

THE PAPER BIRDS PLATINUM JUBILEE PROJECT an Arts & Wellbeing Programme



THE WORDSMITHS Creative Writing & Visual Art

Facilitated by Julie McKiernan & Lisa Michelle Johnson



Elaine Aucott

Elaine lives in Tyldesley and joined the Wordsmiths Creative Writing group as a novice writer in 2021. She struggles to find inspiration on her own but feels stimulated by the weekly workshop prompts. She has been particularly inspired by this project because she likes exploring old buildings and imagining the lives lived within them, especially those of local people in the past.

Loom Poem

My poem is the thoughts of a mill worker who aspires to escape the day-to-day drudge and become a Cotton Queen. The words were printed using individual letters and an ink pad onto cotton fabric strips. These are the weft woven between the warp made from string on a cardboard frame to represent a weaving loom. The lettering has been deliberately aged and faded to give the appearance of an old document. Discovered by chance, perhaps, in an office cupboard by workmen when the mill was cleared out after it stopped operating.

Janet Critchley

Janet is a cardiographer at the Royal Bolton Hospital. She has a very busy lifestyle and five grandchildren but grabs some relaxation time with the Wordsmiths. She enjoyed writing a monologue for the Healthy Arts project, *A Year on Zoom* and the Streets Ahead project, *King Street Presents*, and was delighted to have a poem published in *Beyond the Storm*, one of 100 entries about Covid. None of this would have been possible without the Wordsmiths!

The Mayor and Mayoress

Since visiting Leigh Spinners Mill, I have been fascinated with the Engine Room. I took numerous photos of the Mayor and Mayoress engines and wanted to find a way to personify them but found it more difficult than I expected! I wanted to say so much about the 'married' couple but only had a few words in which to say it. However, a new wave of inspiration came from a hessian bag and a ball of cotton wool!

Louise Courtney

Louise grew up in Ireland with dreams of a common market, and studied languages and politics to add her voice to that mix. Having worked in education policy in Germany and London, life's journey brought her to a hill in Tyldesley where career gave way to the parenting and part-time pick-and-mix (the bread-and-butter equivalent of these nuclear times). She writes, paints, plants and creates. As she says: "No market. But still a commoner at heart."

Paper Threads and Cotton Birds

This triptych is a playful homage to the memory of Violet Lord, a true paper bird, who bequeathed her poetry notebook to Tyldesley Creative Writers. Violet lived in the same house in Tyldesley for all but three of her 94 years, but her life was far from static. She was well known and loved by all with whom she engaged through her writing, her art and the many hobbies she enjoyed. The 3 panels of the triptych pick out some of her later recurring themes of nostalgia for a natural past, sadness at the isolation of the modern age, and humour at the speed and contradictions of the world around her. Three washing lines (Violet certainly liked to hang out washing) run through each panel, breaking the frames into 12 seasonal snapshots.

Cotton and Rat Twixt Mill and Vat

This piece is an examination of how non-human life forms have suffered discrimination through the distorted lens of history. Cotton has been seen as a clean, valuable, progressive, white substance; though its manufacture has transformed landscapes to deserts, and polluted lakes and lungs in equal measure. Rats, now exonerated for the part they were accused of playing in the bubonic plague, are still universally reviled, despite their preference to live in peace, and away from humans. The poem is written as a Vilanelle, a restrictive and repetitive form of poetry in which the writer is forced to repeat the lines in the first stanza elsewhere in the poem, and the last words of other lines in subsequent lines. I have twisted the format slightly, to reflect the mutations undergone by the rat, and the distorted legacy of the cotton mills.

Sharon Godiff-Pulido

Sharon has always enjoyed telling stories but she struggled with her spelling and grammar so joined the Wordsmiths Creative Writing group which boosted her confidence. She has been involved in previous Healthy Arts projects and has had two pieces included in anthologies. She even received a certificate for being a finalist in the 2022 Oxford International Writing Competition. She has started her first book but needs a kick to finish it!

The Round Window a Lens on Leigh

Most of the windows in The Spinners Mill are opaque so as not to distract the workers but there is a beautiful round window on the top floor which is clearly not just for allowing light into the mill. It must have been intended to be looked through. For over a hundred years folk have climbed the stairs and been rewarded with the changing views through its frame. This view inspired my poem.

Stanley's Story

Stanley is a permanent ghostly resident of the Spinners Mill. He wields his clip board like a mighty sword. Anything he doesn't agree with mysteriously goes missing or gets damaged. Luckily, he is all in favour of the Paper Birds project and is indeed happy to guide you round this stunning exhibition.

This piece is situated in The Millage Canteen on Floor 2.

'Stanley in the Lift' created by Julie McKiernan

"How do, I'm Stanley. See my clipboard. Nowt comes in here without it gets signed. Folk that toiled tears and sweat at Mill, have left a tiny part of themselves behind.

Me, my whole life was Spinner's Mill (and the secret is) I'm here still.

The others long gone. I loiter in the lift. Through the doors and walls, I can drift."

Rachel Davies

Rachel has been a member of the Wordsmiths Creative Writing group for a number of years now, specialising in short stories. She has also had a non-fiction piece published in the anthology, *Unchain Your Inner Warrior*. With this project she wanted an opportunity to write more experimentally and let her inner creativity out!

Cotton Queen Nest

The history of the Cotton Queens piqued my interest. I wanted to create a crown to represent cotton's royalty that will ultimately be displayed outside and become part of the garden area. The idea originated from thinking about the poorer workers as sparrows, some of whom would have the opportunity to blossom into a more exotic bird as a Cotton Queen. It's also a tribute to our late Queen Elizabeth II.

Kevin Lowe

Kevin is a self-taught 'person who fastens bits of wood to other bits of wood'. He attempts to reuse reclaimed wood to make objects that are both functional and beautiful. His interest in the project was sparked by the history that lies in the wood of the Mill, and of the people who walked there.

And Did Those Feet

From the very beginning, I was struck by the fact that when I work at the Mill I'm walking in the footsteps of workers past. Footsteps and feet instantly put me in mind of Blake's *Jerusalem*, and it was a connection I couldn't shake so I leant into it. The piece is made from the floorboards that have 100 years of oil soaked into them, along with pallet wood taken from the factory that is currently still operating in the Mill.

Helen Lloyd

Originally from Wales, Helen lived in Stockport, Surrey and Scotland before settling in Culcheth where her sons grew up. She was a primary school teacher and later worked with children with Dyslexia. She loves reading and, after retiring, decided to join the Paperback Writers. Through this group she has been involved in many projects and has been delighted to have her work included in local collections.

A Rat's Tale

On our first tour, learning of the activity there would have been in the busy mill, I couldn't help imagining the unseen population that would flourish in such an environment. Most people have a negative reaction to rats but my research unearthed fascinating facts and I came to have a new respect for the species! Here 'Norburt' gives us his opinion.

Many thanks to Jan Gowans for kindly making and donating the rats.

Cotton Queens

At the start of the project, we learned of the difficult working conditions the mill workers endured; hot, dusty and unable to even look out of the windows. The chance then for the girls to enter a competition to be Cotton Queen of the local area and perhaps even the national Queen must have been thrilling. My two acrostic poems contrast the need for management to promote the declining industry with the excitement and opportunities available to the girls.

Many thanks to Julie McKiernan for kindly making the crown and gown.

Many thanks to 'Archives Wigan & Leigh' for kind permission to use copies of photographs and news articles.

Mary Ann

We experimented with sound poems in our workshops. Here Mary Ann, a traditional mill worker, is entrapped by the loud and ceaseless sounds of her long working day.

NB 'Ends' and 'Picks' were slang terms for warp and weft.

Jan Porteous

Jan is a retired teacher of Modern Languages. After more than 30 years teaching in local schools, she now enjoys having more time to spend with family and friends. Jan's interests include reading, walking, photography and gardening. She also loves to travel, especially to France. A member of Paperback Writers since 2020, Jan has found a new interest in creative writing, a pursuit which allows her to indulge in her love of words.

Proud Leigh Spinners

The loom idea came from a Paper Birds workshop and seemed very appropriate for the subject matter. The colours chosen were inspired by a photograph which I took of the mill. I wrote the words, imagining those employees who must have had pride in their jobs, despite the difficult conditions. I thought that these same people would have felt a strong bond with the community of cotton mill workers. I have hand-stitched some of the lines. Others have been produced on a machine or vinyl printed with the kind assistance of Joanne from *Chic, Ribbon and Scroll* in Tyldesley.

Window Pains

On a visit to the mill, I was shown the vast space where the looms would have been. I saw that the windows could never be opened. It was explained that this was in order to help keep the air inside hot and humid, conditions needed to prevent the cotton from breaking. I noticed immediately that the glass was frosted as well. I imagined a young woman working at the looms, thinking of what was going on outside, on the other side of the windows. I pictured her wishing she was in the outdoors, breathing fresh air. I have used tracing paper to mimic the cloudy glass and miniature bobbins for the window latches. Please take a look behind the windows, which represent the four seasons of the year, and see what the young woman was thinking.

Pilgrims

I was fascinated to learn that Peregrine Falcons have made a home at Leigh Spinners Mill and that they return here every year to nest and raise their young. I wrote this acrostic poem as a tribute to these magnificent creatures.

Alejandro Monteagudo

Alejandro is a Wordsmiths writer with a bachelor's degree in Criminology who is based near the canals of Leigh. His science fiction stories have appeared in *The Coffee Stop Collection* and he has published Criminology essays in *Omnia*. His stories bring together his love of technology and psychology with a humorous twist.

A Melodrama

This project seeks to explore some of the hidden pain of those that lived at a time when the terms "divorce" and "single mother" carried the weight of sin with them.

Corrie Shelley

Corrie has been writing and performing since 2016 after taking a 30-year break from music. She has released 3 self-penned albums and is currently working on a Mining Project: *Mines, Memories and Music*, interviewing former miners and penning individual songs based on these interviews. She writes from the heart and doesn't shy away from any subject matter, with every song having a personal meaning to them and her voice transports you through the ages right up to the present day.

The Mill

The Mill was originally written as a song but was transferred to poetry. The poem describes the journey through the mill of a drop of water and the power contained within, as it fuels the steam engine to power the looms and machinery, which result in the fine cloth before returning to the lodge and repeating the cycle.