

We Are



Wednesbury



Community
Magazine

Issue 1, Spring 2022



Made with, and by, Wednesbury residents
Produced by Multistory



Wednesbury town centre

Welcome to the first of three annual editions of the We Are Wednesbury community magazine that shares the activities that have taken place during 2021-22. The We Are Wednesbury cultural programme is part of the Wednesbury High Street Heritage Action Zone, funded by Sandwell Council and Historic England, to re-establish the historic character of the area and create a vibrant, welcoming space. It has been produced by local arts organisation, Multistory, who are working with local residents, groups, communities and artists as well as with local organisations who are members of the We Are Wednesbury working group.

The cultural programme celebrates the town's community life; it invites its residents to share histories and stories and to collectively imagine possibilities for its future. People are invited to participate in a free programme of creative projects and activities, with performances, community walks and celebrations, street festivals, processions and art workshops taking place on the streets and community spaces of Wednesbury.

Early in 2022, artist duo Hipkiss & Graney co-produced the art project MARKET alongside Wednesbury residents. The group created new fabric banners in a series of textile and storytelling workshops, and their work was shared at a community celebration of the refurbished clocktower in March. Alongside this, many other activities unfolded throughout the year: local people took part in an open photography competition focusing on Wednesbury's unique features; poetry performances took place in shops along the high street; a series of poetry films were produced exploring the many dialects and languages of Wednesbury and their relationship to food; community walks animated the town, featuring newly commissioned poetry exploring Wednesbury's social, historic and physical landscapes.

In these pages you can find newly written creative writing by young citizen journalists who interviewed local business owners to inform their work.

Send an email to the address below if you want to know more about the programme and how to get involved, sign up to the newsletter, or simply want to say hello!

wearewednesbury@multistory.org.uk

Visit [multistory.org.uk](https://www.multistory.org.uk) to see films, photographs and more from the projects that have taken place so far and follow us [@multistory](#) on social media.

*There's a town
A small town
It's a pretty town
Smiles and laughter scatter round the roads
There're loads to do
To see
Welcome to Wednesbury*

Although part of Sandwell, Wednesbury is quite independent, separate from the rest. Wednesbury people make it feel like home for everyone. No business is too small, it's warm like...

*On the high street
If you take a left, then a right then a left again
...then a right then a right again...
At 10:30AM you will see
In the heart of Wednesbury
A café
Great for weekends
And weekdays after work
There're paper owls on the shelf
It's basically Hogwarts itself
It's the life of the party*



But down towards the main street there's a soldier. He hasn't fought in any physical wars or battles, but his motivation and mental strength has earned him more than just this metaphorical armour.

*He's a handy man
It's a sweet store so
Maybe call him the candy man
A hint of sweetness for everyone's teeth
A thief for bad moods
Always printing smiles on people's faces
Them strawberry laces will do the trick
Or
Pick, slip and trip your way to the bookstore
Them empty pages tame emotions with words
There's something for everyone
The walls are warm like the people's hearts
And childish smiles play their part
Coming to the end of the street there is a museum with giant green doors. They take in artefacts and preserve and share publicly, some even say it's haunted. But essentially...

*It's home to Wednesbury's arts
It's part of the town
It makes them
Creates them
Storing everything from swords to paintings
To children's toys and more paintings
But the main thing is
It makes you feel part of history
It really welcomes you to Wednesbury *

Welcome to Wednesbury



And here begins our shapping trip,
up the town,
street
maybe get our groceries,
'o suck from Teddy Grays
the butcher's shap
ower gray paes
some opples from O'Connels.
should you need to bury our jed
up an oss with plumes
with Webb's
we'll pluck history from the shop shelves,
from out thin air,
boots with stories,
how, the where
Get you past, present and parsnips.
Cock and Bull, Cock and Bull. Hear all about it
Let's mooch together for morsels
and tek wum summat nice.
exchange is no robbery,
all things here have a price.

we'm gooin'
to wander the high
see what and who's around
a bag
maet from aht
ower bacon

And
we can order
if we arrange it all

take tales
fill our bags and
the why, the

Fair



Emma Purshouse, written for the Wednesbury Tales poetry walks.

Over the period of one month the people of Wednesbury came together to think and chat about where they lived. Through these conversations they would co-create a new artwork called MARKET.

Market

Discussions about Wednesbury came from a range of people, including families who have lived here for generations and people who are newly arrived in Wednesbury and the UK. People shared tales that they had been told by their grandparents, and that their grandparents had been told by their grandparents. Others shared their own stories and memories of life spent growing up underneath the clocktower of a market town, from great carnivals to famous samosas, historical plays, to battles for workers' rights. Stories about founding restaurants and choirs, overcoming fears on the hilltops, and running through parks with siblings on summer evenings. Everyday memories and emotions were conjured and shared, and that is how MARKET came into being.

These stories didn't just remain words. The people of Wednesbury painted them onto hand-dyed fabrics. Spoken words became landscapes and portraits, objects and structures that represented scenes of everyday life in the town. Places like ring roads and junctions evolved from simply being town infrastructure to peculiar glyphs that took the painter to their memories. Objects from the market became new symbols coded with the painters' feelings and people became folk characters, running through the old market, passing the clocktower and leaping onwards into the other tales that lay strewn across the fabric.

Hipkiss & Graney



Phillip Parnell Photography



Phillip Parnell Photography

The fabrics were woven together to become the skin of a market stall, made in replica of the same market stalls that stood in the old Market Place in the 1900s, built out of old timber and reconstructed through reference to photographs and paintings. The market stall was designed in response to visual language found in Wednesbury such as The Caryatid Gateway at the bus station which features a polished stainless steel inverted tubular arch, referencing Wednesbury being renowned for the manufacture of tubes.

MARKET doesn't just discuss the past but shows the current beating life of the town and explores the contemporary issues faced by its residents. The old merges with the new, with industrial heritage and pride woven alongside stories of ecological restoration and conservation. The pied-wagtail, an endangered bird that had taken up residence in the clocktower, and delayed its restoration for months, became the project's mascot – a flurry of wings and steely bird eyes peering out of the painted landscape. Older generations shared radical propositions for future high streets and public spaces as places of well-being and care. Younger generations looked back with appreciation to those who cared for the place before them and dream how they will carry this on.

Thank you to the wonderful South Staffs Water Community Hub (and to Becky!) for hosting the workshops; the hub is a true community venue that welcomes everyone with open arms.





In March 2022, people were invited to join a series of guided community walks around Wednesbury where poets and performers brought to life the facts and fables, truth and tall stories to be found in the history of the town. The performances consisted of newly written song, scripts, text and poems by Marion Cockin, Brendan Hawthorne, Suzan Spence, Alex Vann, Matt Windle, and Emma Purshouse (previously Wolverhampton Poet Laureate) who was also the creative producer.

Emma Purshouse reflects:

It's a great challenge to put on a promenade performance as of course the landscape that we are moving people through is constantly changing. This is particularly so in the High Street! We don't know how the general public will engage with what they see, or what they will say, or if a car will be parked in a performance spot. Wednesbury is notoriously blowy, but we were blessed with really lovely weather for March which helped. The audience was in good spring spirits for the five shows that took place over two consecutive weekends.

Ian M Bott, a local historian, is so knowledgeable and good at what he does that it was a no brainer to invite him to lead the walk with me. He gave facts and stats, while I performed four-line verse that name checked shops and businesses along the route.

Suzan Spence appeared out of nowhere by the bus station to give a rousing performance as the warrior queen Ethelfleda who fortified the town; Matt Windle's brilliant poem about boxing was delivered at the top of Hitchen's Alley; Marion Cockin was the wistful woman on The Shambles reminiscing about the past; Brendan Hawthorne delivered a potted history of Wedgebury Ware on a car park; and I brought John Wesley's horse block to life outside the Methodist Central Hall on Spring Head. The event culminated with a song from Alex Vann, the aptly named 'Tube Town', performed with a definite nod in the stylistic direction of 80's star Gary Numan's Tubeway Army.

The following text is taken from the performance script:

Ian Bott: Welcome to Wednesbury, previously known as Wedgebury, and Wodensbury. A bury being a fortified hill dedicated to the Saxon God of War, Woden. We're here above High Bullen which is so called because it's the place where the ancestors of us Wednesbury folk used to bait the bull for pure entertainment. Over there where you gathered is the Wesley memorial. John and Charles Wesley first came to Wednesbury to preach late in 1742 but by October 1743 there was great hostility towards them thus promoting the Wednesbury Riots.

Above us is where Ethelfleda's fortifications were, right there where St Bartholomew's church now stands. Daughter of Alfred the Great, she built a ring of castles around her kingdom of Mercia which she took on to look after and strengthen after the death of her husband. It's given as about 916 when she fortified Wednesbury. She eventually died at Tamworth Castle.

In there are beautiful alabaster tombs to the Parkes family of Willingsworth Hall, which stands roughly where Warbuton's Bakery is now between Wednesbury and Tipton.

Emma P: Give us this day our daily bread.

Ian: Some people call St Bartholomews the cathedral of the Black Country.

In there is something unique in the British Isles. A lectern which is said to be 14th century. It's gilded carved wood. Carved not in the image of the eagle which would traditionally spread the gospel on its wings but instead ours is in the form of a fighting cock!

Just outside the church steps several years ago we had a crowning in of a not properly capped shaft to a limestone mine and it swallowed up a ford fiesta!

Emma P:

Come now happy shoppers
We can't hang around
Gotta get to market early
for the best bargains to be found

So, nev up your trollies
But afore we goo
I'll gid yow summat for nothing

A free sample of the view.



**Wednesbury
Tales**

Wednesbury

by Ella Newman Kidd



Wednesbury. A small bustling community full of history and life. Funny ghost stories circulate through the ears of the townspeople and small independent businesses thrive like flowers in a field. Unique stores fill up the streets and friendly shopkeepers have their own independent stories to tell, making you question the history of each building you walk past.

As I slowly walked through Wednesbury town centre, the sound of energetic children excited about their day out, cut through the morning silence. The rising sun shone so brightly that I almost forgot about the cold air hitting my blushed cheeks. Old fragments of an abandoned bingo centre acted as a reminder of the changing times. As I glanced around, I could see a small clock sitting on what seemed like a pedestal, with plants crawling their way through the cracks of the broken concrete structure. The town was a maze of smaller streets and alleyways leading me towards the butchers, pubs full of drunk old men and a Harry Potter café. I almost got lost in my anticipation to see more.

I continued my walk through Wednesbury, engulfed by the winter leaves, glancing around for the bookstore known to be in this area: Blue Sheep Books. Whilst walking through the different twists and turns of Wednesbury high street, a brightly coloured building caught my eye. It was so bright that it dominated the street, grabbing my attention away from the bustling sounds of the men chanting football songs and rowdy children begging their mothers to buy them bags of sweets. I was mesmerised. The blue building enchanted me, whispering into my ears “come inside”. My curiosity gushed out of me like a waterfall, so I decided to take a peek through the window. Women’s empowerment, fantasy, crime and even history books were on display. The front covers mocked me as my brain craved for the hidden information written behind the book covers. I decided to look up to find out the name of this amazing shop. Yes, it was Blue Sheep Books! Finally, I had arrived.



As I entered the bookshop, its small size surprised me. It felt like I was entering a bedroom, except all the walls were covered with books. The shop was so small, that if you took three steps in any direction you would be met with a screen of books, which gave the store a cosy feeling. The sounds of crying children and drunk old men were silenced as I immersed myself in the abundant shelves of books. The shop was completely filled to the brim and only a small corner to the left of the store was left empty. The store owner sat there silently. She was reading *Gearbreakers* by Zoe Hana Mikita. When she looked up, she quickly greeted me kindly. I started to browse. Books for certain age groups or genre preferences were placed in their own designated area. This made the experience easier as you wouldn't find Steven King's books next to a book about maths for 4-year-olds. Towards the back of the store, there was a large display of children's books. The display was so colourful and exciting that no child would be able to pass by without being amazed and no mother would be able to keep their purse closed.

As I continued to walk past all the children's books, I was met with books aimed at teenagers. It reminded me of those I would find at my high school library, bringing back memories of my youth. I continued to browse and was met with romances that exuded passion from their covers. I now knew I was at the books aimed at adults. The horror books were placed next to the romance books. Their covers sent shivers down my spine as they brought me flashbacks of sleepless nights and scary clowns. I continued to browse through the whole store until I arrived back at the desk where the owner sat. There I saw all the books filled with the history of Wednesbury. It was nice to see how everything was documented. It allowed me to see how Wednesbury's past was connected to its future and how it became such a lively place.

As you know I have a curious mind, so I decided to ask the shop owner about the origins of her store. It has a large variety of books, is child friendly and has a fantastic owner! So why haven't I heard more about this magnificent place? We started to have a nice conversation. She said she opened the store in October 2021 with her partner. I was surprised because during that time Covid-19 was still rampant. Many small businesses were forced to close at that time but instead, she opened one, showing her determination to create something for the community. It was nice to see how people were still trying to create a place of learning and enjoyment during maybe one of the Wednesbury community's hardest moments.

As I walked back through the now sunlit streets, I thought about what book I should buy when I come back to Wednesbury.

Wednesbury Through the Lens



A Photography Competition for the town!

Open to everyone of all ages, members of the public were invited to submit photographs of their favourite people, places, food, buildings – anything that makes Wednesbury unique and interesting.

The competition was produced by Tekkinpix, a showcase for contemporary photography in the Black Country and Birmingham that encourages people to share images of the region. We received some fantastic entries and the three winners were Jay Mason-Burns, Ronnie Ackling and Kelly Hadley, whose photographs were taken as they explored Wednesbury on foot, depicting chance encounters between photographer and subject. A selection of photographs were exhibited at Wednesbury Museum & Art Gallery and in the town centre.



First prize: Jay Mason Burns image: The Three Graces

I really enjoy exploring and wandering through places; it's what brought me to Wednesbury in the first place. My photograph, which I've called 'The Three Graces', is of three ladies sitting on a bench in Wednesbury town centre. I was walking along Union Street, the pedestrianised shopping area during the summer of 2021. It was just after the end of the last national Lockdown and the streets were still quiet, with many shops still closed but people were out enjoying the summer sunshine. I heard these ladies talking and laughing before I even saw them! When I asked them if I could take their photo, it made them laugh even more. The lady in the middle said, **'Now why on earth would you want a photo of us?'** I replied, laughing, **'Because you look so lovely sat together in the sunshine laughing and talking away like the "Three Graces" of old!'** Quick as you like the lady in the middle replied, **'The Three Daft Monkeys more like!'** and they all burst out laughing again, just as I took the photograph.



Second prize: Ronnie Ackling – Costa Coffee sign

I was actually in Wednesbury trying to find industrial and structural photographs of pylons and factories when I took this one. On returning to my car, I noticed the sign on a jaunty angle and was interested in its story. Hopefully you can see the humour of the Black Country and more precisely Wednesbury in this image. I enjoy the idea that something similar to Costa Coffee is a selling point! Photography is my creative escapism. **I really enjoy knowing that a photograph captures a particular point in time that will never be repeated.** The medium of photography allows me to show others the world in different ways and I find that inspiring. More recently, I have been more involved in the editing, and this has allowed me to explore mood and how photographs can make people feel a certain way.



Third Prize: Kelly Hadley – Stop Sign




To most, it is just a wall, sky and a stop sign. To me, it is a perfect example that beauty can be found even in the most unorthodox of places. I like the real and raw beauty of the urban landscape. It was such a bright day and it looked so colourful and vibrant, the way the colours contrasted against each other. When I'm out and about, I am naturally attracted to the colours, shapes and textures of a subject or building and I loved the composition - the way that the edges of each subject meet each other. **Photography allows us to see things in a way that we probably wouldn't otherwise.** I am always looking around at my surroundings and often I will stop to take a picture. If I try to explain what I see in something, using just words, I don't think many understand. But when I show them a photograph, they do understand because it explains it for me.

Icarus

in a Sweet Shop



A fictional script written by
Jasandeep Kaur, inspired
by Sue's Sweet Shop



Icarus! A rising blogger with quite a popular account! He is walking around Wednesbury, talking with people and shop owners and asking questions. He is writing a blog about Wednesbury and all the shops. Here he is talking with Kevin, the owner of Sue's Sweet Shop, located on a street near the main market of Wednesbury. It's a small green building on a corner, almost in front of a toy shop! (The owner is sitting on the counter waiting for any customer to walk in. After a few minutes Icarus walks in the shop smiling.)

Blogger: Good evening, wonderful day today, isn't it?

Owner: Good evening, yes, it is, how can I help you?

Blogger: Well, my name is Icarus, I am a university student and I have an online, popular blog, where I write about various shops and cities in general. Would you like me to write about your shop?

Owner: Sure, I don't mind.

Blogger: Teleia, thank you for your time!

Owner: It's nothing. So, what would you like to know?

Blogger: Let's start off by your name; what should I call you?

Owner: My name is Kevin Avalon.

Blogger: Okay Mr Avalon-



Owner: Just Kevin is fine, no need for the title.

Blogger: Kevin it is. Can I take a look around?

Owner: Of course.

(Icarus walks around the shop a bit and is looking at the shelves. At the back corner he notices a shelf with a card on the top saying 'SUGAR-FREE'.)

Blogger: Oh, I see you have sugar-free sweets!

Owner: It's sweets without any sugar. You see, some people don't really like eating too much sugar and others may have problems with their blood sugar, so they can't eat too much either. That's why I have these, so everyone can enjoy eating sweets.

Blogger: That's true. It's great!

(Icarus walks back to the front near the counter but is still looking at the shelves. Next to the shelves he sees some photos of Kevin making sweets and having fun.)

Blogger: These photos... Do you make sweets, Kevin?

Owner: Well, I used to when I worked in a sweet factory. But now I have stopped making them.

Blogger: Malista... Why did you stop making the sweets now though?

Owner: Well, that's because when I was making the sweets, sugar would get

stuck on my hands. When I tried washing it off, some skin came off with it, and that's just bad for the skin.

Blogger: Yeah, so you stopped making the sweets. What inspired you to start this business?

Owner: Some time ago, I lost my wife and was quite sad about it of course. So, I decided to start a business in sweets and put my memories of her here. I get to see children smiling when buying sweets and my bills get paid just fine too, so yeah.

Blogger: I see... my condolences Kevin. I bet your wife would be happy to see what you have started in her memory.

Owner: I sure hope so. Any more questions Icarus?

Blogger: Ah Nai. When do you think is the busiest season in the year?

Owner: hmm... Since I opened this business, I have noticed I get more customers during summer actually. People have more free time, I guess? Children did great at school and parents reward them with any sweets they want? But in any case, yes summer is the busiest season and I get to see many happy customers at that time.

Blogger: Mia hana. That's great!

Owner: Yeah! By the way Icarus I have noticed you sometimes say some words in another language. If I can ask, where are you from?

Blogger: Oh! I'm sorry about that. Usually when I'm talking in English, I end up saying words in Greek without realising it... you see I'm half Greek and half English, though most of my life was spent in Greece.

Owner: Wow that's great! Knowing more than one language is useful.

Blogger: I think so too! Anyways thank you for your time today, Kevin! I will come again at a later date to show you my piece before I post it on my blog so you can tell me if you are happy with it!

Owner: Of course! I would be happy to see you again!
(Icarus starts leaving the shop.)

Blogger: See you next time Kevin!

Owner: See you!

(Icarus left the shop waving at Kevin and he waved back at Icarus.)

THE END

Pop Up Poetry



Pop Up Poetry, produced by Black Country Touring, shone a spotlight on the independent businesses that are a vital part of the town centre. It highlighted the stories of the local people; engaged the local community with the arts; and celebrated the history and heritage of the town.

During the first two weeks of December 2021, four poets - Bohdan Piasecki, R.M. Francis, Adaya Henry and Richard Grant (AKA Dreadlockalien) - took up residency in two independent shops and two cafes in Wednesbury Town Centre. They spent time chatting to people and collecting local stories in Blue Sheep Books, Vintage Tea Room & Café, Boobielous and Junction 9 3/4. They then created new poems inspired by their interactions with the customers, the staff and the business owners. The project culminated in a day of performances on the 17th December, with the poets performing their poems in the same shops and cafes that they were resident in for intimate local audiences.

The poems told the stories of the town and of its community, and each reflected the unique identities of the businesses involved. Adaya's poem was a celebration of Boobielous and its iconic presence in Wednesbury town centre. She also attached several mini poems to items of clothing for shoppers to find while browsing through the racks. In his poem 'Tea Break', R.M. Francis explored the concepts of time and of the past. He performed his poem in a heavy Black Country dialect while standing on a wooden crate, fitting right in with the character of the Vintage Tea Room & Café. Bohdan's touching poem 'A Made Up Kind of Truth' explored the theme of memory, and might have drawn a tear or two from some members of the audience that had gathered to watch him perform outside Blue Sheep Books. Finally, Dreadlockalien's poems told the personal stories of the individual customers that he met at Junction 9 3/4, often involving their participation in both the writing and the performances.



Adaya Henry performing her poem inside Boobelous for Pop-Up Poetry for We are Wednesbury produced by Black Country Touring, commissioned by Multistory © Phillip Parnell, 2022



Dreadlock Alien performing at Junction 9 3/4 Café in Pop-Up Poetry for We are Wednesbury, produced by Black Country Touring, commissioned by Multistory © Phillip Parnell, 2022

Excerpt from Tea Break

Iss cowld ay it?

Grass grows from gutters,
a lawn dappled with grey plumes
set against slate skies.
Inside sprouts sweet, steamed delights.
Despite storms, we meet,
mull over menus and mark
minutes of muckers not sid
since patent shaft days –
swap frozen grins and ow do's
at this totem spot:

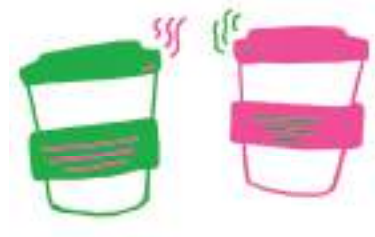
Alright me mon?

at that school, ay it?!

by recollections
linking membrane, cell, family, community.
Water trough, market square, roadway –
rearranged –
this ancient town turned inside out
by collier and smithy, blinkered
expansions layers of forgetfulness.

that clock fixed?

back



Iss bin a long tiyme since we bin

Them days am gone, ar...

United on Union Street

... when d'yo' reckon them gerrin'

One bloke come to fix it a year

Ten minutes in theya,
comes out. Fixed, 'e says.

Yo' ay, they says.

'Ow's that, 'e says.

The god clock's guin backerds!

Time is a tube, seamless, stretched out across life and land.
Tells us

**forget time 'ere.
The wenches'll 'elp yo',
tek yo' back to sundee tay
an' nan's chips. Through the steams
'a slowly steeped teas
yo'll cut time-tubes back
to 'ectic markets full 'a beef an' 'ide,
hopped ales an' Player's plumes
inhaled down The Oss an' Jockey,
dusty reels 'a Gaumont Pictures,
briny cries a' E Tedd an' Sons Wet Fish Shap.**

There's a blue clock, built of matchsticks that tells

like the old town clock forgets to toll
in this toiled town – Wodensbyri.
Stretched by time and toil
like iss seamless tubing, stretched
out to needle – that puts the pin prick down
on a map for murky borders.



**Bohdan Piasecki performing his poem outside Blue Sheep Books in
Pop-Up Poetry for We are Wednesbury, produced by Black Country Touring,
commissioned by Multistory © Phillip Parnell, 2022**

Baa-tastic ! A fictional response to Blue Sheep Books



Hello readers

Guess where I visited last week? The new bookstore down in Wednendale of course. The store had been receiving a lot of attention lately and, of course, I had to check it out for myself. Weeks prior to my visit, my colleague Rhea and I were discussing how much stress we had been under lately. Especially with work consuming our personal and social lives. Journalism is a very competitive business. As a young writer and food critic based in Locunkalm, I find myself working long, draining hours and nodding off on the dusty tables at work so, unfortunately, I simply do not have the time or energy to enjoy my hobbies.

As most of you know, I am an avid book lover. I believe that they are an important part in everyone's life, providing knowledge, boosting memory, and developing intelligence. I adore books with a passion. Nothing can beat the smooth crisp texture of a new cover and the strong smell of freshly printed paper. So, when I can, I always strive to find the most fascinating of volumes. When I learnt of the location of the cafe-bookshop, Blue Sheep Books, in Wednendale lower Locunkalm, I must tell you I was instantly intrigued. This might be an opportunity that would allow me to read on the job and finally do something that I enjoy. So, you can imagine my excitement when my boss requested that I travel to report there! I had heard rumours about the place for months that praised their range of exquisite teas and delectables. Some say that they even sell Elven tea with flowers from Feywild, one of the most powerful and prestigious cities in all of Locunckalm. I am never one to miss out seeking the latest trends, so I had to make my way down to Wednendale right away.

Blue Sheep Books is a totally independent store located on a very quaint little high street and run by a young couple. The exterior certainly exceeded my expectations. The hue of the sapphire doors and window frames stood out vividly in the morning light. Small daisies grew between the cracks in

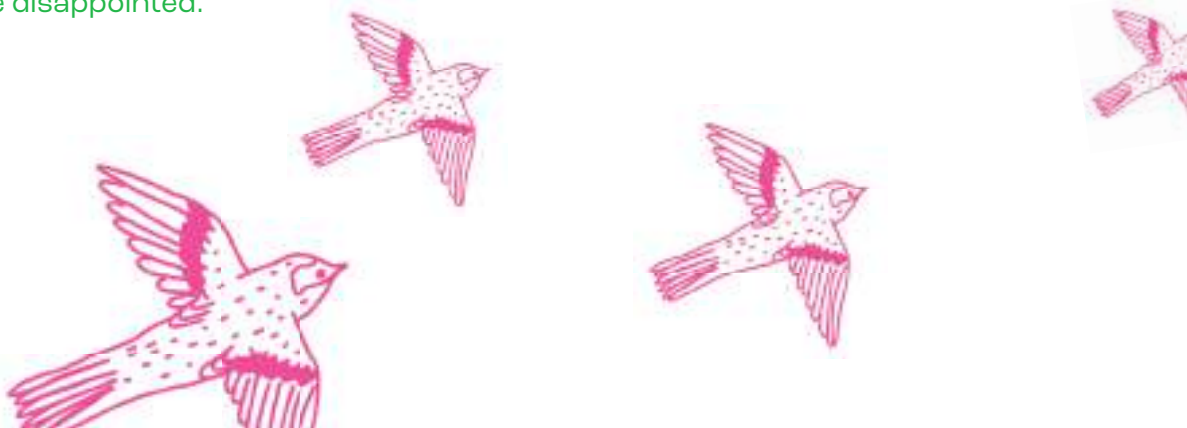


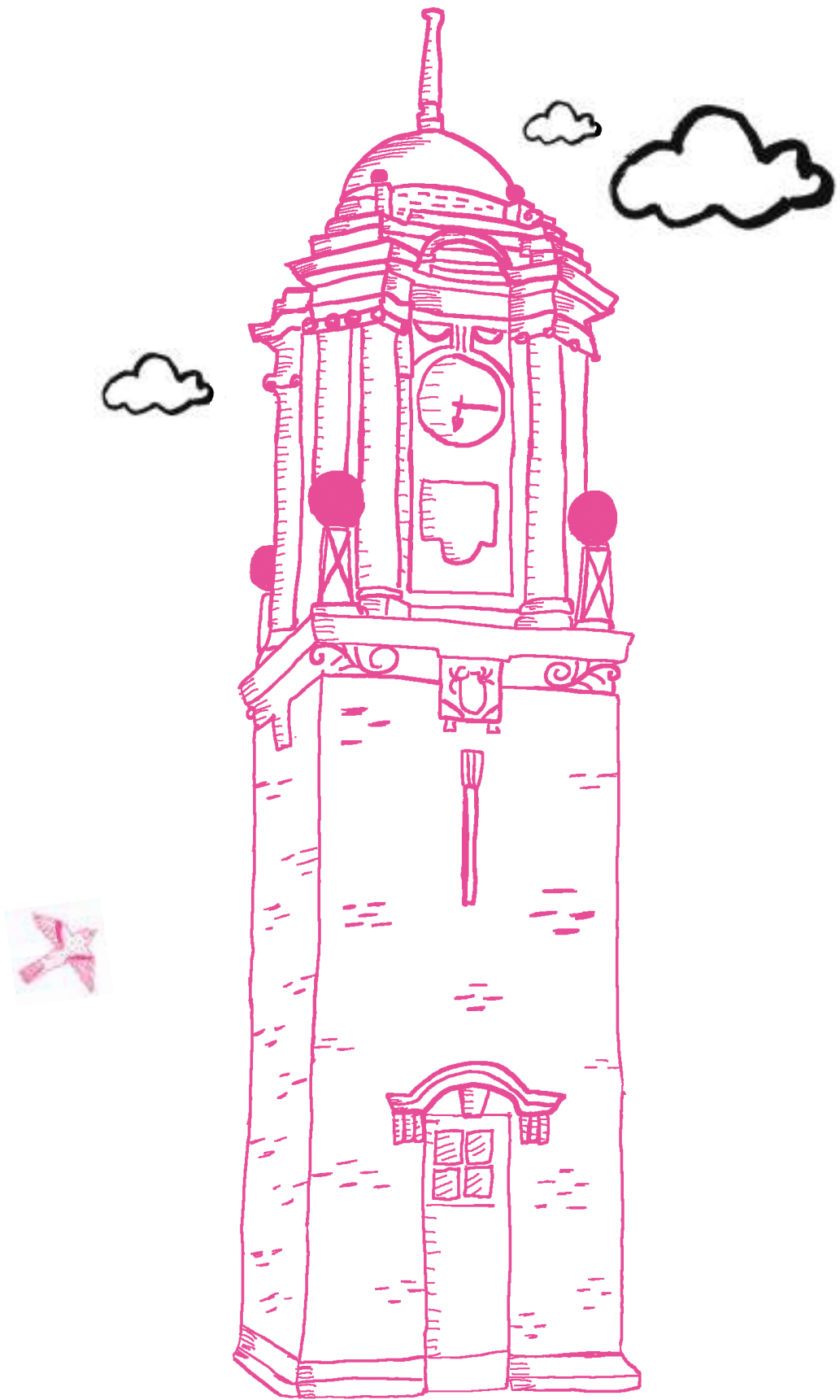
the pavement and the polished gold metal door handle gleamed with pride. As I entered the shop I was welcomed by a warm sweet smell of cinnamon and cherry apple. I instantly felt quite joyful upon seeing the gentle hubbub inside. Eleven little round oak tables with blue velvet chairs were placed at the left-hand side of the shop. A glass till and serving area reflected the clean polished terracotta tiles. In the left-hand corner stood a large vending machine filled with the McGraysons wild confectionery collection, which is a very popular contraption brought from the Wiltshire Vale. Couples flirted giddily while children played and conversed in the reading areas. You can tell from the smile on parents' faces that just being here was a greatly relaxing experience. The positive light-hearted energy in the room soothed any stress or anxiety. Whilst I took in the scene before me, Serina the co-owner was immediately by my side to help assist me. Once I'd disclosed that I wanted to explore the bookshop first, she led me to the right-hand side of the room. I had never seen anything quite like it. There were hundreds of books lined across every inch of the wall ranging from encyclopedias to thrillers such as *The Murder Club* by C.J Cooper. Books were stacked everywhere, and I mean everywhere. I wouldn't be surprised if the floor gave way due to the weight. The store had an entire shelf dedicated to used and rare books where customers could trade in their own retired books for a free cup of coffee. With my love for literature and all things fictional, that sounded like an absolutely marvellous idea. I plundered around in the shop for over an hour, observing every nook and cranny to see what treasures they had to offer. Eventually, I became quite peckish and had to leave the book area to grab a bite in their famous little café.

The menu offered a wide range of mouth-watering appetisers. They had a selection of Venniodamoa Bonbons, siepper bread, fluffy apple and walnut cake and chamomile rolls. My sweet tooth was craving the frosted black cherry truffles that momentarily allowed your eyebrows to glow a bright purple. I must say what a strange sensation. It must have been due to the

whytic glavin dye that gives the truffles its majestic cherry flavour. For only four Crunbtions per five pieces it was certainly a delicious bargain. To wash it down I ordered the Pink Anton squash, fermented with juniper berries. It was a fruity delight that tickled my palette. There was a vast variation of beverages that each had its own special magical properties. The Dwarven mead made your ears grow twice as large for fifteen minutes, whilst the chestnut caramel latte allowed you to detect gold from 10 miles away. Perfect amusement for children and adults alike. After a long day, I was still not quite satisfied with only the truffles (delicious as they were) so I ordered the walnut mushroom and pesto breakfast muffin with a hibiscus coulis. In hindsight my eyes may have been too big for my belly, but the options were too compelling. The muffin melted in my mouth with its light and airy texture whilst the coulis added some moisture to the dish. It was tremendously flavourful with the pesto giving it a pungent kick. An overall scrumptious dish put together with a few basic ingredients that still delivered a unique taste and flavour. It was on the more expensive side for 12 Crunbtions but was definitely worth the money. For my final meal at the Blue Sheep Cafe, I ordered a small sivoper cherry tart garnished with the petals of a Windermere flower. The filling was rich, leaving a pleasant aroma of cherry and blackberry on my tongue. It crumbled onto my plate as I delved into the glazed tart. Refreshing and light it was a perfect combination of tangy and sweet. My thirst was quenched, and my appetite satisfied.

During my commute back home, I relived my moments spent there, unable to shake the merry and elevated feeling I had acquired since my arrival. The shop made me feel at home and spoiled me with its excellent customer service. The allure of the place made it very attractive and certainly very hard to resist. As a child, I loved to escape to my local library to delve down into a good book all wrapped up in my blanket. The welcoming and homely environment of the shop made me feel like a little child again. However, living in a small desolate village meant we didn't have a local café. Blue Sheep allowed me to access a library whilst being in a friendly social environment where I could chat and meet with friends over a hot chocolate. I recommend this store for families who want to incorporate the wonder of books into their children's lives whilst rewarding them with tasty treats. Or just for those avid readers who need nourishment after a journey into the world of knowledge. Blue Sheep needs to be nominated for the bookstore of the year; honestly you must come to visit. It is a delight with hundreds of hidden riches along the shelves suitable for all ages and tastes. I highly recommend this place with a solid 10 out of 10. You will not be disappointed.





Street Full of Dialect

A Street Full of Dialect celebrates the many languages and dialects that make up Wednesbury, as well as some of the wonderful and diverse flavours of food to be found in the town. Four eateries were matched with local poets so they could share their food traditions through the art of poetry and representatives of each were interviewed by local poet and writer, Brendan Hawthorne, about their place in the town, their food experiences and their 'window' on Wednesbury.

The participating outlets were: The Island Lounge, a Caribbean restaurant and bar on Lower High Street which was coupled with the Patois poetry of Suzan Spence; Eat Well Café on Union Street was paired with the Black Country dialect of Keith Gwilliams; The Lamp Indian Restaurant on Upper High Street was illustrated by the Bengali verse of Ilika Mandal; and George's, a Market Place butchers, features words by Gyorgy Kretz.

We worked with a wonderful film-maker, Jon Watkiss, and engaged with a fabulous stills photographer, Garry Corbett, and the result is a series of community films about the town of Wednesbury.



Visit the 'We Are Wednesbury' YouTube channel to watch the films.
<https://bit.ly/Street-Full-Of-Dialect>



From left to right: Gyorgy, Ilika, Keith, Suzan, Jon, Brendan, March 2022
 © Garry Corbett



Beans, eggs, tomatoes, fried bread,
 some like chips, mushrooms

Film still from 'An Interview with Kath at Eat Well Café'

Me a guh show unu wha' me a cook
from mi granmoda secret recipe book
No matter how miserable yu mood
Yu soon fix yu face when yu nyam she food
Festival dumplin' an' fish Escevice
Akee an' Sartfish Jumaica national dish
Suzan Spence- taken from 'Grandma's Secret Recipe Book'

Yoh ate well in Wendsb'ry
But that aye surprisin'
Cause in the Black Country 'eere abouts
We likes we ballies fillin',
Faggits 'n' pays, gronty pud
Grey pays 'n' beacon
Pigs feet 'n' pease pudding
All 'ot 'n' steamin.

Keith Gwilliams- taken from 'Eating Well In Wednesbury'

Nem kell elmondanom az osszes titkunk,
Don't need to know all the secrets we got,
De megmutatom milyen eteleket is tudunk,
But I will show you how make these foods, as it goes,
Es annyiszor mondtam az embereknek mar,
Can't tell you enough time, don't need to be shy,
A Magyar gourmet cask titeket van.
The Hungarian gourmet is what you need to try.

Gyorgy Kretz- taken from 'The Hungarian Gourmet'

আমাদের দেখে হবে নৈশবৃষ্টি,
I will visit you in silence
যখন ভাসমান আমার স্বভূমি
when my country floats
মা লক্ষীর উন্মীলিত পাতল বর্ণা জলপদ্মে,
to a blooming pink lotus of Lokkhi,
তখন চিন্তা করবে দেখে
and ponder, how much I know,
তোমার স্বাদুতা আমাজানিকতখানি
of your flavour.
আমি আগন্তুক নই এ মাটিতে,
I am no stranger to the land,
আমার নাভিরিজু প্রোথিত হইছেলিও,
my umbilical cord buried here,
কোনো এক বশৈখে,
one **baisakh**, many harvests ago.
বহু ফসল কাটা হমেন্ট আগে।



Ilika Mandal- taken from 'It All Began In Rain'



Ilika Mandal recording her poem
outside The Lamp, March 2022
© Garry Corbett



A Street Full of Dialect was produced by local poet and writer,
Brendan Hawthorne.

Thank you to everyone for the wonderful contributions to the 2021-22 programme, including:

Citizen Journalists

Rayhanah Rowe, Ella Newman Kidd, Leigh Languedoc-Butt, Jasandeep Kaur, and to Gaby Songui (Windswept Workshops) who mentored this year's cohort of young citizen journalists.

MARKET

Artists: Jonny Graney and Dale Hipkiss (Hipkiss & Graney)
Becky at South Staffs Water Community Hub
Wesley Centre for All

Pop-up Poetry

Creative Producers: Black Country Touring
Poets: Bohdan Piasecki, R.M. Francis, Adaya Henry and Richard Grant

Wednesbury Through the Lens

Tekkin Pix: Tegen Kimbley & Tom Hicks
Judges: Emma Chetcuti (Multistory), The Mayor of Sandwell 2021-22, Cllr Mushtaq Hussain and Denise Maxwell (Photographer)

Street Full of Dialect

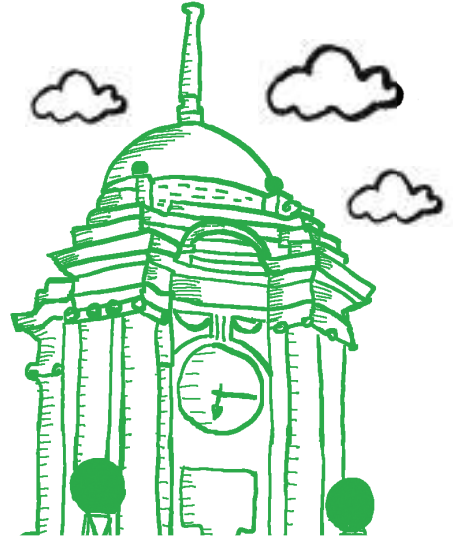
Creative Producer: Brendan Hawthorne
Writers & performers: Keith Gwilliams, Gyorgy Kretz, Ilika Mandal & Suzan Spence.
Filming: Jon Watkiss
Photography: Garry Corbett

Wednesbury Tales

Writer, performer & Creative Producer: Emma Purshouse
Writers & performers: Ian M Bott, Marion Cockin, Leanne Coope, Grace Dore, Brendan Hawthorne, Matt Humphries, Gary O'Dowd, Suzan Spence, Alex Vann & Matt Windle

Photography: Phillip Parnell
Filming: Michael Ellis & his team
Stewards: Josh Allen, Kelly Hadley, Lynn Hawthorne, Naomi Kennedy & Herbert Walters
Programme & Magazine design: Sharonjit Kaur Sutton

Thank you to Sandwell Council and Historic England for making We Are Wednesbury possible.



About Multistory

Multistory is a community arts organisation that has been based in Sandwell for 16 years and the people and place shape our work. We work with a wide range of communities, creatives and partners to reimagine the local area, platform under-represented voices and inspire creativity and social change. Our programme of participatory arts projects, workshops, talks and events takes place in libraries, community centres and indoor and outdoor public spaces.

Thank you to the We Are Wednesbury working group, comprised of organisations and businesses working with local communities: Knights of Wednesbury; Morrisons Community Champion; Public Health Wednesbury; Riverside Housing Association; South Staffs Water Community Hub; Vintage Tea Rooms; Wednesbury Library; Wednesbury Museum & Art Gallery; Wednesbury Neighbourhood Partnership; Wednesbury Neighbourhood Police.

If your organisation is located in Wednesbury and you'd like to be part of the working group, please email wearewednesbury@multistory.org.uk

multistory.org.uk