on the ground, this June morning
when the sky is a blue so free it hurts,
we spy the Little Egret sail over
the red brick houses, a dancer
all in white soaring across a vast stage,
and, just for a moment, we too take flight.

Protected
Aoife Mannix

On Father's Day, you show your boys
how to walk along the restoration
of the river, teach them
there is a whole language of butterflies.
Meadow bright, brimstone,
stormy blue, marbled white.
You lean over the decking peering into
a world of newts, the glint of silver,
shimmering shadows. Your youngest
spies the emperor dragonfly, celebrity
helicopter hovering to land
on the lawn of reeds.

Your eldest drops seeds of speedboats
spiralling downstream to plant
their own kingdom. He says you are giants,
is convinced he's found a frog,
his favourite creature, semi aquatic,
independent from the moment
the egg splits to set free a tadpole
adventurer with no need for parents.
And you do not doubt him
as you ask him to carefully take
a step back from the edge.

Free

Aoife Mannix

The banded damsel dances
above the pond as a stormy blue
sucks salts from the mud.
You say as a child you were so lonely,
you tried to keep a butterfly for a pet.
You put it in a sealed box laced
with the softest velvet.
But wild things don't appreciate such riches.
They long to escape their airless cage,
to fly as the kingfisher does along the river,
celebrating, in a shock of blue wings,
the glory of his water kingdom.

Construction

Aoife Mannix

I walk with the old man
in the bright yellow guerilla girls' t-shirt
as he tells me of building Boeing
Saturn V rockets in Kentucky, the ones
that helped to put us on the moon,
hopping on a plane to fly fifteen hours
to pick strawberries in Alaska,
living in three countries at once.
The ox eye daisies stare at us
in the shock of summer
while the harvest mouse,
tiniest of all mammals,
hangs from the tight rope
of his tail, absorbed in the acrobatics
of building his tennis ball of a nest,
high in the stems of the reed canary grass,
a living wonder of engineering
woven into this gift of a morning.

In Tune

Aoife Mannix

You say all these new lands hum
an ancient tune strangers ignore
at their peril. You show me
how to draw a map, to find my way
through the forest of wild bears,
to connect with the water when I am
lost and unsure, to carve a circle
of protection. You teach me to salute
the magpie so that his stolen curses
no longer glitter under the strawberry moon.

Not that you're superstitious
but you believe it's best not to mess
with the fox in his murderer's gloves
prowling the edges of chickens,
to cross words with skylarks,
to confront pigeons as they coo
about grief on a June morning
after the storm has left the air smelling
of monsoon myths in the drought of England.

You show me how to walk
the fields with the slow swish
of a horse's tail keeping time
to the rhythm of Himalayan honeysuckle,
to weave my footsteps into the jive
of the robin, defiant in his dealing
of demon suits, the lost feathers
of Friday the thirteenth.

Get Involved

If you would like to take part in the project or speak with one of our writers please get in touch with us at 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 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, thirteen year old son and a pomsky 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.

Han Newton (she/they) is a poet, filmmaker, visual artist, facilitator, and womble who collects things from the street and occasionally upcycles them. Their work lives in the in-betweens, grey areas, and the threshold between the serious and the absurd. A winner of the StAnza On-Screen Poetry Film Competition, Han has been featured on BBC Upload, published in CV&L Zine and HNDL Mag, and has performed at UK Pride, Victorious, and Cheltenham Poetry Slam. They are currently mentored by Portsmouth Creates. Han lives in Southsea with too many pets.

Kym Devine is a poet based in East Hants. She delivers dementia friendly 'Creative Connections' poetry and reminiscence workshops in care homes and community groups and is an assistant facilitator for ArtfulScribe's online 'Junior Writers' Club'.

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Winchester
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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 second edition and please do get in touch to tell us what you think at hello@plotlines.co.uk

