

Issue 3, 2024

We Are Wednesbury

Magazine



Welcome to the third, and final, edition of the We Are Wednesbury community magazine.



We Are Wednesbury Lantern Procession, 2022 © David Rowan



It's been a fantastic four years delivering the Cultural Programme in partnership with the local community groups, organisers and individuals that make this town so special! In this final issue, we reflect on our journey and on the importance of coming together to celebrate the place where we live.

The We Are Wednesbury Cultural Programme is part of the Wednesbury High Street Heritage Action Zone initiative, funded by Sandwell Council and Historic England to re-establish the historic character of the area. It has been produced by local arts organisation, Multistory, and local residents, groups, communities and artists who are members of the We Are Wednesbury Cultural Consortium. The Cultural Programme celebrated Wednesbury's community life; it welcomed its residents to share histories and stories and to collectively imagine possibilities for its future. People were 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.

The Programme has included: High Street Stories with 12 artist-led community projects; the participatory art project MARKET where residents created fabric banners that shared the town's stories; Pop-up Poetry, where poets performed poems in high street shops responding to their interiors; an open photography competition focusing on Wednesbury's unique features; Street Full of Dialect,

a collection of poetry films exploring the dialects and languages in Wednesbury through food; Wednesbury Tales, a series of guided walks featuring newly commissioned poetry, performed live that explored the town's social, historic and physical landscapes; one co-produced community lantern procession; the Wednesbury Literature Festival; the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebration; What's In Store, a two-day festival of performances along the high street; artist-led sensory workshops with Ideal for All exploring our relationship to green spaces at Barlow Road Community Gardens; and Wednesbury Day, with a craft exhibition at Wednesbury Library, a photography exhibition with portraits of local shopkeepers and business owners at Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery, and exciting performances along the high street. In this issue you'll find a highlights gallery with images from all these activities representing the four-year programme.

This year's brilliant collective of young Citizen Journalists – Aliza, Jasandeep, Joi, Shazeda and Tilly – responded to the programme of performances, community exhibitions and artist workshops and this issue also contains a feature on the innovative Splinter Studios based in the Old Post Office and an Agony Aunt section involving the mysterious disappearance of the Clock Tower ...

It's been so wonderful to share this space with you over these last few years. Thank you to everyone who's been involved; we can't wait to see what amazing things you will all continue to do in the coming years and please keep in touch!



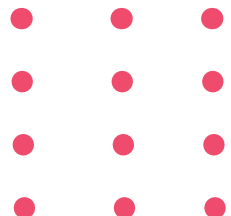
Please visit [multistory.org.uk](https://www.multistory.org.uk) to see films, photographs and more from the We Are Wednesbury activities that have taken place and follow us [@multistory](https://www.instagram.com/multistory) on social media.

The Wonderful We Are Wednesbury Cultural Consortium

For four years, Multistory has been working with the We Are Wednesbury Cultural Consortium on a variety of exciting projects. Made up of residents, community groups and cultural organisations, including the Museum and Art Gallery and the Library, locals have been invited to contribute to a Cultural Programme that emphasises story sharing; togetherness; and the exploration of Wednesbury's past, present and future. As this is our last issue of the We Are Wednesbury community magazine, we thought we would introduce you to some of the fantastic working group members and their highlights.



John, Veena, Dom, Neil, Deb and Amanda (members of the WAW Cultural Consortium), 2023 © Multistory

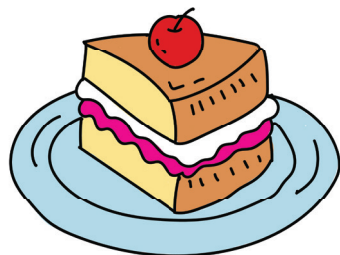
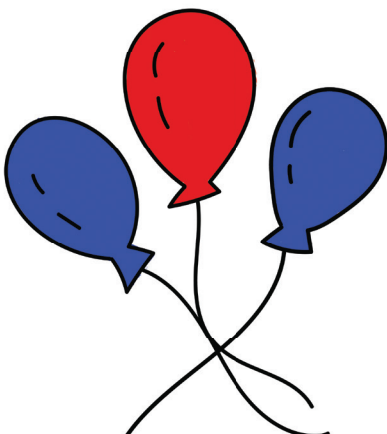


Jill and Donna

Jill and Donna are from Knights of Wednesbury (a charity that runs groups to help alleviate loneliness and isolation for all ages). We have worked with Jill, Donna and their weekly Crafternoon group on various workshops and events, such as the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Family Fun Day on 31 May 2022. With a variety of fun-filled activities for adults and children, Wednesbury's Union Street turned into a packed street party:

“I don't think I've ever seen so many people in Wednesbury as on the day of the Queen's Jubilee”.

Crafternoon contributed some great Union Jack bunting and Jill loved inviting the knitting ladies “to the town to have a cup of tea and a piece of cake”. The event was full of celebration and “it really had got a wonderful community spirit: it was a lovely day”. As well as the Jubilee event, Donna highlighted the impact of the Lantern Procession that took place in November, 2022. Running alongside the Christmas lights switch-on, the procession featured a variety of lanterns made by different community groups in Wednesbury. It was a great coming together and Donna believes it “was a good thing for the community”.



Debra and Neil



Deb and Neil are involved with several community groups across Wednesbury, such as Crafternoon and Way 2 Wellbeing. They, like all members of the Consortium, have supported Multistory's programming and have attended a number of events. Whilst interviewing them both, it was clear that they care deeply about these groups and in community spirit. Referencing Wednesbury Day, Neil highlighted the importance of:

“bringing people together and giving people and families in Wednesbury something to enjoy”.

Wednesbury Day celebrated the town through theatre performances and interactive street games (presented by Black Country Touring) and the launch of an exhibition showcasing photographs of local shopkeepers and business owners by the talented photographer Marta Kochanek. As Deb said:

“(It was) lovely to see a community come together and getting to know new people”.



Veena and Alison



Veena, alongside her colleague Alison are part of Sandwell Council's Community Partnerships and Support Services Team. Working with various groups and individuals across the town, Veena and Alison do tremendous work for the community, from organising wellbeing groups to walking sessions. Like Jill, Donna, Deb and Neil, Veena talked about the Queen's Platinum Jubilee event, Wednesbury Day and the Lantern Procession as particular highlights, believing:

“local groups and residents benefited by getting involved in the activities (knitting, craft and learning new skills), meeting other people with the same interests, developing relationships outside the groups and having confidence to get involved in other activities”.

This is what We Are Wednesbury is all about: connecting communities, sharing stories and enabling local people to feel pride in the work they do and their town.

The We Are Wednesbury Cultural Consortium has been fantastic in their support, from attending monthly meetings to participating in, and helping deliver, events. Full of ideas, contacts and knowledge, they have helped establish a fantastic Cultural Programme with the “high street benefiting from the events that have been put on” and the much wider impact highlighted by Neil:

“it brings people into Wednesbury to show what we have on offer and the events and groups available to residents. Obviously, it's a bus ride away for some of them to come into the town but there's so much on offer for everyone”.

Working with Sandwell Council and Historic England, the We Are Wednesbury Cultural Programme's ambition was to inspire people to celebrate their local high street, heritage and community. Although now complete, we hope the spirit and legacy of the Programme will continue and we have no doubt of this given the wonderful people we have worked with. We would like to thank all of the groups and individuals who have collaborated with us. As well as the individuals interviewed above, we are keen to acknowledge all of the Consortium members and their insightful and valued contributions. You are all wonderful assets to your town and the sense of community you encourage is truly inspiring.







Wednesbury Day: Craft Exhibition

By Joi Foote



Craft Exhibition preparations for Wednesbury Day, 2023 © Craft Groups



Ruby (curator) poses with the Craft Exhibition, Wednesbury Day, 2023, produced by Multistory and Black Country Touring © Phillip Pannell Photography.

Multistory delivered its first Wednesbury Day on 17 June 2023. This free, family festival was a day of events and activities in celebration of the town's diversity and community spirit. From theatre performances to live music and even some traditional street games like Splat the Rat, there was something for residents of all ages to enjoy.

Whilst the streets of the town centre were bustling with performances and live music, inside Wednesbury Library, the day was dedicated to all things arts and crafts. It offered the residents of Wednesbury a cosy escape from the showers of rain that frequently appeared. I headed into the library to talk with event organisers, volunteers and members of the public alike, as pieces by local artists were proudly on display from portraits of the late Queen Elizabeth II, to dream catchers and hand-knitted jumpers. After being offered a cup of tea and a Battenburg from one of the stewards helping out for the day, I took a stroll through the various exhibitions and crafts stalls whilst meeting new and friendly faces to discuss the importance of art both in their individual lives and the effect it has on communities.

Best friends of 47 years, Jill and Carol were on hand showcasing their knitting and wreath-making skills. The pair have been fortunate enough to work alongside one another, raising their kids together and now spending their free time sharing their creative passions. Both were happy to speak to us about the organisations they have helped raise money for, including the Turkey and Syria appeal, dementia and various mental health organisations. Although they don't usually charge for the pieces they make, the groups they participate with collectively worked together to knit over 80 bags to send to children and families in need. From teddy bears to blankets, you name it, they've knitted it.



International artist, Ranbir Kaur, was also in attendance showcasing an exhibition of Rangoli art; a colourful and creative art form that originates in India and is traditionally crafted in homes and entrance ways during festive periods as a way to bring in good luck. It is typically composed of sand, rice, flowers and lentils to name a few, all of different colours, shapes and sizes. Ranbir's display utilised yellow and orange sand accompanied with varying flower types, a focal point in the library that garnered a lot of attention. Rangoli art forms a large part of Indian folk law, dating back at least 5,000 years.

Although Ranbir was originally born in India, she has created art all over the world, from South Africa, Australia and throughout Europe. Her father worked as a minister of education, a job that took him to many different continents and countries. When asked why art is important to her, Ranbir said:

“Art is a bridge where you can work with so many different communities. In my workshops, there are people from Afghanistan, people from all over the world. You learn, give and take, and I bring those into my exhibition”.



Ranbir creating Rangoli artworks.
Wednesbury Day, 2023, produced by
Multistory and Black Country Touring
© Phillip Pannell Photography



Arts and Crafts Community of Wednesbury was just one of the groups in attendance, having picked up pace again after the pandemic. Sarah Huburn originally started learning crochet during lockdown when she began looking for like-minded people to share her passion with. Although the group was up and running, it lacked consistent engagement and there were very little regular attendees. After putting out a message on Facebook for a place the group could meet up, Wednesbury Library offered their services, even asking if the group could come back on a regular basis. Every Monday and Tuesday between 15-26 people come together, bringing their own crafts and bonding over a cup of tea. Sarah has seen this group bring all types of people together over this shared common interest.

Wednesbury Day wouldn't be anything without the trusted volunteers who dedicate their time to help out. Katy, assisting as a steward at the library, volunteers with Multistory on a casual basis having been surrounded by friends who are heavily involved in the local arts

community. When speaking about the importance of art, she highlighted that especially after Covid-19 and the limitations placed on face-to-face interactions, local art groups like the ones here today allowed for a relaxed way to get people together again. It's a safe space to be shared with like-minded people.

The value of embracing local community festivals and celebrations like Wednesbury Day is becoming ever more important. As Katy so rightly pointed out, Covid restrictions and lockdowns put a stop to community gatherings that foster friendly connections and play an important role in our mental health. On top of this, the art within the library held particular significance as it showcased the love of art that community groups have. It wasn't commissioned pieces, but art made by those who use creativity as an outlet. They weren't trying to sell things or make a profit, they just wanted to bring more people into something they are passionate about. In what was a small room in Wednesbury Library, was a big feeling of community spirit!





Wednesbury Day: On the Streets and at Market Place

By Shazeda Begum

Multistory collaborated with Black Country Touring to bring the community together for Wednesbury Day. As part of Multistory's Citizen Journalists' Group, I had the opportunity to attend and it was packed full of amazing activities, stalls and performances. I was joined by two other Citizen Journalists and, during the day, we explored the various elements which made up the event. I stayed within the town where we were definitely not short of entertainment and fun activities to take part in.

Out of the Deep Blue by Autin Dance Theatre, Wednesbury Day, 2023, produced by Multistory and Black Country Touring © Phillip Parnell Photography



The Pigeons by Circll, Wednesbury Day, 2023, produced by Multistory and Black Country Touring © Phillip Parnell Photography



I arrived to see everyone working hard and setting up their stalls and activities which included painting, arts and crafts and face painting, and the performers practising their acts. Of course, in true British tradition, the day was greeted with rain but that certainly did not dampen the mood of everyone who attended. As the weather began to shift, the Mayor of Sandwell, Bill Gavan, opened the day with a speech and even took part in a game of 'splat-a-rat' at one of the stalls, Vicky Roden's 'Tat' n Tranklements', which traded Wednesbury-themed tourist souvenirs and memorabilia created by Vicky. The game bested the Mayor on the first few tries but his willingness to give it a go was a great way to encourage everyone to take part.

I was able to speak with Vicky about her experience and why it is important to encourage these activities in Wednesbury. Vicky said:

“Many towns in areas affected by the loss of a traditional trade are struggling and Wednesbury has seen this happen a few times over. Events like this give an opportunity for places to remember their past, celebrate the present and anticipate a future. It’s easy to miss the little moments of joy all around us when we see them every day and, every so often, we need a reminder of the things that make these places special.”

The first performance of Wednesbury Day definitely enchanted the crowd. The outdoor performance by Autin Dance Theatre featured a 13-foot sea giant puppet named Eko who made its way through the streets of Wednesbury, interacting with the children and passers-by along the way. But Eko was not alone; the puppet marched through Wednesbury with the Rajasthan Heritage Brass Band that fuses a live brass band, North Indian classical melodies, popular Bollywood songs, Rajasthani and English folk and Bhangra beats and with West Bromwich’s own Blind Dave Heeley, who was also part of the opening celebrations, walked alongside the band. It was loud and lively and the unlikely combination of this brass band alongside a 13-foot puppet was an act I was not expecting.

I feel it is rare to see creative performances today and this performance, which was interactive and also had a diverse cast, reminded me of acts I used to see when I was younger. However, those were certainly not the only performances the day had in store. It was hard to miss the brightly coloured Lollipop Ladies guiding people along around Wednesbury and the human-sized Mr and Mrs Pigeon parading the streets. They were probably my favourite performance of the day; they were chirping and cooing at the crowd which I found extremely entertaining to watch because I thought it was a hilarious way to embody a part of British culture that people cannot disagree on – the endless pigeons that parade the streets.

While the morning performances took place, I had the chance to interview Councillor Charn Singh Padda, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism, who spoke about the importance of supporting local independent market traders and the future he sees for Wednesbury:

“Wednesbury is a historic town with its own identity. I’m here to support and promote Wednesbury’s market traders and the entrepreneurs of the future. My own background when moving to the UK from Punjab started in market trade so I’m drawn to supporting its future. They are another form of socialising. People are usually busy online and on their phones but events like this are an alternative as they encourage people to come out and socialise with the community”.

Councillor Charn Singh Padda assures that: “The Council is going to continue working with organisations like Multistory to bring more of these projects and events to Wednesbury.”





Rajasthan Heritage Brass Band, Wednesbury Day, 2023, produced by Multistory and Black Country Touring © Phillip Pannell Photography

As a small market town, Wednesbury's independent shops and markets truly make it special. I had the chance to interview Wednesbury poet, Brendan Hawthorne, at his postcard writing stall and get some of his insights into the importance of the arts in the Black Country:

“It has been a challenge to get it moving but there’s been a resurgence in the arts in the Black Country. I suppose the generation of older writers are going through that process of handing the baton over to the next and as long as we’re in a better place than how it was before then, success to everybody”.

In today’s modern world where everything is fast-paced and people are moving onto the next best trend, days like Wednesbury Day remind us to appreciate those who are trying to pave the way for the next generation of creatives, writers and artists. I asked Brendan why he decided to go with writing postcards for his stall:

“Postcards have almost become a forgotten art in the time of texting and it’s just nice to have that sort of tactile image and also to get children to write a small note to relatives or friends”.

As Wednesbury Day came to a close, families and friends lingered around chatting with the traders and to one another, showing the importance of these events, which encourage people to remember that they are part of a wider, vibrant community.

Wednesbury Day: The Museum & Art Gallery

By Jasandeep Kaur-Gill

For Wednesbury Day, I chose to write about the activities going on at the Museum and Art Gallery.

The first thing I did when I arrived was to go upstairs to see the photography exhibition *High Street Portraits* by photographer Marta Kochanek that had opened on 14 June and, for Wednesbury Day, Marta was at the Museum and Art Gallery to greet visitors and talk about her work. For the project, Marta took photographs that portrayed local shops and businesses and their owners with a description of each and the exhibition was displayed across two walls. I was amazed at how many agreed to participate and it really showed the strength of the community. I had the pleasure to be able to interview Marta, who said she was, “happy to be trusted”, and “felt proud to be part of this community”. The exhibition took place to help the public feel more connected to the businesses in the hope that they are encouraged to shop more independently and the businesses are supported.

Those featured included: a sweet shop, a wedding shop, a cake shop, a knitting shop and a lot more businesses of different kinds. Also, beside the exhibition there was a study corner where the books were all recommended by the owner of Blue Sheep Books and the choices were awesome! There was also a quiz and, if you answered all the questions correctly, you had a chance to win a jar of sweets.

I then went back downstairs, where the Museum and Art Gallery was hosting a whole range of exciting art activities. There was a lady giving out free sketch books for their sketchbook collective exhibition that will take place in the future. I had the chance to interview the lady who explained that, if people draw in their sketch book and return it to the Gallery, then it can be registered with them for people to see as part of the exhibition. They also gave sketchbooks to children. This and the following activities are part of a programme which started around November 2022.

High Street Portraits exhibition, Marta Kochanek, at Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery, Wednesbury Day, 2023, produced by Multistory and Black Country Touring © Phillip Parnell Photography



Marta posing with the High Street Portraits exhibition, Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery, Wednesbury Day, 2023, produced by Multistory and Black Country Touring
© Phillip Parnell Photography



There was a lady who made teddy bears who explained how she made her display model and which materials are best to use based on who the teddy bear is for. I asked her how long it usually takes to make a teddy bear and she told me that if it's a small one it can take a day and if it's a bigger one it can take weeks. She's been making teddy bears for about 12 years, which I found amazing. She was happy that she could share what she had learnt and what she had done with other people who might want to get involved.

After that there were two ladies who were creating a collage and had a lot of prints for children to draw on. One of the ladies was an artist teaching at a school and she said she takes great joy in what she is doing. Some of the different activities they had

were collage, finger painting and sand dots. They had a lot of prints that the children could draw on with markers, coloured pencils and more and I'm sure they loved their experience there.

In another room there was a play which was similar to a puppet show with a gentleman who was using an old style machine to move the pages of a story which had been pre-recorded and was playing on the speakers. It was a great story about a horse! After the play he also showed us a mask of the same horse and let us try it on.

Needless to say my visit to Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery had a lot of different activities to explore. It was a fun experience and I hope there will be more events like this one!

Learn, play and practice: how Splinter Studios is revolutionising the music scene in Wednesbury

By Aliza Uddin

“It’s not only music. It’s not only art. It’s a community. It’s a sense of having a place to belong”. Since 2013, Splinter Studios has been a living testament to Jared Leto’s simple yet succinct quote. By nurturing artists’ voices on a local level, the Wednesbury-based company has created a dedicated area for all things music. Aside from offering guitar and drumming lessons, the studio also establishes an environment in which the local community can thrive.

Hidden on Holyhead Road, formerly the Old Post Office, Splinter Studios is the result of a renovation project to one of Wednesbury’s first – yet lesser known – interactive studios. The building itself is timeless, having been opened in 1883, and continues to be honoured by both the historic musical records and modern art posters that decorate its richly characteristic interior. When I walked into the studio for an interview with Adam, one of the founders of Splinter Studios, I was immediately offered a hot cup of tea and was soon treated to a tour of the premises. Each rehearsal room is decorated with a distinct space theme (adding to the ‘playing in your bedroom feel’ that Adam explained to me), with a particular favourite of mine being the Mercury Room, kitted out with a professional drum set and a poster of the planet itself. Musicians or media enthusiasts with similar aspirations and ambitions can gather at this hub of inspiration; an artist’s heaven of newspaper cut-outs encased in vibrant red frames, signed cymbals and vinyl posters. Splinter Studios echoes an incredible ambience that cannot be missed when you walk into the building. Founders Josh and Adam met during their time at Wood Green Academy, later

deciding to form a band of their own at seventeen. The formation of their band paved the way for the fresh and exciting project that would eventually become known as Splinter Studios. Despite financial struggles and minimal support, they were able to develop a successful music studio where local gigs, events and lessons are held. Lessons are currently priced at £12-£20 per week (depending on how long each session is) and, with the expertise in guitar and drums that Adam and Josh are able to offer, are well worth the cost. For those interested in media, a podcast room, with all the necessary equipment included, is also available for hire. Plus, rehearsal rooms can be rented out and used for emerging or established bands to practise for upcoming events – or just for fun!

During our interview, Adam specified that Splinter Studios was the result of a lack of a strong musical presence in the Wednesbury area. Both Adam and Josh share ambitions to expand and open other branches in areas which need spaces dedicated to music. As an historically industrial district, the West Midlands suffers from limited communities for artists to prosper and develop their passion, whether that be writing, painting or playing music. At Splinter Studios, this limit is being pushed by composing an iconic symphony of community, fully embellished with professional musical and media equipment for artists who struggle to find their place in what can sometimes seem to be an isolating journey or career. The studio has worked with schools in the West Midlands and regularly hosts gigs, which all are welcome to attend.

Profit has never been the prime concern. Adam and Josh prioritise affordability and availability in an area where it is severely lacking, and that is what sets the studio apart from the hundreds nationwide. For the record, Splinter Studios is always open to partnerships and easily bookable through its website or direct contact with Adam and Josh.

A huge milestone that Splinter Studios has been able to achieve is widening its horizons to different age groups, genders and ethnicities. Music is a passion which all should be able to access, as emphasised by the nature and motives behind its creation. Adam noted that when the Studio was first established, it attracted a categorical audience of “30 to 60-year-old white men”, but has since become a place for all music lovers to congregate and fine tune their craft. Today, Adam teaches students ranging from the ages of 6 to 65, and half his students are now girls. Adam and Josh also do outreach in schools. UK schools have seen significant drops in funding, with the creative arts

sectors being disregarded entirely. Since 2010, the number of students taking creative GCSE subjects has dropped by 40%, resulting from lacklustre funds for the arts. Splinter Studios’ ultimate goal is to provide a community for young musicians, and when they go into schools they inspire a love for music that’s sorely needed.

At Splinter Studios, Adam and Josh aim to combat a lack of support for local artists by creating a space in which all creatives – whether they want to learn how to play their favourite song or aspire to become performing artists – can hone their skills. To round off, a critical piece of advice from Adam is to never stop practising at something you have a passion for; a lesson that is not only increasingly relevant in the wondrous world of music, but also in the world of perilous ups and downs.



ThunderChunky gig, Splinter Studios Christmas Party, December 2022 © Bradleigh Aston of Cedar Media



The Wednesbury

Dear Wednesbury Agony Aunt

We are the Wednesbury Detective Enthusiasts and we are contacting you on a matter of utmost importance. On Saturday 17 June, the beloved Clock Tower that has stood in Wednesbury's town centre for over a 100 years was stolen. Wednesbury Day, one of the most important days in the calendar, was cancelled due to this tragic incident and we're not sure if it will ever happen. Most importantly we have cracked the case, but no one will take us seriously!

Allow me to provide some context: myself, Pinky and Georgie make up the Wednesbury Detective Enthusiasts. We left Wednesbury Library at precisely 3:02pm on the day of the crime. The summer holidays were fast approaching but we still had a couple of mock exams to prepare for, so we were studying. I don't understand how everyone else in Year 8 uses this time so nonchalantly as these are our most important academic years! But I digress. Pinky wanted some new hair bows from the market to add to her ever-growing collection, so we headed straight there. We went past the Wednesbury Central Mosque and Wednesbury Central Methodist Church and that's when we began to see a disturbance among the crowds. People whispering to one another, groups gathered around as if waiting for something. We didn't think much of it until we got to the post office and then that's when we saw it. Police tape blocking the entrance to the markets, police cars everywhere and a gaping hole where the Wednesbury Clock Tower once stood.

We looked at each other, jaws to the floor trying to understand what we were seeing. Georgie spotted his Mum's friend amongst the stalls. She then spotted us and ran over to explain everything. The missing Clock Tower was reported missing at 8am that morning by Vera, a market stall trader. The police had nothing to work with because most people were asleep when it went missing. The few statements they had were believed to be meaningless. However we, the Wednesbury Detective Enthusiasts, know there's no such thing as meaningless clues. We decided to talk to Vera.

Vera was meant to sell her trinkets for Wednesbury Day. At precisely 7am, as she was packing her goods into her car, she spotted something quite odd - there was what looked like a Greggs van parked up a few yards away. Approaching the van were two people in uniform carrying unusually large and heavy boxes. I asked where the van was and Vera said it wasn't even near the Greggs which was on the other side of town. She then showed us a piece of vital evidence that could lead right to the thieves - a photograph she had taken and right there, in the background, were the suspects carrying huge boxes, big enough to fit an unassembled Clock Tower. And their uniform was yellow, not the same colour as Greggs!

Unfortunately, when we presented these crucial findings down at the police station, they laughed right in our faces! Told us to stay out of it, this is no work for children and to "let the adults take care of it".

Please, Agony Aunt, what would you advise? Those so-called 'adults' are nowhere near finding our beloved Clock Tower and we're sitting on hard evidence. Help us save Wednesbury Day!

Kind regards

Spokesperson for the Wednesbury Detective Enthusiasts

Detective Enthusiasts

By Shazeda Begum

Dear Spokesperson of the Wednesbury Detective Enthusiasts

Thank you very much for your letter. I have been following this story as a fellow resident of Wednesbury myself and my, my, the obscene number of letters I have received about the unfortunate theft of our beloved Clock Tower is saddening. I was just about to start giving advice to the distraught community; however it seems the answer has quite literally fallen into my lap.

The younger generation never fails to astonish me - kudos to the Wednesbury Detective Enthusiasts for your efforts. You've done your homework, gathered information and even presented your findings to the authorities but they scoffed at the idea of children cracking the case. Now this is something I cannot understand! It seems like the adults might be stuck in a 'ticking' time loop of their own. If I had the stamina and joints of my younger days, I would march right in there with you.

Unfortunately, I have had my fair share of missing clock tower thieves. Yes, this is not the first time beloved city clock monuments have been stolen around the West Midlands. The disappearance of Old Joe at University of Birmingham in 1992 caused a riot amongst the students; the disappearance of the Big Brum Clock standing atop Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery led to the Big Brum Brawl of 2001. In these cases, good citizens like yourselves have come to me with the same problem - but no-one seems to listen! Fortunately for you, however, you have old Auntie Barbara on your side and here's what we're going to do.

I've studied your photograph very carefully and, while this is indeed evidence, we need more to convince those adults. Your market trader took a very good photograph because there is a number plate! Luckily for us, we were able to follow this van from the early morning of the Clock Tower's disappearance - the morning of Wednesbury Day. I'd suggest you share this with the Mayor, who will be very keen to meet you.

It's wonderful to see young, capable people taking matters into their own hands. Well done for saving Wednesbury Day!

Yours truly

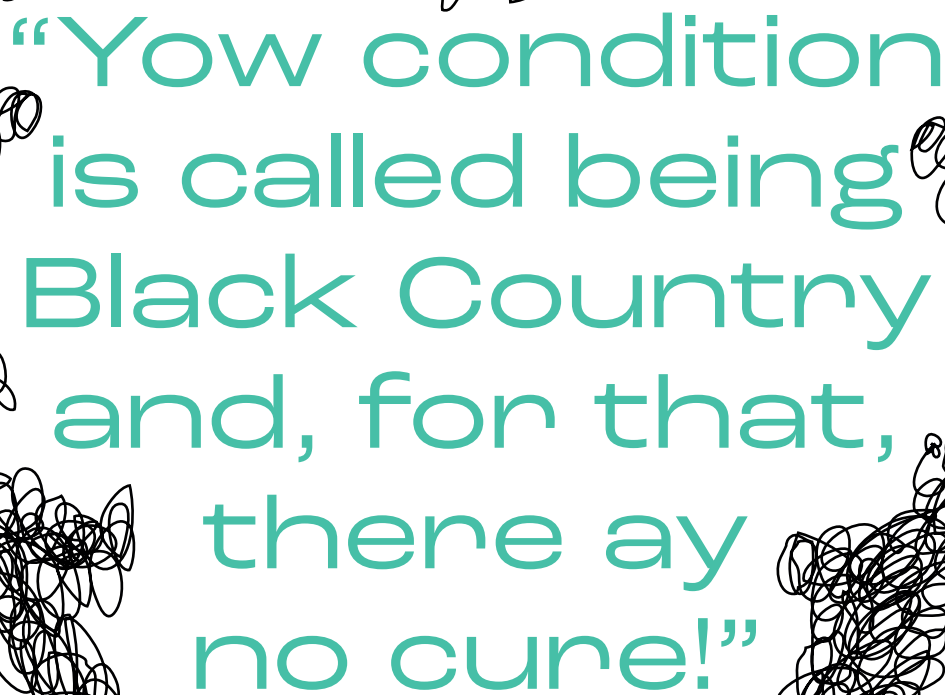
Barbara, Wednesbury Agony Aunt

Wednesbury Literature Festival Review: Brendan Hawthorne

By Tilly Holland



Homeward © Lynne Hawthorne



“Yow condition
is called being
Black Country
and, for that,
there ay
no cure!”



Brendan Hawthorne was the closing performance for this year's Wednesbury Literature Festival as part of We Are Wednesbury. Brendan is known for being Wednesbury's Poet Laureate, as well as a playwright and musician. Along with his group of performers, they collectively delivered a funny yet poignant representation of life as it is living in the Black Country. They each shared their own personal stories, from living through the pandemic, to the struggles of working life using music, poetry and skits.

“Bit posh for Wednesbury, ay it!”, bellowed two women in woolly hats, indicating the start of the show. The performance is packed to the brim with Black Country-isms, taking place in the Grade II listed Wednesbury Library. It's a full house tonight, so full in fact, that the library runs out of chairs! We are surrounded by antique bookshelves and there's tea and biscuits for all.

There was an array of original songs performed and sung by Brendan, with Kerry's haunting yet beautiful backing vocals on many of them, including 'Black Country Cowboy', through to 'Delerium of Life', an upbeat tune portraying some of the frustrations and highlights of working class life. Multiple of Brendan's songs express a major aspect of Black Country history which was his life working in factories. He worked in one for 18 years like his Grandfather, who was a glassblower. 'Old Men of the Factory' also depicts this, as well as the decline of this lifestyle and having to watch it disappear: 'Do you hear them ringing the field of echoes?'

In the interval, I was able to speak to an audience member who I was sitting next to. She applauded the way Brendan can articulate his knowledge of the Black Country -so artistically.

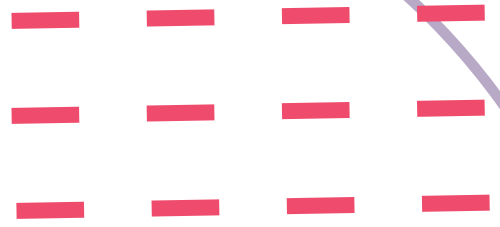
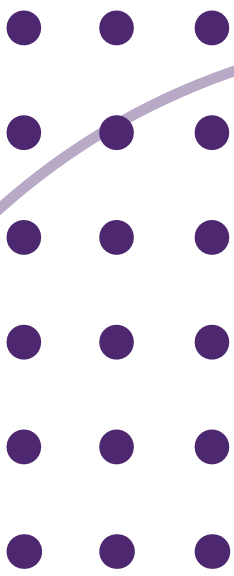
A highlight of the show was Keith Gwilliams who sat alone in the corner of the stage for the first half hour, unassuming, until it was his turn to be at the forefront. He suddenly came to life, having the audience in stitches and joining in with the lyrics to Brendan's rendition of a tune that, "sounds slightly rude, but it ay", 'Billy Cock Hat'. He was full of energy, prancing through the gaps in the audience in his billycock hat. It was thoroughly entertaining and the audience loved it. The on-stage relationship between Keith and Brendan was something special and seeing them bounce off each other made the show even more hilarious and joyous for the audience.

“In my younger days, twenty odd years ago, I used to be billed as the Jim Morrison of Wednesbury, ‘cause I used to wear leather trousers”, Brendan said laughing. “And then I thought, isn’t art weird? Because Morrisons Superstore has got my poetry outside on the panels!”

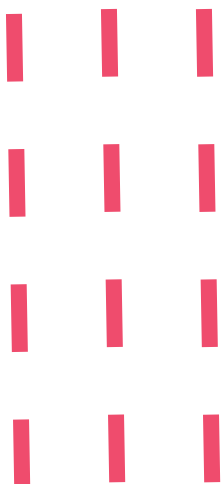
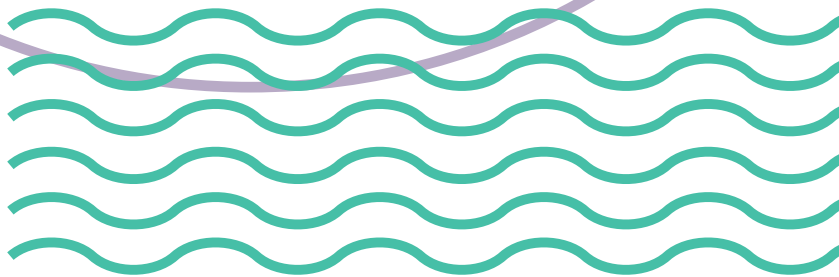
For a Black Country lad growing up in the ‘70s, Brendan was able to explore his writing skills at school before having his poetry pinned up on the wall in the factory where he worked. He’s since flourished into being a published writer, appearing on multiple radio and television shows, including Smooth Radio and The One Show, and has even translated one of Shirley Bassey’s song lyrics into Black Country dialect in front of her!

The show brought to light aspects of Black Country life that people who live in the local area can understand and relate to, but it was also a hilarious and intriguing history lesson to those not familiar with Black Country history.

The way Brendan can convey to his audience so much joy and humour in his thick Black Country accent with his jolly lyrics, yet so much sorrow as the chords of the acoustic guitar strike through the tall grey and blue library walls, celebrates the great and tragic elements of past Black Country events. He keeps them alive and strengthens our community. It is utterly applaudable.



“I told you some
of this could be
tragic... I said it in
the advertisement!”



Reflecting on our Citizen Journalist Programme

By Gabriella Songui, Community Magazine Co-ordinator





Emily, Ella, Leigh, Rayhannah & Jasandeep, First cohort of the Citizen Journalists © Phillip Pannell

Citizen Journalists, one of the many strands of the We Are Wednesbury Cultural Programme, was conceptualised to actively engage young adults in their local community. Over the course of three years, ten 16-25 year olds attended local events, interviewed local businesses and then wrote and edited journalistic and creative pieces in response. These pieces were published in the We Are Wednesbury community magazine.

This age bracket was chosen because it is often missing from local community events and activities, which can result in a lack of civic pride in younger generations. Therefore we asked our writers to attend events such as Wednesbury Day, Wednesbury Literary Festival and the Wednesbury Lantern Procession, not only to platform their voices in the magazine, but so they would connect more with their communities. As a result, the group learnt more about local history and the current events and happenings on their doorsteps.





“Despite living in the Black Country for ‘pretty much all my life, my participation in this programme has taught me a lot about both Wednesbury and the surrounding towns. Its rich history and community spirit is undeniable and I look forward to seeing what else this region has to offer. The opportunity and confidence it has given me to speak to locals within my community is one I am fortunate to have come across and undertaken.” (Joi Foote, Citizen Journalist)

As well as events, our journalists were all supported in delivering interviews with businesses and artists in the area. I’d argue that this was the most impactful aspect of the programme, as not only did their knowledge of the local area increase, it also gave them “confidence [...] to speak to locals within my community”, as mentioned by Joi. The writers spoke to businesses such as Sue’s Sweets, Blue Sheep Books, Allsorts, Mona’s Cafe and Splinter Studios. The stories range from heartwarming to crudely funny (the willy warmers being a standout from last year) and every interview was conducted by the young journalists themselves. Jasi, who participated in all three years said it “helped me come out of my comfort zone”. In her very first interview she didn’t feel prepared to ask a single question; in her final one she conducted the entire interview by herself.

The programme evolved to include guest workshops with writers such as Anne Alexander, Ania Bas, Mymona Bibi and Naush Sabah, working towards giving our journalists a more well-rounded experience. They learnt ways they could actively pursue writing careers through engaging in activities on their doorsteps.

“I am beyond grateful to have been a part of this programme because it has taught me to make a habit of my passion. Speaking, listening and interacting with local business owners and their employees showed me that the only way to turn a dream into a reality is to wake up.” (Aliza Uddin, Citizen Journalist)

The young journalists, as demonstrated by Aliza, learnt to draw value from their local area and understand how careers can evolve in the place they call home. Engaging in the community is a task of being proactive and taking initiative, something which was clearly demonstrated by our group along this process.

Citizen Journalists was a programme of significance, not only for the individuals’ development and sense of civic pride but also for the community to have a diversity of voices within its cultural activities. As this project winds to an end, I look forward to seeing what our emerging journalists write and create outside of the programme and I hope to see everyone at future events around Sandwell.

About our Writers



Joi Foote

I am an English and Philosophy student at the University of Birmingham. I love all things reading and writing and have recently had the opportunity to rediscover my passion for creative writing through a class I took at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago.

Despite living in the Black Country for pretty much all my life, my participation in this programme has taught me a lot about both Wednesbury and the surrounding towns. Its rich history and community spirit is undeniable and I look forward to seeing what else this region has to offer. Furthermore the opportunity and confidence it has given me to speak to locals in my community is one I am fortunate to have experience and undertake.



Aliza Uddin

My name is Aliza Uddin and I am a 16 year old aspiring author who also hopes to study Law in the future. Some of my all-time favourite books are Hamnet (Maggie O Farrell); The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (C.S. Lewis); and Unrest (Michelle Harrison). Besides writing, I love to read historical fiction, play guitar and cook; sometimes all at once!

I am beyond grateful to have been a part of this programme because it has taught me to make a habit of my passion. It has introduced me to an historically profound Wednesbury and an equally profound desire to document its achievements. Speaking, listening and interacting with local businesses owners and their employees showed me that the only way to turn a dream into a reality is to wake up.



Gabriella Songui

I'm a freelance writer, producer and facilitator and have had the pleasure of working with our team of citizen journalists to create this magazine. Within my work, I particularly enjoy exploring themes of heritage, migration and diversity, and engaging in community-centred projects.



Tilly Holland

My name is Tilly and I study Art, Design and Media at university. I also love listening to music and playing the drums!

This is the first time I have done any published writing and I really enjoyed seeing the performance, meeting new people and going through the writing process. I was able to improve my writing through the suggestions given to me and being able to learn more about Black Country history has been really rewarding.



Jasandeep Kaur Gill

I am Jasandeep Kaur Gill and I'm a student. I really enjoy playing video games, listening to music, reading books, writing fantasy stories and watching anime. I can speak Greek, English and Punjabi.

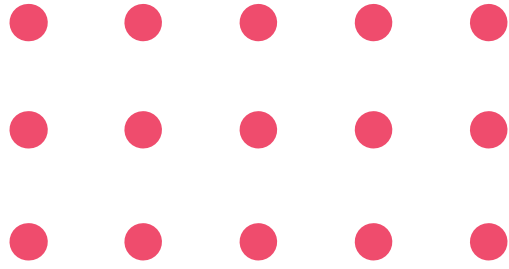
I have really enjoyed my time on this programme. It was an amazing experience for me and helped me come out of my comfort zone a little. I would definitely love to participate in this type of programme again!



Shazeda Begum

I'm Shazeda and I've been reading for as long as I can remember but writing is only something I've done on and off. But the desire never went away.

Being on this programme has really helped me tune into the writer's side of me that I've neglected. The support team adapted and were flexible with the fact I work full-time and I was able to still visit Wednesbury when I could. Out of this, I was able to explore different styles of writing which they really accommodated to.



Looking back

Here are some highlights from all the amazing activities that took place throughout the four-year programme!



Out of the Deep Blue by Autin Dance Theatre, Wednesbury Day, 2023,
produced by Multistory and Black Country Touring
© Phillip Parnell Photography



Group portrait of the poets, Street Full of Dialect, produced by Brendan
Hawthorne, 2022 @ Phillip Parnell

We Are Wednesbury Lantern Procession, 2022 © David Rowan



Adaya Henry in front of Boobielous, Pop-Up Poetry, produced by Black Country Touring, 2021 © Phillip Parnell Photography



Lorna Meehan performance in Allsorts Knitting, What's In Store, Produced by Black Country Touring, 2022 © Phillip Parnell Photography





Highstreet Stories We Are Wednesbury Online Map. (visit wearewednesbury.uk to explore) © Multistory



MARKET Celebration event at the Clock Tower, with artist duo Hipkiss & Graney at the Clock Tower, 2022 © Multistory



Mike Gayle talk, Wednesbury Literature Festival, produced by Wednesbury Library, 2022 © Phillip Parnell Photography



The Queen's Platinum Jubilee street party, produced by the We Are Wednesbury Cultural Consortium, 2022 © Phillip Parnell Photography

MARKET Celebration event with Hipkiss & Graney at the Clock Tower, 2022 © Multistory





Sensory Workshops with Real Arts Workshops at Barlow Road Community Garden, 2022 © Phillip Parnell Photography



Suzan Spence performance at Mamma's L Cakes, What's In Store, produced by Black Country Touring, 2022 © Phillip Parnell Photography






Sensory Workshops with Vik Chandler and Shaun Hill at Barlow Road Community Garden
2022 © Phillip Parnell Photography



Wednesbury Tales Poetry Walk, produced by Emma Purshouse, 2021
--© Phillip Parnell Photography

Thank you



We want to thank the We Are Wednesbury Cultural Consortium for their continued support; it wouldn't have been a success without you. We also want to thank the many community members, Councillors, Council staff, market traders, shops, businesses, schools, local groups, artists and creatives who participated and helped to bring the streets of Wednesbury to life.

We Are Wednesbury Cultural Consortium

Alison Hartshorne - Neighbourhood Partnerships Officer
Amanda Quinn - Way 2 Wellbeing
Catherine Melnik - Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery
Clare Gough - Wednesbury Leisure Centre
John Allen
Deb Baker - Way 2 Wellbeing
Denise Heginbotham - Community Engagement Officer, Riverside
Dominic Ashton - Community Navigator, Ideal for All
Donna Martin - Knights of Wednesbury
Ian McDermott - Friends of Brunswick Park
Jacqueline Hawkins - Library Manager, Wednesbury Library
Jill Turner - Knights of Wednesbury
John Steventon - Centre Manager, The Wesley Centre and Church Hall
Mandy Williams - Public Health Development Officer, Wednesbury
Neil Baker - Way 2 Wellbeing
Nicola Churchill - Wednesbury Museum
Roseanne Hardy - Wednesbury Police
Simon Bryan - Wednesbury Leisure Centre
Veena Devi - Neighbourhood Partnerships Officer

Councillors

Ian Chambers - Councillor, Wednesbury South
Jenny Chidley - Councillor, Wednesbury South
Kullwant Singh Uppal - Councillor, Wednesbury South
Luke Giles - Councillor, Wednesbury North and Town Lead
Nicola Maycock - Councillor, Wednesbury North
Peter Hughes - Councillor, Wednesbury North
Scott Chapman - Councillor - Friar Park
Simon Hackett - Councillor, Friar Park
Terry Fitzgerald - Councillor, Friar Park
The Worshipful the Mayor of Sandwell, **Councillor Bill Gavan**

Shops, businesses, community groups, schools

Acorns (charity shop)

Aladdin's Pizza

All Sorts

Barnado's (charity shop)

Blue Sheep Books

Boobielous

Bowjangles

British Household Stores

Cake Inn

Christine's Cards

Eat Well Café

First Choice School Uniform

Food Bazaar

J&F Butchers

Neon Demon Tattoo

Teddy Grays

Junction 9 3/4

Juniper Training

Maggie's General Store

Morrison's

Neighbourhood Hair

O'Connells Florist

Pat's Homemade Bakes

Perfect Bunch

Popcorn Shoes and Bags

Simone's Bridal

South Staffs Community Hub

Sue's Traditional Sweet Shop

The Chip Tub

The Island Lounge

The Lamp

The Orchard Coffee Lounge

Thornleigh Cycles

Vintage Tea Room & Cafe

Barlow Road Allotments

Friar Park Road Allotments

Woden Road Allotments

Jan, Stacey, Paul and yr 5 pupils (St Mary's Primary)

Mrs Dhanjal and yr2 pupils (Holyhead Primary)

Mike Maynard (History of Wednesbury Group)



We Are Wednesbury / artists / creatives / groups and the projects they worked on

Cultural Programme / Year 1: 2020-21

High Street Stories

Brendan Hawthorne
Claire Leggett
Denise Maxwell
Emily Warner
Grace Dore
Iain Armstrong
Jo Löki
Keaton Barton
Marta Kochanek
Maurice Bartosch
Serena Patel
Sophie Huckfield

Cultural Programme / Year 2: 2021-22

MARKET

Hipkiss and Graney

Pop-up Poetry

Adaya Henry
Black Country Touring
Bohdan Piasecki
Richard Grant (AKA Dreadlockalien)
R.M. Francis

Street Full of Dialect

Brendan Hawthorne
Gary Corbett
George Kretz
Ilika Mandal
Jon Watkiss
Keith Gwilliams
Suzan Spence

Wednesbury Tales

Alex Vann
Brendan Hawthorne
Emma Purshouse
Marion Cockin
Matt Windle
Suzan Spence

Wednesbury Through The Lens

Tekkinpix

Cultural Programme / Year 3: 2022-23

Lantern Procession

Boston' Arts
Bostin' Brass Band
Crafternoon Group
Friar Park Youth Club
Helter Skelter LED stilt-walkers
Ideal for All
Place of Welcome Craft Group
Roger Coley and the 617 Sandwell Air Scouts
The Knights of Wednesbury
Way 2 Wellbeing
Wednesbury Museum Community Art Group
Wednesbury Neighbourhood Police
Wednesbury Rainbows, Brownies and Guides

Queen's Platinum Jubilee Day

Emily Warner
Jennens Brass
Nick Cook (stilt-walker)
Patricia Ford (Queen impersonator)
Rainbow Faces

Sensory Workshops at Barlow Road Allotments

Ideal for All
Real Arts Workshops (Alex Vann and Gary O'Dowd)
Shaun Hill
South Asian Arts Collective (Vik Chandla)

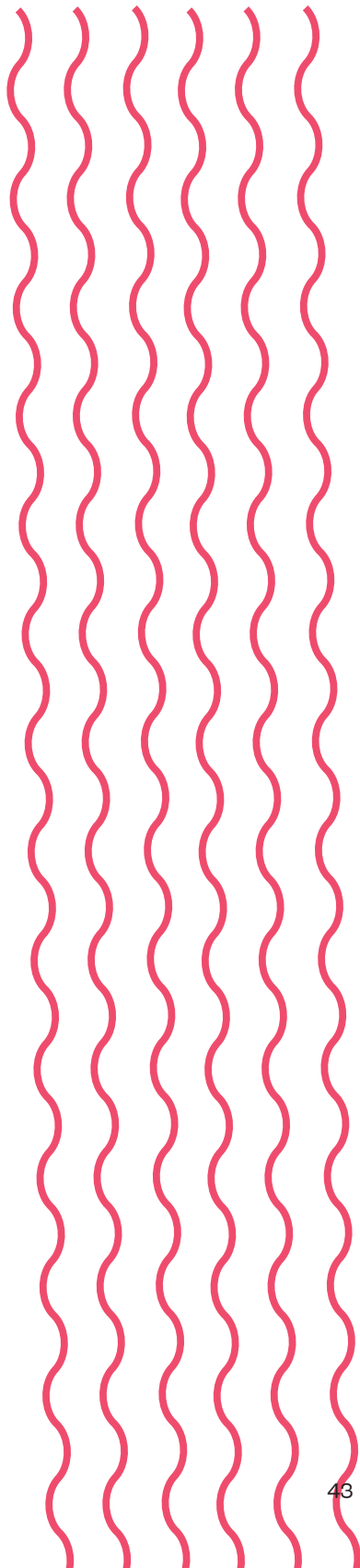
What's in Store

Ben Cornish
Black Country Touring
Bohdan Piasecki
Crow's Nest Theatre Company
Derek Nisbet
Lorna Meehan
Vimal Korpai

Cultural Programme / Year 4: 2023-24

Doomsday / A Wednesbury Reckoning

Alex Vann
Billy Spakeman
Brendan Hawthorne
David Calcutt
Emma Purshouse
Heather Wastie
Priyanka Joshi
Reaya Seeley
St Bartholomew's Church
Steve Pottinger
Suzan Spence
Suzie's Community Choir
Trudy King



High Street Portraits

Marta Kochanek

Wednesbury Day

Autin Dance Theatre
Black Country Touring
Brendan Hawthorne
Cradley Creatives
Crow's Nest Theatre Company
Dave Heeley
Emily Warner
Infamous Arts
Lollipop Patrol by Curious Congo
Mark Whitaker
Rainbow Faces
Rajasthan Heritage Brass Band
Ranbir Kaur
The Pigeons by Cincii
Vicky Roden

Cultural Programme / Years 2, 3 and 4

We Are Wednesbury Community Magazine

Citizen Journalists: Shazeda Begum, Joi Foote, Tilly Holland, Jasandeep Kaur-Gill , Leigh

Project Co-ordinator: Gabriella Songui

Workshop facilitators: Anne Alexander, Ania Bas, Mymona Bibi and Naush Sabah. Languedoc-Butt, Emily Logan, Ella Newman-Kidd, Rayhannah Rowe, Aliza Uddin and Hafizaah Uddin.

We Are Wednesbury designer: Sharonjit Sutton

We Are Wednesbury photographer: Phillip Parnell

We Are Wednesbury film-maker: Michael Ellis Videography

Cultural Programme / Years 3 and 4

Wednesbury Literature Festival

Wednesbury Library staff and all the wonderful authors and speakers who took part.

A huge thank you to the We Are Wednesbury Cultural Programme funding partners

Historic England
Sandwell Council
Heritage Fund Lottery
HM Government
Arts Council England





About Multistory

Multistory is a community arts organisation that has been based in Sandwell for 18 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.

www.multistory.org.uk

Follow us @multistory