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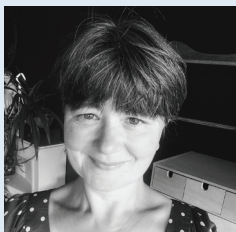
# Contact us

Linsey Parkinson  
07875 895 604  
Managing Editor, OPEN UP Magazines  
linsey@openupmagazines.co.uk

Deborah Grace  
07979 908 871  
Editor, OPEN UP South Manchester  
deborah@openupmagazines.co.uk


Sam Paechter  
07939 077 036  
accounts@openupmagazines.co.uk

## Advertising Sales



Lesley Swann  
07919 534 186  
lesley@openupmagazines.co.uk

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# I

wasn't born in Chorlton (Wythenshawe), but have lived here for longer than I care to remember and have no plan to leave. I'm a descendent of the Brundrett and Gresty families, so can trace my Chorlton roots back centuries.

One of the reasons I love living here is that it's such a positive place to be, with a smart, caring, creative and close-knit community. After the dark few months we've endured, I wanted our return issue to reflect that positivity and remind us that things can - and will - get better.

Read Councillor Eve Holt's hopes for building back better; about funding and plans for Chorlton to be greener, kinder and fairer; Barlow Moor Community Association's amazing outreach work and much more. Our Book Festival and Arts Festival will both be online celebrations this year, so log on and join in! We miss you!

We can all play our part in making a better Chorlton and we have more influence than we think. Read about *Let's Re-imagine Chorlton* on page 12 - that's a fine place to start. Close your street, get the chalks out, chat (safely) to your neighbours and then have your say about what we do next. You've got to be in it to win it.

*Linsey*

Editor  
Open Up Chorlton



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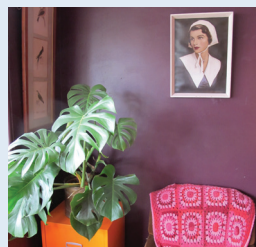
Photo © Martin Glackin

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Chorlton Co-Housing, Sue Dixon, Cath Dyson, Deborah Grace, Eve Holt, Helen Jeys, Linsey Parkinson, Jolene Sheehan, Andrew Simpson, Claire Stocks, Lesley Swann, Laura Swain, Janine Waters, Katherine Watson



**Cover Image**  
Lesley Swann





## WONDERWALL

A particularly boring brick wall in Chorlton has now become a fabulous mural, bursting with colour and hope, thanks to a joint project between Manchester City Council and Chorlton High School.

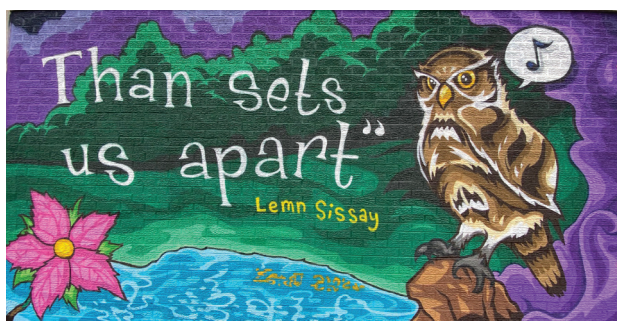
Its creator, artist Sumit Sarkar, was commissioned by Pete Whiteley (from the Council's Neighbourhoods Team) and Susannah Haygarth (from Chorlton High), using funding from a grant given to the Council to improve local high streets.

"I'd been trying to get a mural on the side of the precinct for ages," says Pete. "It's such a great spot, right in the heart of Chorlton. When the owners agreed, we consulted with local residents and businesses to find out what sort of things they'd like to see. There was a strong preference expressed for nature and wildlife, so we wanted to go down that route."

Pete found an artist, but the project ground to a halt when she got stuck in Spain during lockdown.

"It was a real piece of luck when Susannah from Chorlton High got in touch. She said the school wanted to paint a mural in the community as part of their Beelong Community Festival. She brought in Sumit, who came up with the designs and did such a fantastic job."

"The words that you see on the wall are from a poem by Lemn Sissay," adds Susannah. "We're very grateful to him for allowing us to use them. They give a message of hope and togetherness in these difficult times, and Sumit has brought them to life so beautifully. We're absolutely thrilled with the mural and hope everyone else loves it too."







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# READING THE WORLD

Ayesha Ansari-Choudhury, founder of indie bookseller Mirror Me Write and a member of Chorlton Book Festival, talks about her aim to promote diversity and inclusivity in children's and young adult literature in the North West. Interview by Deborah Grace

As a book-loving youngster growing up in North-West London, Ayesha devoured children's literary classics from Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* adventures to *Goodnight Mr Tom* and CS Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. Then, at the age of 12, Ayesha discovered *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and her world was transformed.

"That was the moment when my reading journey changed and I became conscious of the multiple identities I navigated - that of a British, Asian Muslim growing up in the South.

"Finally, I'd come across a book that gave me another perspective on life and history and it just opened up my world. And that's when I began to question my identity in terms of my place in society and also the types of books I was reading."

Ayesha's new reading journey led her to the work of authors including Benjamin Zephaniah, Amitav Ghosh, Elif Shafak and the wonderful Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

"I felt like I was literally reading the world!"

A primary school teaching assistant and the mother of two young boys, Ayesha has long been frustrated by the lack of

*"These books are the most amazing tool for education and social change"*

representative literature available to children and young adults and in use in the curriculum.

"A lot of children's literature seems to be rooted in one cultural narrative, leaving little scope for representation. If you want to engage a wider audience of young readers, then children need to see their stories reflected in the literature available to them. They need to feel valued and included."

Ayesha launched Mirror Me Write in Manchester last year at the same time as promoting the British Ghanaian author, Pamela Aculey, whose book, *Buster Finds His Feet*, was inspired by her dual-heritage family and her autistic son.

"Pamela was told by one mainstream publisher that her story was wonderful, but that she should change the ethnicity of her protagonist to make the book more accessible and to make sales. Shocking, but not unheard of, unfortunately! In the end, Pamela went down the self-publishing route."

Through Mirror Me Write, Ayesha promotes new and established authors and books that are representative of wider society and rooted in the author's authentic voice. Onjali Q Rauf, Danielle Jawando, Patrice Lawrence, Jewel Parker Rhodes, Elizabeth Acevedo and Okechukwu Nzelu are among the award-winning writers she champions.

Their powerfully-told stories cover a range of issues from bullying and teenage suicide to the global refugee crisis. Ayesha works closely with educators, helping them to diversify their classroom bookshelves and advising them on alternative books to support the curriculum.

"These books are the most amazing tool for education and social change. We need them now more than ever. We need to normalise representation and the multiple voices in our communities. I want my boys to grow up in a world where they feel equal and represented in any area and supported in anything they want to achieve. I'd want that for anybody."

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# THINGS ARE LOOKING UP!

Eyewear choices have been a little limited in Chorlton - until now.  
The stylists at Framed Opticians are coming to Beech Road

Beech Road, with its bijou bars and eateries and its stylish, independent boutiques and galleries is the perfect location for Framed, because this is no ordinary optician.

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Framed is an independent business and, as such offers an individual, boutique approach. They hold an amazing range of gorgeous glasses and sunglasses from exclusive and independent brands you will fall in love with, such as Face a Face, Moscot and Booth&Bruce.

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## Framed's top tips for choosing glasses:

- Don't just think of your glasses in terms of being a necessity - they're an opportunity to make a real style statement and update your whole look.
- Consider glasses in the context of your personality, your overall style and the look you want to convey: sophisticated, retro, serious, youthful or fun?
- Experiment! Be open to different styles and colours. It can be easy to get stuck in a style rut - so break free!
- Try, try, try! Glasses on display will look very different on your face, so be adventurous and you might be surprised.
- Take full advantage of the help and advice that we offer: it's surprisingly difficult to see your own face objectively!
- We'll be your personal style consultants and help you get it right.

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# BUILDING BACK BETTER, TOGETHER

They say it takes a village to raise a child. Chorlton Councillor Eve Holt looks forward to the Age of the Neighbourhood.

## People and place matter.

I was raised in Chorlton and am bringing up my own kids here. I learnt to walk and ride my bike on our streets, and to swim at Chorlton Baths. I've played in our parks, made friends in our schools, and I hope to grow old at home, in my community.

I've formed critical connections and trust with those who live and work here: my neighbours, family, friends, babysitters, teachers, carers, doctors, shopkeepers... These people inspired me to dream of a fairer, greener, safer world, and encouraged me to roll up my sleeves and be part of the change I want to see.

## What we pay attention to grows.

While there is a lot going on in the world which feels desperately hard, sad, frustrating and beyond our control, we mustn't overlook the opportunities we have on our doorstep: to sow new seeds, water green shoots, and do all in our power to make Chorlton a better place to be for generations to come.

We can't do this on our own: we can't move forward and build back better together without a shared vision.

All the consultations, surveys and discussion in recent years have shown me that:

- Chorlton has ideas and expertise: we want to be involved, not just 'consulted'.
- We may disagree, but ultimately, we care about this place and each other.
- We want Chorlton to be a safe, green, healthy and kind place.
- We are proud and appreciative of our local co-operatives, independent businesses and community groups.

We want to see our high streets thrive.

- We value diversity and equality: we want to make Chorlton a fairer and more age-friendly place, with more affordable housing, better quality public realm and accessible ways for everyone to get around.

## What can we learn from lockdown?

Whether you experienced a pause, a quickening of pace, or a sharpening of pain, the shock, disruption and turbulence of Covid has made us all reflect on what really matters. The vast majority of us don't want everything to return to how it was before.

### Caring for others

Mutual aid groups formed across Chorlton: neighbours helping neighbours. People watched out for each other, mobilised and adapted.

Local businesses stepped up brilliantly too, working cooperatively with community groups, residents and services. Thousands of meals were cooked up each week and deliveries were made by foot, bike and van.

### Being active and learning

Strangers came together (virtually) with bursts of creativity: window galleries, murals, doorstep singing, music and dance, craftivism, yarn bombing, quilt making, Chorlton High's Beelong festival, chalking on streets, naming wild flowers. Messages of hope were spread far and wide. We appreciated nature and were more mindful of the 'small things'

### And breathing...

We celebrated the lungs of the city - our green spaces and our outdoor 'living



rooms'. We enjoyed cleaner air as more of us walked or cycled, while car use plummeted.

At the same time we feared Covid would take our breath away, the words "I can't breathe," stirred us. We read, listened, took the knee, beeped our horns and pledged to check our privilege and do the work needed to tackle racism. The impact of the virus really has highlighted the inequalities and injustices in our society.

## A call to action

We are all place shapers, makers, leaders and dreamers. I invite you to play a part in shaping the future of Chorlton. Here's where we start:

- Join the 'Let's Reimagine Our Chorlton' big conversation (see p12)
  - Watch out for information about the Chorlton Climate Change Partnership
  - Get involved with Chorlton Community Land Trust
  - Visit [co-operate.coop.co.uk](http://co-operate.coop.co.uk) to find or add details of local groups, activities and businesses
  - Search online for "20-minute neighbourhoods". What sort of neighbourhood would you, your friends and neighbours like to create?
  - Keep chatting to your neighbours, keep doing what you're doing
- We'll get there.





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# Let's re-imagine...

Sue Dixon

Two events to celebrate - and build upon - Chorlton's positivity for a brighter future. Everyone's invited.

Six months ago, we all knew about a new virus that had closed down an entire city. Now, we *really* know about it!

Our lives, our experiences, families and friends, are all changed by the pandemic: it has affected everything we do, how we think and how we plan for the uncertain future. There have been wonderful stories of how Chorlton has pulled together since March, looking after and helping those around us - especially those having the hardest time of it.

Time and again, we are reminded that we are having to adjust to 'a new normal', inspired to create an improved future and to grasp the opportunity to 'build back better'!

We are planning two events to discuss ways we can help to make this happen- to help Chorlton to not just *survive* through the coming months, but to *thrive*!

## Street Party

To celebrate the great stories of lockdown and beyond, we invite streets to apply to close their road for a day on the weekend of 19/20 September to make a Play Street for all and an outdoor social - distanced, naturally! You'll find details of exactly how to apply to the City Council for a street closure on our website.

## Let's Re-Imagine our Chorlton

The following weekend, Chorlton Alliance will host an online community get-together on Sunday 27th September, called Let's Re-Imagine our Chorlton.

We'd love people of all ages to join us in imagining creative ways we can help Chorlton to be the best place to be. What can we do to help all Chorlton communities to thrive and prosper? To keep up the new connections we've made? To help local businesses to keep going? To keep up morale and have fun while we stay safe and work out our new normal?

Details of how to take part are on our website, or look out for social media. Everyone who cares about Chorlton is welcome.

We'd love to hear your stories of lockdown and what worked well in your street, your circle of friends, your family or with colleagues. We'll make a video to open the online get-together, featuring some of the great things that happened in Chorlton - stories of individuals helping one another, of communities pulling together to use their creativity to meet the challenges. We'd love to see photos or artwork of what people of Chorlton did to make a difference and especially, a callout to children, for your artwork of what made lockdown better for you.

Please email your picture to [Chorltonlockdownstories@gmail.com](mailto:Chorltonlockdownstories@gmail.com) with your name and a brief back-story. Or you can post, including your name and contact details ( please mark the envelope 'Let's Reimagine Our Chorlton') to c/o Helen Hibberd Coordinator, Chorlton Good Neighbours Care Group, Wilbraham St Ninian's Church, Manchester M21 0XJ.

# The Green Light

A group of residents has won a £200,000 National Lottery grant for a community scheme to help address the Climate Emergency in Chorlton, and to help get the area moving safely after Covid-19.

The grant, one of only 14 to be awarded across the UK, comes from the new £100m Climate Action Fund. It will pay for a 12-month project to understand and explore the benefits of reducing car traffic; which includes reduced congestion, pollution and carbon emissions, and increased road safety, accessibility and public space.

Cllr Eve Holt and Walk Ride Greater Manchester co-founder Claire Stocks (both from Chorlton) brought in specialist agencies Groundwork Greater Manchester, Sustrans North and Open Data Manchester to work with local people and formed the Chorlton Climate Action Partnership, which made the bid.

The submission built on ideas from several workshops, set up by Cllrs Holt (Chorlton) and Mandie Shilton-Godwin (Chorlton Park) last winter. Reducing car journeys and increasing green space and wildlife in Chorlton emerged as among the most popular climate measures.

"This is just the catalyst we need to #BuildBackBetter for all in Chorlton," says Eve. "This funding will allow us to unlock the potential for sustained change. We want a strong, inclusive partnership between residents, traders, schools, community and faith groups, the council and the health sector. We all want a greener, safer, fairer and more connected place, where we can all live healthy, active lives."

"Making it safer and easier to walk around Chorlton has become an even bigger priority for our community since Covid19," adds Claire. "People need to get to local shops and other amenities; children need to walk or cycle to school. We'll be working with three fantastic, expert partners to design solutions to our traffic problems - which will mean big benefits for our community, but also our planet."

A Climate Action Community Board, with representatives from across the community, is being set up to guide the project and to take forward wider climate action in Chorlton. The immediate priority is to recruit people to run the project (job share available) and to secure a visible and accessible base in Chorlton (space shared with other projects would be great, please get in touch!).

Work starts in the community after Christmas.

For more information:

[cllr.eve.holt@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.eve.holt@manchester.gov.uk)

[claire.stocks@walkridegm.org.uk](mailto:claire.stocks@walkridegm.org.uk)



# Chorlton Arts Virtual

Chorlton Arts Festival is going virtual! National Fun Palaces weekend, 3-4 October, will see 18 Chorlton performers and artists featured via the 3-D social, Mozilla Hubs, and the Art Steps online gallery.

The line-up includes Susan Parry, Anna Violet, Cathy Duggan, Nerissa Cargill Thompson, Tracey Cartledge, Mike Beard, Amy Tefler, Peter Topping and The Sea Cat. They're joined by musicians Chu Yun and Ivan Hovorun, bands, including MIRO, Peggy Chorlton and The Dead Xtras, plus poet Paul Needs.

Performers will take to the stage at Solstice, Chorlton's brand new virtual performance and meeting space. It's been designed by local creative digital studio, Visioning Lab, in collaboration with Virtual Reality Films and features a 360 photo backdrop of Chorlton Ees.

Chorlton Arts Virtual is curated by Visioning Lab's Jessica Symons and Jim Carroll, both local residents and parents. "The teenagers have shown us how to gather online through 3-D games such as Fortnite," says Jessica. "Mozilla Hubs provides customisable 3D online spaces, so we decided to make something for Chorlton. This Fun Palace will launch Chorlton Arts Virtual as an online place for the community to enjoy art and music and a new way of being together."

[chorltonartsfestival.org](http://chorltonartsfestival.org)



## Co-operating, Co-housing

Over-50s could live in a completely different way, says the Chorlton Co-housing Company.

One unanticipated effect of the pandemic has been a strengthening of local connections. WhatsApp groups have sprung up all over Chorlton, helping to keep neighbours in touch, despite social distancing restrictions. This demonstrates a clear desire for community, which we'd like to see continue in the longer term.

The Chorlton Co-housing Company has met regularly on Zoom to develop plans for stronger ties. We want to live in our own individual homes as we get older, but also as part of a shared community space - coming together to manage the community, engage in joint activities, and sometimes share meals together. Our goal is to support a longer active life in the community.

We've been busy during lockdown, imagining how life could be in a co-housing development and how we can create an attractive and environmentally sustainable housing environment. The co-housing model potentially reduces demand on health and social care services: it combats loneliness and isolation and provides warm, economical housing that's designed to support ageing, with services and facilities close at hand.

The pandemic really has underlined the value of the kind of community ties we hope to foster through our co-housing project.

We have recently drawn up some costed plans to reflect our vision, which includes a shared green space, as well as private outdoor spaces or a balcony for every household. We're looking at a couple of possible sites in Chorlton and continue to explore other opportunities.

*If you are interested in finding out more and are or will soon be over 50, please email us at:*

*[chorltoncohousing@gmail.com](mailto:chorltoncohousing@gmail.com) and we will be in touch.*

Image: How co-housing could look in Chorlton  
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# A NEW START

Helen Jeys is looking forward to new beginnings as the Head Mistress of Manchester High School for Girls

I am joining Manchester High School for Girls in September 2020 as the eleventh Head Mistress in its 146 year history. I am very fortunate that I know the School really well. I spent fourteen very happy years at the School as a Head of Department, Head of Year and Deputy Head, before taking on my first Headship, at Alderley Edge School for Girls. In all that time, I always taught my subject – Religion & Philosophy – as I will continue to do in my role as Head.

Teaching is such a joy and I have never lost my passion for it. Knowing the School, many of its staff and the outgoing Head well, I feel a real sense of privilege that I will be leading this magnificent school into its next stage of development.

I will – undoubtedly – experience the same ‘butterflies’ felt by all of those pupils and staff who will be joining a new school in September. Of course, with many pupils not having been in school since March, the return in September is exceptionally important for all young people. Staff across the country are working hard to ensure that pupils can look forward to returning to an environment that is safe and one where they can make new friends, see old friends and immerse themselves in the joy of learning. Schools are so important to our sense of community and wellbeing and I can’t wait to meet all of our pupils in school in September.

I’ll be taking over the Headship from Mrs Claire Hewitt under whose leadership the School has enjoyed fantastic success, including becoming the Sunday Times Northwest Independent School of the Year in 2019. One key characteristic of the School is its atmosphere – one of real excitement and vibrancy; pupils know that the School can help provide them with the opportunities they need to reach their academic potential in an environment where



their happiness is of central importance. Every pupil is valued and cared for as an individual.

Our alumnae – both past and present – are a reminder of the potential each young woman has to change the future. It is well known that the School educated the Pankhurst sisters, as well as many other female powerhouses including Facebook EMEA Vice President, Nicola Mendelsohn, Kotska Wallace, Principal Engineer at the European Space Agency, Ambah Simpson, Account Strategist at Google and the Broadcaster and Journalist, Emma Barnett (who I remember teaching; some years ago now)! Knowing that the School has educated such women – brilliant in their own fields – empowers our current pupils to understand that any glass ceilings they experience are there to be broken. I am looking forward to building on this fantastic success, to encouraging the next generation of pupils to be bold, to be kind, to know that they can make a real difference to the world in which they live.

Manchester High is exciting, diverse, vibrant, fun and forward looking. What do I want for the School? I want every pupil to be equipped with the tools they need to flourish and to be, as our motto says, “tomorrow’s successful women.”

[www.manchesterherhigh.co.uk](http://www.manchesterherhigh.co.uk)



A photograph of three girls sitting outdoors. On the left, a young woman with long dark hair in a school uniform. In the center, a young girl in a grey school jacket and plaid skirt. On the right, a young woman with long brown hair in a black top, smiling. They are sitting in front of some greenery and a building in the background.

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## VIRTUAL OPEN EVENTS 2020

Sixth Form: Tues 22nd September 5.00pm – 8.30pm

Senior School (11+): Thurs 1st October 6.00pm – 8.30pm

Whole School (4-18): Sat 21st November 9.30am – 12.30pm

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# CHORLTON BOOK FESTIVAL

Reading has been more important than ever in 2020, so cancelling the sixteenth Chorlton Book Festival seemed like a very bad idea. Instead, the team has curated an exciting mix of webinars, videos and much more. Grab your gadget of choice, sit back and relax while great writers tell you their stories. There's something for everyone, with a particularly strong line-up for children and young adults, exploring real-life issues and gleefully smashing stereotypes. All events are free. Find out more at [chorltonbookfestival.co.uk](http://chorltonbookfestival.co.uk)

## Nathan Bryon

We're thrilled to welcome Nathan to our festival for a recorded video chat! A former actor (you'll have seen him play Joey Ellis in *Benidorm*), he's now an award-winning children's author. In *Look Up*, science-mad chatterbox Rocket is determined to go into space; while in *Clean Up*, she's on a mission to save an island from a sea of plastic. With joyous illustrations by Dapo Adeola, these empowering and heartwarming picture books are a must-read for every little activist! Ages 4-8.

10am, Saturday 19 September



## Okechukwu Nzelu

Manchester-born Okechukwu Nzelu read English at Cambridge. His work has been published in *Agenda*, *PN Review* and *The I*. His essay, 'Troubles with God' was published in the anthology *Safe: on Black British Men Reclaiming Space* (Trapeze, 2019). He received a New Writing North Award in 2015. In 2020, his debut novel for young adults, *The Private Joys of Nnenna Maloney*, won a Betty Trask Award. Read Deborah Grace's interview with Okechukwu on page 20.

6.30pm, Sunday 20 September

Photo © Steve Ullathorne



## How to Survive Lockdown with the Wisdom of Literature

Comedian Daliso Chaponda lives alone and went months without touching another human being. One thing he did to survive was read books like *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Count of Montecristo*, in which characters were in isolation. And then *The Andromeda Strain* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*, in which they coped with pandemic.

He did not read for entertainment. He read for research and now presents to you the somewhat surprising results.

8pm, Saturday 19 September



## Anna Mainwaring

Anna is the author of two novels for teens. *Tulip Taylor* has been described as a 'charming and hilarious story of love and self-acceptance'. She'll be reading from *Rebel with a Cupcake*, a funny, wry and sensitive novel, exploring self-image and body confidence.

5pm, Monday 21 September

## Flapjack Press presents: The People's Republic of Mancunia

Street photographer Rik Jundi presents a mixed-media live stream of photography, poetry and discussion. This collection of reportage-style images showcases the connection and interplay of his home city's sights, sites and citizens. Rik is joined by performance poets featured in this distinctly Mancunian collaboration.

8pm, Monday 21 September

## Northern Noir: Paul Finch, Caroline England & Chris Simms in conversation

A live webinar discussion, exploring why Manchester so often makes the ideal backdrop for fictional murder.

Former police officer Paul Finch is creator of the *Heck* series. Caroline England, a former divorce lawyer, writes thrillers that explore the shadier side of human nature. Chris Simms has found inspiration in the city's dark underbelly, with a series of gripping crime novels.

7pm, Tuesday 22 September

Photo © Martin Glackin







### Marie Basting

Marie Basting writes funny fiction for children aged 7+. Told by a careers adviser that girls like her don't become writers, Marie loves nothing more than inspiring others to believe in themselves and achieve their dreams. Her hilarious debut novel, *Princess BMX*, was listed by *The Guardian* and BookTrust in their best new books categories and has been praised by Gender Collect as one of the best books out there for smashing stereotypes. Marie will read from *Princess BMX* and talk about the inspiration behind it.

4pm, Tuesday 22 September



### Ruth Estevez

Ruth is a locally-based author who also works for The Portico Library as Project Co-ordinator for their Young People's Reading and Writing Awards.

Her most recent young adult novel, the thrilling *Jiddy Vardy*, is inspired by a real-life female smuggler from Robin Hood's Bay. Look out for the much-anticipated sequel, *Jiddy Vardy: High Tides*, in Spring 2021. Ruth will be reading from *Erosion*, her second novel for adults – to be published by Beaten Track in November – about a disparate group of people faced with the prospect of losing their homes to the sea.

5pm, Wednesday 23 September



### Louisa Reid

Louisa is a teacher and the author of four young-adult novels, the most recent being *Wrecked*, from which she'll be reading. Her last two novels are written in verse – a form that's immersive, playful and compelling – she loves the brevity and power of this genre. "I write the kind of stories I like to read: powerful narratives about the here and now and the challenges, experiences, moral choices and dilemmas we face."

5pm, Thursday 24 September



### Henry Normal

BAFTA-winning writer, poet, TV and film producer, Henry Normal founded Baby Cow with Steve Coogan. Together, they produced *Gavin and Stacey*, *Alan Partridge*, *Mrs Merton*, *The Royle Family* and lots, lots more. Since 'retiring', he's written and performed the Radio 4 shows, *A Normal...*, combining comedy, poetry and stories.

Henry's new poetry collection, *The Beauty Within Shadow*, is about the balance of darkness and light; the search for an understanding of pain and sorrow, and the processing of thoughts we'd rather avoid with mindless distractions. This special performance will be streamed live into your living room, so budge up on that sofa, Barbara – and make us a brew while you're up!

8pm, Wednesday 23 September



### Jack Nicholls

Poet and playwright Jack Nicholls is based in Manchester. His collection, *Meat Songs*, explores humans' relationships with animals. It's been praised for its dark comedy, surrealism and pitch-perfect sense of style. He's been published in *The Poetry Review*, *The Tangerine*, and *The Scores*. A member of the Royal Court Writer's Group, his first play *Harsh Noise Wall* was longlisted for the Bruntwood Prize.

8pm, Friday 25th September

# TIME FOR CHANGE

Lesley Swann on a change of focus and a decision to offer Open Up Magazines for sale



Dragon's Den has been entertaining the nation since 2005. Enthusiastic, inventive, and sometimes deluded entrepreneurs pitch their business ideas to a panel of wealthy 'dragons', in the hope of persuading them to invest big chunks of cash to kickstart or significantly grow their businesses. I love the pitches from proper inventors, like Rupert, with his 'Fold-Ease'. Pop this gadget on the end of your finger and fold a crease in your sheet of paper. Never again suffer the pain of a paper cut or a friction burn. A perfect crease and, as Rupert explains, they come in two sizes. Handy!

Or Peter with his 'Easyxchair', the armchair that turns into a gym. Complete with tiny little treadmill, which had Duncan Bannatyne crying with laughter and expaining "This is quite ridiculous, Peter, I'm sorry, but this is just not going to sell".

For the most part the Dragons dismiss the ridiculous inventions with good humour. They know that you don't have to invent a new product or service to succeed in business. They invest their cash in businesses with tried and tested products and services, presented by well prepared and capable contestants, who 'know their numbers'.

It's a shame that we might be encouraged to believe that you need to have an original idea to be a successful entrepreneur. In my experience this is certainly not true.

Way back in 2007 I had been working as a painter and decorator for a few years and had advertised my business in the local magazine (The Chorlton Directory). The advertising worked really well for me, and when the directory stopped publishing, lots of local tradespeople, including me, really missed it. There was talk of some of us clubbing together to pay for a folded A3 leaflet with adverts for all of us, but it didn't happen. What did happen, was that I was encouraged and supported to start a magazine. I knew there was a need, I fancied a change of direction and I do love a challenge.

My partner Sam and I spent six weeks learning to use Adobe InDesign, I did a lot of research, sent a lot of emails and made many phone calls. I contacted community groups and campaigns, inviting them to send me articles and information to include. I wanted the magazine to be interesting to read as well as an effective way for local businesses to advertise. The learning curve was very steep!

We launched our first magazine (Community Index Chorlton) in April 2008. We printed 2,500 copies and I delivered most of them myself. We got so much positive feedback from readers and advertisers, and grew steadily despite the challenging financial circumstances.

The business has changed and evolved from those early days. I did pretty much

everything myself for the first four years. We became a limited company and re-branded as Open Up Magazines. We have a fabulous team of editors - Linsey and Deborah - and regular volunteer writers, and we now print and distribute 20,000 copies across Chorlton and South Manchester.

I'm now living in Leeds with Sam, and my time and energy is spent on our online vintage business. I've also recently opened another Etsy shop selling houseplant cuttings, vintage planters and books. My life and focus has changed and it feels like the right time to move on.

So, for all of you who would love the challenge of owning and running your own business, there's no need to go on Dragon's Den or invent a new gadget. Open Up Magazines is for sale!

You'll need to be based in South Manchester, have bags of enthusiasm and be keen to continue to develop this successful and profitable enterprise into the future.

I'm in no great hurry to sell, and we will continue to publish until I find the right buyer. If you are interested in this opportunity, please do get in touch.

**Lesley Swann**  
[lesley@openupmagazines.co.uk](mailto:lesley@openupmagazines.co.uk)  
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# OKECHUKWU NZELU

The award-winning writer talks to Deborah Grace, ahead of his virtual appearance at Chorlton Book Festival in September

Okechukwu Nzelu was in the middle of a tour to promote his award-winning debut novel *The Private Joys of Nnenna Maloney* when lockdown struck.

"I've done some nice events online with other writers and organisations since then, though. I try to look on the bright side of things because I've had some great experiences."

Even over the phone, Okey radiates warmth, optimism and joy – qualities which also illuminate the pages of his much-acclaimed, young adult novel. In *Nnenna*, his bookish, sensitive teenager exploring her Nigerian heritage while navigating the often turbulent waters of young adulthood, Okey has created a protagonist who is both convincing and hugely affecting. As she begins to ask questions about the father she has never met, we see Nnenna's once close and loving relationship with her white, single mother, Joanie, becoming increasingly strained.

"I really wanted to write about what it is to be a black, British person. And also, what that means for someone like Nnenna, who has never met her Nigerian father and doesn't have a connection with that part of her life.

"So, for instance, when Maurice (*Nnenna's father*) and Joanie are dating, Maurice explains that his parents told him he'd have to work twice as hard to get half as much as white people. No one has had that conversation with Nnenna, because there's no one in her family who can speak to that

experience. She's having to figure it all out for herself, which is an incredibly difficult thing to do."

"I think that in a broader sense Nnenna's journey does reflect my own. My parents came here in the eighties and had me and my brothers here, so English is my first language and my formal education was not Igbo. I didn't learn black British history at school. That's something I had to work out for myself and I think that's something pretty much every black person can relate to."

With a second novel due out in spring 2022, Okey is still somehow managing to balance his role as writer with a demanding teaching career, a feat which, he admits, has often involved "insane" working hours and little sleep. Fortunately for Okey, who teaches English at The Manchester Grammar School, where he himself was a pupil, he has found in education – as in writing – a genuine vocation.

"I absolutely love teaching. There's nothing like sharing literature that you are really passionate about with people who have never seen it before."

What is it like having your students read your work? And how do they respond to you as an author?

"It's kind of like having someone read your diary. Having those two worlds collide is the most surreal thing, especially because parts of the novel are about sex and things, so my sixth



Photo © Martin Glackin

formers were – 'Oh I thought this was really funny!'

"It's the most bizarre experience but it's wonderful that they have made the effort to read the book. They've been lovely; really positive about it."

Okey's second novel is currently at the editing stage – and he's reluctant to give too much away.

"I'm doing something that's tonally different from the first book, but with very similar concerns. It's not a sequel – the characters are different – so I'm trying something new. It's scary, but also exciting. And it's very much a work in progress."

In the meantime, Okey is preparing for his appearance at Chorlton Book Festival which runs (online) from 20–25 September.

"Obviously it's sad that these events aren't happening in person, because I love literature festivals. The nice thing about it being online is that it opens up access to people who might not have been able to attend. I'm thinking about the positives and very much looking forward to it."

*Okechukwu Nzelu will be online at Chorlton Book Festival:*

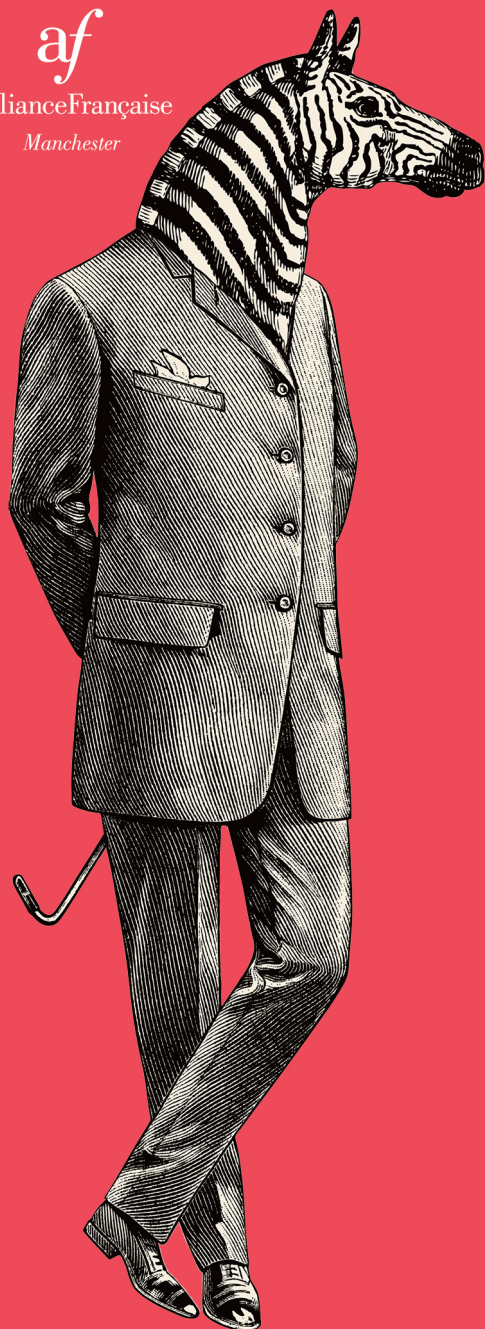
*6.30pm on Sunday 20 September*

*Find out how to be there (it's free), at [chorltonbookfestival.co.uk](http://chorltonbookfestival.co.uk)*

*See page 16 for full festival listings.*



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## A NEW CHAPTER

Jolene Sheehan

There are so many stories and lessons we remember, share and then gather together. *Stories of Our Lives* is a community led, inter-generational project to record those stories.

It began in partnership with Chorlton Good Neighbours, with groups meeting at St Ninians over coffee and relaxed, guided chats. People shared their stories, while writers made notes. The resulting book, published in partnership with Peter Topping, brought joy not only to those involved, but also to a wider readership.

This year, we set about creating a second book, holding sessions at St Ninians in January and February. March's social distancing measures then stopped us in our tracks. Undaunted and determined to carry on, we re-established the group online. Our first efforts using Zoom led to great hilarity, but we managed to work out the new technology, though we all agreed that it seemed a bit strangely futuristic at first. With a little practice everything turned out to be simpler than we first thought. Our group has formed strong bonds over the months, 'meeting' regularly as a way of staying connected.

"The connection here really helps bring us all together," says one participant. "We can see each other and share. It's lovely to have that one-to-one time together and have a proper catch up. It's wonderful! I was unaware of how good this technology could be."

"We are locked down, but also opening up by getting to know a new group of people through this experience," says another. "It is fascinating to hear the different stories which have emerged and I have felt energised after the meetings."

"I've enjoyed the challenge presented by the need to embrace new IT skills. The imaginative topics stimulate a lot of feelings and ideas."

Since March, we have 'met' online regularly, all the time chatting and then writing about an increasing number of themes. The whole thing has been a wonderful way of keeping connected and continuing our new-found combined creativity.

Massive thanks to all those who have contributed their presence, writing and stories so far, with a special thanks goes to Margaret Kendall, our wonderful editor.

[storiesofourlivesnow.org](http://storiesofourlivesnow.org)

# ROOTING FOR BUSINESS

Lesley Swann on anxiety, dolphins, foxes and a rooted recovery

At the end of March my anxiety levels had dialled right up to 11. I didn't need to be told to stay at home, like so many others, I was too frightened to leave the house.

As Lockdown continued, and life slowly settled into a new routine, things did improve for me. I discovered a thing or two about what's important, and how I'd like to re-focus my attention.

Like re-discovering that I love my houseplants. I really do *love* them. The Swiss cheese plant (*Monstera Deliciosa*) in the corner of my living room has unfurled six new leaves since the start of lockdown. He is destined to be a very big cheese indeed.



My string of hearts (*Ceropegia Woodii*) just gets longer and longer. And more and more thoroughly tangled!

The Chinese money plant (*Pilea Peperomioides*) put on an impressive growth spurt during the lovely bright and sunny early lockdown weather. So many *Pilea* babies or 'pups' as they are called have been born, that I was able to pot up eight new plants from the original. One plant becomes eight. Amazing!

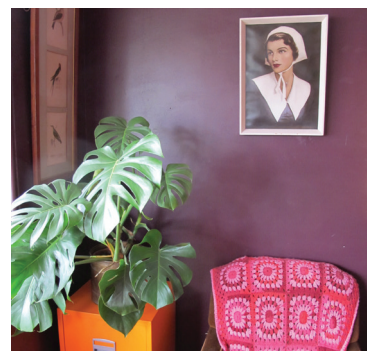
I also managed to acquire, the very fashionable and completely adorable string of dolphins (*Curio peregrinus*). This is a succulent with dolphin shaped leaves. How fabulous is that?

I tried my hand at propagation; which for most of my houseplants is as simple as cutting off a stem and popping it in a jar of water. Roots grow quickly!

As summer arrived, and more plant material than I have space for - I set up an Etsy shop to sell rooted and unrooted cuttings, vintage planters and pots, and vintage books about houseplants. It's a tiny, narrowly focused business, running alongside my homewares shop DigVintageStuff. I love it, and hopefully it will grow, slowly and steadily.

The mindful attention and nurturing of these resilient plants has made an unbearable situation more manageable. And it turns out I wasn't the only one adapting their business to the new circumstances.

Stewart Hutcheon and David Dodsworth run The Curious Fox - a card, gift and interiors shop on Beech Road in Chorlton. During lockdown they turned the yard space at the back



into a small outdoor garden shop. "We've only been selling plants for a few weeks and have been amazed at how popular houseplants in particular have been. Summertime is usually a fairly quiet time for us, but because of Covid, people aren't away on holiday and seem to be spending more money in local shops.

"We've always been interested in plants and gardening, so if someone is buying a plant we try as much as possible to give advice on watering, light requirements and pet safety etc. On the whole, we are having quite a good summer, given the circumstances, and we are both enjoying being back in the shop!"

Why not see for yourself?

Visit Stewart and David at The Curious Fox and buy a plant or three. While you're about it, pop into other lovely Chorlton independents.

Now is the time to support your local independent businesses. Keeping money circulating in our local economy is vital for recovery. Let's root for business.

**Lesley Swann**

[etsy.com/uk/shop/DigVintageStuff](https://etsy.com/uk/shop/DigVintageStuff)  
[etsy.com/uk/shop/DigPlants](https://etsy.com/uk/shop/DigPlants)





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Our members are doing all they can to keep everyone safe. It's been tough, but we're still smiling (mostly). We'd like to thank all our valued customers for sticking with us. We thank you for your patient queueing, your good nature, your selflessness and all the errands and shopping you've been doing for others.

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**Want to pay it forward?** Give a Chorlton Gift voucher, redeemable at: Barbakan; Bowling Green; Celebration; Chorlton Bookshop; Chorlton Fireworks; Creative Recycling, Croma; Epicerie Ludo; Globe Restaurant; House of Bystander; Lead Station; Love Lucy Boutique; Lush Brownies; Reach Out to the Community and Unicorn.

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## LEADING EDGE

The Edge is Manchester's Theatre for Participation and Chorlton's own live entertainment venue. It provides the best small-scale professional theatre, comedy and music with an ambitious and inclusive programme of participatory activities for the whole community.

Wow... we certainly didn't see this one coming! I mean, we're used to uncertainty as a sector and we've survived some pretty big challenges, but this one has really hit the creative industries, threatening our very existence. The danger now is that those people who were already having to fight for a seat at the table will be pushed back even further in a desperate attempt to return to 'business as usual'.

But maybe we don't want business as usual.

Maybe from this chaos can emerge a more equal and inclusive industry. It has to. Access to the Arts for everyone, as a basic human right.

The Edge has always worked to open the doors wide, to provide opportunities for people who are otherwise being excluded; but the Black Lives Matter movement, and all the inequalities that this pandemic has exposed, have shown us that we can, and we must, do more. So here's what we've been up to while our (physical) doors have been closed.

We've continued to provide creative activities for learning disabled people, people with mental health, drug and alcohol issues and people at risk of homelessness. We've also begun some new work, working with new partners and shaping a whole new programme of work to start the day we fully reopen.

And here's our plea to you, Chorlton for when we do: support your local theatre, support the work that we are doing and going to do, to try and make things better for everyone.

Join us, become part of The Edge family, get creative and - as our Patron, award-winning actor, Julie Hesmondhalgh says -

"Welcome to the movement of giving a toss about stuff"

Janine Waters  
Artistic Director



# DELIVERING KINDNESS

Lockdown's tough when you're all about connecting people, but that hasn't stopped Barlow Moor Community Association. Linsey Parkinson pays a virtual visit.



One of the best things about Chorlton is the way that people have rallied round to help each other. They moved fast to tackle the immediate lockdown challenges and made a real difference for friends and neighbours hardest hit.

The team at Barlow Moor Community Association, on Merseybank Avenue, is no different, but they're thinking about the longer term too. Becky Elliott is the Strategic Lead for Adult Services at the centre.

"We've always been about making connections between people - the exact opposite of social distancing, in fact - so we've had to think carefully and creatively about how we deliver our services. Lockdown presented us with new challenges, but also with more need.

"Keeping in touch with our community is vitally important for so many reasons. We've set up a remote befriending service, using phones, email, video calls, texts and social media. We've done lots of safely-distanced Cake and Conversation doorstep visits to older people too.

"We've also been helping people keep busy, dropping off free activity packs and goody bags: everything from art materials to mini kitchen garden kits and safe summer accessories like sunhats. Children have made gorgeous, colourful postcards, which we've been

posting to make people smile.

"We've had to rely on digital channels and social media a bit more than we'd like, as that in itself presents problems. Our social media activity and following has really spiked, but we're very much aware that many people don't have internet access. Lockdown has been particularly hard on those who are digitally excluded: how do you home educate your children without access to a computer? In the broader scheme of things, that's a relatively small amount of money, but it might as well be a fortune. It can certainly be very costly in terms of potential damage to a child's educational attainment."

To address this, the centre raised funds to provide tablets and internet access for some local residents, making a huge difference to their quality of life under lockdown.

"When this is over, we don't imagine people will simply go about their business in the same way as they did before. We focus on helping them adjust to the new normal - whatever that may be. That will involve them re-engaging with services and their community, re-establishing relationships, building confidence and resilience. We'll be there for them.

"Tackling digital exclusion is a huge priority for us, especially for older people. We think more services, like

GP and other appointments, will be delivered digitally in the future. We'll do what we can to make sure everyone can take part in that.

"We'll offer intensive support to address individual needs and the impact of Covid, such as poor mental health, isolation and loneliness. We'll also offer advice and guidance on more tangible issues such as redundancy rights, unemployment, benefits help and jobseeking.

"We're hoping to build up numbers, events and activities, subject to government restrictions. New provision will include more focused work around ageing better, as well as activities such as yoga, dance and mindfulness sessions. We may even set up fitness boot camps on the playing fields!

We have such an amazing team of volunteers here - I sometimes think we're unstoppable - we certainly try to be!"

*Barlow Moor Community Association services are open to all, not only Merseybank residents. If they can help you - or you can help them - get in touch.*

*Barlow Moor Community Association  
23 Merseybank Ave  
Manchester M21 7NT  
0161 446 4805  
bmcaltd.co.uk*

# BOOKS

## Queenie

by Candice Carty-Williams

*Sometimes I feel frantic. And I feel like everything has just spun out of control, out of my hands?*

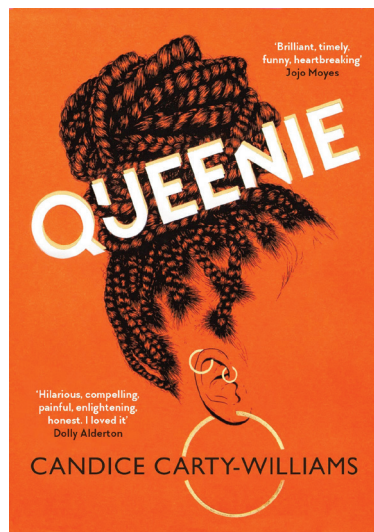
Earlier this year, Candice Carty-Williams became the first black author to win Book of the Year at the British Book Awards for *Queenie*. The critically acclaimed novel follows Queenie Jenkins as she tries to navigate her way in the world as a 25-year-old Jamaican British woman living in London. *Queenie* has frequently been compared to the *Bridget Jones* series, but this feels like an injustice to a novel that is about more than relationships and heartbreaks. Carty-Williams's debut engages with political and social issues, providing important commentary on everyday racism and exploring the implications of being a black woman in London. The novel offers a fresh and

much-needed perspective on modern life and provides honest meditation upon a generosity of subjects including modern dating, family, friendship, and mental health.

Through the eyes of Queenie, Carty-Williams explores both the highs and lows of life. Queenie is a complex character who has a brilliant sense of humour and remarkable endurance despite the many hardships she faces. Whilst the novel is multifaceted, at its heart it is about growth and the strength it takes gradually to overcome low self-esteem to arrive at a place of self-acceptance.

Carty-Williams has achieved an entertaining and accessible debut novel that is an essential read. With a television drama series confirmed, it will be interesting to see how Carty-Williams adapts best-selling *Queenie* for the screen.

Review by Laura Swain



## The Private Joys of Nnenna Maloney

by Okechukwu Nzelu

*How do you begin to find yourself when you only know half of who you are?*

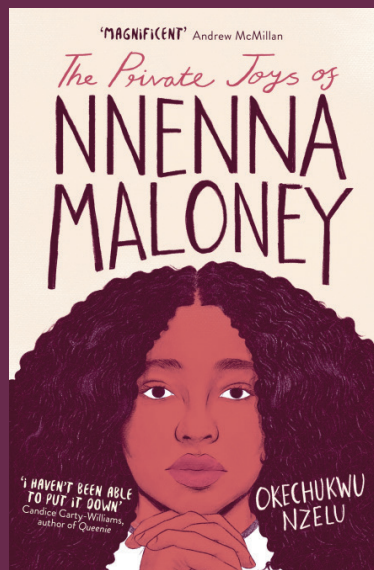
There are many moments of joy - and pathos - in Okechukwu Nzelu's touchingly written debut novel about a young woman's coming of age in modern-day Manchester.

As she approaches her 17th birthday, Nnenna Maloney longs to connect with her Igbo-Nigerian culture. Her parents, Maurice, a Nigerian graduate, and Joanie a white, British woman, fell in love while studying at Cambridge in 1992, but Nnenna has never met her father and Joanie refuses to discuss him. Isolated and confused, Nnenna craves validation, often wondering if she's a "bad, black person" or "not really black" when, for instance, she fails to call out a racist remark.

Moving between past and present, the narrative introduces a cast of characters who, like Nnenna, are groping their way along the painful path to self-realisation. Joanie is heart-broken at the idea of her only child growing up and abandoning her. Jonathan, Joanie's gay friend from uni days, struggles to reconcile his sexuality with the teachings of his church.

While dealing with the big issues, Nzelu has a light touch and there are moments of pure comedy. Having first-time sex with her boyfriend in the adult magazine section of a friend's father's shop, Nnenna's thoughts turn wistfully to Mr Darcy and Eliza Bennett. The overall tone is one of optimism. This is a novel where everyone - including the grown-ups - gets the chance to grow up!

Review by Deborah Grace







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# CLOSE QUARTERS

**Andrew Simpson** finds life inside one of Chorlton's grand, lost houses a bit of a squash and a squeeze - for some of the inhabitants, at least.



I have come to know a lot about Mr Bryce Smith, who lived at Rye Bank on Edge Lane. Described as a 'calico printer', he owned a prestigious warehouse on Nicholas Street (now part of Manchester's Chinatown) and a factory in Whalley, near Blackburn.

I doubt I would ever have gone looking for him if Chris Griffiths hadn't shown me an inventory of the contents of Smith's house, made shortly after his death in 1892.

Leather-bound and filling over 57 foolscap pages, the inventory offers insight into just what a wealthy Victorian family accumulated in their home. The list of Mr. Smith's library covered 21 pages; his collection of oil paintings, water colour drawings and engravings another three; his silver and plated articles filled two more. And that is just what caught my eye, leaving me to explore the full twelve rooms, along with the lists of linen, glass, and china.

I knew of the existence of Rye Bank but little of its occupiers. The house stood in extensive grounds, on the western corner of Edge Lane and Ryebank Road. Just when the family moved in is a little unclear, but they can be found in the 1871 Rate Books. Rye Bank had an annual rateable value of £229, which marked it off as the largest property on this bit of Edge Lane.

Bryce Smith was a wealthy man: he left £162,622 on his death and his warehouse and offices - still there on Nicholas Street - bear witness to his financial standing.

His papers are in the Lancashire County Archive and contain, among other things, the *Bill of Quantities for the Erection of a Warehouse in Nicholas Street, Manchester for Bryce Smith Esq* in August 1873.

And befitting all this wealth, Mr Smith employed an army of servants to tend to the house and administer to his family. In 1891 there were seven, which may seem a lot, but there were eight members of the family, including six children, aged from 26 years to just four.

There were twelve rooms to maintain, including a day and night nursery, a library, umpteen bedrooms, and the usual dining, drawing and breakfast rooms.

In time, I think, I will explore the lives of the servants, but for now I shall just record that they were, Ellen Owen, 30, from Wales, Mary Davies, 28, from Buckley in Cheshire; Maria Holmes, 30, from Staffordshire; Martha Massey,

36, and Elizabeth Satter, 17, both from Yorkshire; Annie Haboh, 22, from Staffordshire, and the cook, Annie Roberts, aged 31.

On a page of the inventory, headed 'Servants Room' are listed two 'iron French Bedsteads, each with straw paillasso, feather beds, bolster and pillows.'

Only two? Even if the seven had shared beds, there don't seem to be enough to go around! There is no record of a second servants' room, nor of any other alternative accommodation. So perhaps, then, they did all share this one, sparsely furnished room, leaving the family to inhabit the remaining eleven.

*Pictures; Bryce Smith (date unknown)*

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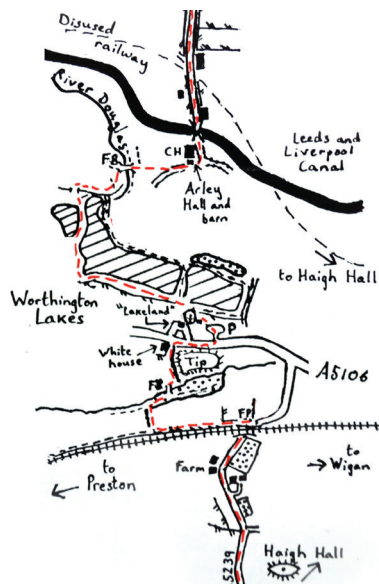
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## WALKING THE LINE

**Cath Dyson** is walking all the way around the outer boundary of Greater Manchester. This time, she's heading from Appley Bridge, up to Blackrod, via the Lakes!

It is so good to be back walking the line after four months off. I know that, like me, many of you have been exploring closer to home during lockdown. I've seen you walking along the river, in Fletcher Moss, Longford Park and on the canal. We are all very lucky to have these riches on our doorsteps, but it has been wonderful to stretch my legs, go further afield and get back to Wigan to continue our journey on the GM Boundary Walk.

The hills of the West Pennines are still in the distance, but coming closer as we continue north west out of Wigan and into Bolton along the boundary with Lancashire.

Our route is on footpaths across wheat fields, through several lovely small woods, along tracks around Worthington Lakes and across Wigan Golf Course. We've the usual smattering of roads, but nothing too grim.

We did this this 9-mile stretch in one day's walking. If you want to follow in our footsteps, the route, in summary, is Appley Bridge > Shevington Vale > cross the M6 > Standish Hall > Standish > Worthington Lakes > Arley Woods >

Wigan Golf Course > across the Leeds Liverpool canal > 'Little Scotland' > Blackrod.

I think this is the best day yet - or maybe I was just glad to be somewhere different! Such pretty woodland in Elnup Woods in Wigan and Arley Wood in Bolton. Arley Wood would be worth a visit on its own, as it offers a lovely circular walk, taking in the Leeds Liverpool canal and the beautiful grounds of Wigan Golf course. But the gems of the walk are Worthington Lakes, between Standish and Blackrod.

The lakes are actually three reservoirs - Worthington, Arley and Adlington - built in the 1860s to provide clean water to the growing population of Wigan. They're fed by a diverted river Douglas, whose source is on the soon-to-be-visited Rivington Moor, above Horwich. The lakes are separated from each other by dams, which you can walk across, giving fantastic views of the lakes to both your north and south. The site is owned by United Utilities and is part of a 50-acre country park, with a nature reserve, footpaths and tracks.

Getting there and back: Appley Bridge

and Blackrod can both be accessed by direct trains from Manchester.

Map illustration © Graham Phythian, from *The Greater Manchester Boundary Walk* (Sigma, 1992), reproduced with kind permission from the author (map details may have changed since publication). Pictures by Cath Dyson.

Cath co-organises guided walks and navigation training. [mapandcompass.wix.com/mapandcompass](http://mapandcompass.wix.com/mapandcompass)







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# GARDEN NOTES

**Katherine Watson** has been busy, making and bringing up lots and lots of babies

Plants are very clever things. They find the most inventive ways to multiply without even moving from a given spot. My Euphorbias and Verbena manage to set seed all over the place, supplying me with new little plants that I greedily pluck out and pot on.

The euphorbia Mellifera almost spits out its offspring, casting them far and wide with little pops on hot days. The foxgloves, Alchemilla mollis and Erigeron also spawn copiously with the latter two wedging themselves in tiny cracks and crevices. I have a lot of fluffy grasses that also manage to spread themselves around - less welcome because they are fiddly to get out of the gravel and look untidy, but prolific they most certainly are.

For other plants, the parts used for reproduction also store the food reserves needed for growth. Accidentally leave a potato in the ground one year, and it will form new plants the next.

Crocosmia (pictured) is almost impossible to see off with neglect. Its corms multiply, forming tight little clusters that can be dug up, separated - even cut up - and they'll keep producing luxuriant, strappy growth for as long as you let them.

My neighbour gave me three sections of her lovely light blue bearded iris (looks a lot like 'Jane Phillips' but she wasn't sure of the variety). This plant has a swollen rhizome that sits just proud of the soil to bake in the sun: simply break it up to produce new plants.

One of the easiest plants I've propagated this year is Cyperus involucratus - the umbrella plant. My friend Andrew told me how to do this: simply cut a stem, turn it upside-down and put it in water. Yes, it feels counter-intuitive to put the leafy bit in the water but, miraculously, after a few days, the bit where the leaves converge produces lots of lovely white roots. Pop it in a pot, snip the stem and you now have a little umbrella plant.

These are all the easy ones, but if you fancy it, you could try your hand at some other propagation techniques that are quite good fun.

Layering is one that has always fascinated me. Plants like blackberries and loganberries send out long shoots that make contact with the soil and will reproduce vegetatively this way. If you want a few more plants, just pull shoots (still attached) down to the ground and plant them in a little hole (you'll need to pin them in position). When you see

new growth, you can cut them away from the parent and transplant them - magic!

In autumn, plant hormone levels are high, so they should root and grow well. There are lots of plants you can duplicate by taking 'semi-ripe' cuttings in September/October: try fuchsia, lavender, penstemon, salvia and lots of herbs like thyme, rosemary and lemon verbena.

It's very easy - cut upright, non-flowering stems from the plants, trim them down a bit, take off a few of the leaves and then put them around the edge of a plastic pot in well-drained compost. If you can't bring them under cover, tie a supported plastic bag to the top of the pot and check them every few days for build up of condensation, giving them a light spray with water if they need it.

Give it a go! Everyone loves a free plant or six.

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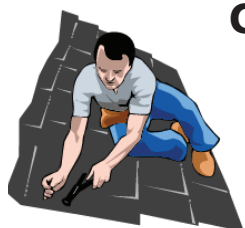
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