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Foreword

I have lived in Southampton for over seven years now, and since I arrived I have been fascinated by its long history of migration as a port city. Migration is the thread that runs through my academic research as a historian, my creative writing as a novelist and poet, and through the story of my family. Archives have been a particularly fertile source of inspiration for me as a writer: the omissions and silences that exist in archives in relation to migrant communities are spaces where we have to use imagination and empathy in order to piece together the fragments of the stories that have been preserved. As Southampton Libraries' first Writer in Residence, I wanted to explore the City Archives, housed in our iconic 1930s Civic Centre alongside the Central Library, and use its records as writing prompts with a group of creative writers, focusing particularly on records on the migration stories of Southampton.

So began So:Write Stories, a creative writing group, which met fortnightly in the beautiful Central Library Seminar Room between January – July 2018. Over six months, supported and guided by City Archivist Joanne Smith's invaluable knowledge and expertise, we have worked with a range of sources in relation to three main historical areas: interviews with Polish and African Caribbean inhabitants of the city conducted by the Oral History Unit between 1980 and 2008; the forced movement caused by evacuation and the Blitz in Southampton during the Second World War; and the experiences of the refugees who arrived from the remote volcanic island of Tristan de Cunha in the 1960s. We have looked at handwritten diaries, oral histories, photographs, newspaper articles. We have also undertaken excursions to the City Archives, the Local History Centre, and to see *The Shadow Factory* play and installation at Nuffield Southampton Theatres City.

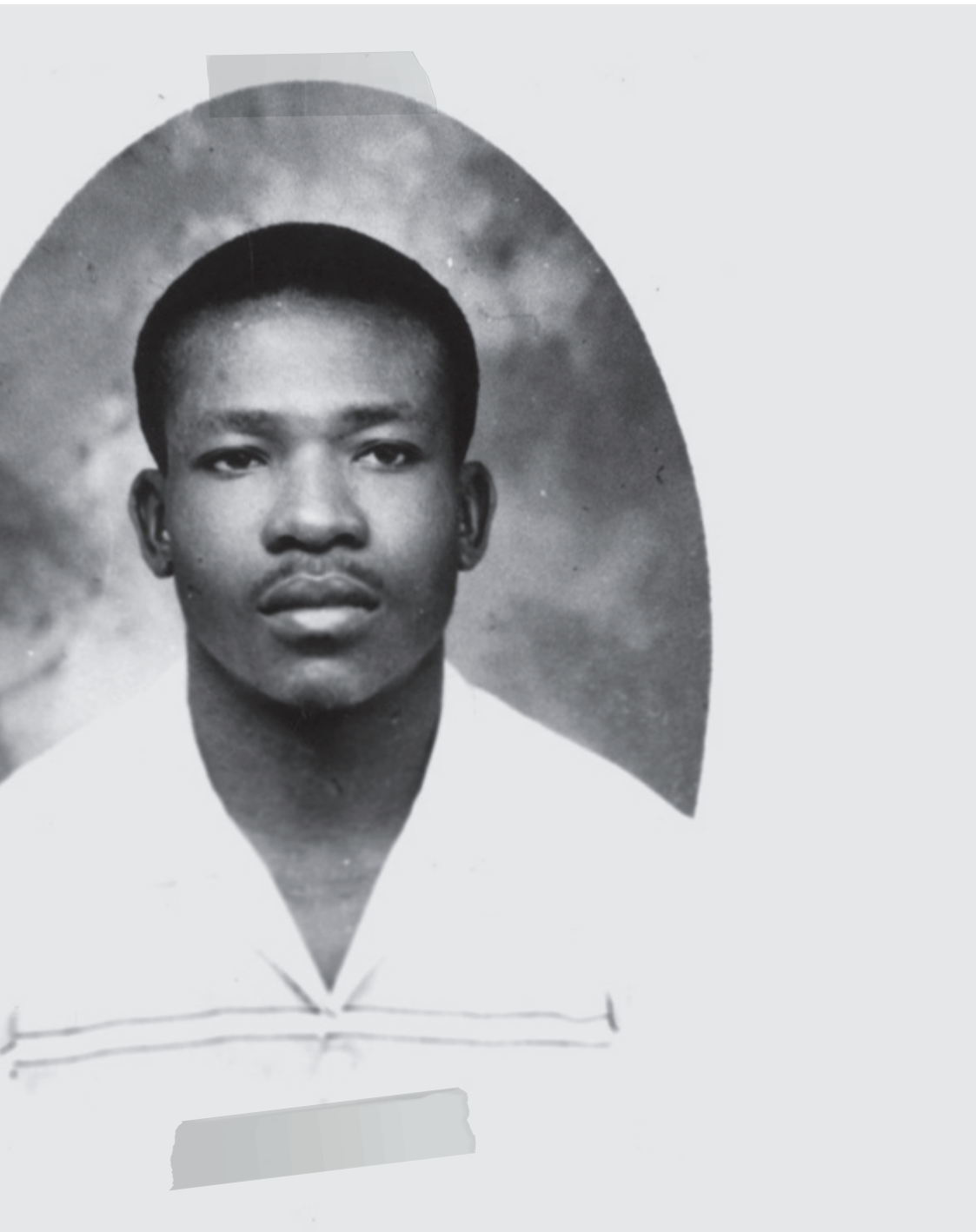
We have all greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet together to explore migration and the way it has impacted everyday lives in Southampton. Examining archives in the depth needed for creative writing resulted in a very intimate, embodied connection to the people whose stories we worked with. One of the writers reflected: "It is very easy to look at people as a 'group' with one identity – 'refugee' – 'migrant'. This currently happens in the media and is very lazy. It has been wonderful to look at these people as individuals, to understand what brought them – or drove them – to another country far from home, to appreciate the massive effort they made to get here, to adapt their lives, to acknowledge what

they have, and, most of all, the immense courage it takes to make such radical changes, even in times of peace. It is only through the voices of the individuals that we can begin to understand the whole." As this anthology demonstrates, writing empathetically from archival material can produce new stories of great power, depth, humanity and diversity, mirroring the very sources that inspired them.

Being based at the Central Library over the course of my residency has also led me to a greater appreciation of the library as a space of beauty and tranquillity which possesses a unique, almost numinous atmosphere. Like Southampton itself, it is a space of sanctuary and refuge, open to all. In the final couple of months of my residency, I explored the City Archives' holdings on Southampton's libraries: research which threw up delightful surprises, such as a Librarians' photograph album from the 1920s and 1930s, lists of books added to the libraries dating back to 1900, and plans for the 1990s refurbishment of Central Library. From this research led I wrote the set of poems I have included at the end of the anthology, poems which express my love and gratitude for the treasures that are our public libraries.

Nazneen Ahmed

Writer in Residence, Southampton Libraries,
June 2017 - July 2018



Migrant Voices

In preparation for the So:Write Stories project, in the autumn of 2017 I spent time at the Southampton City Archives gathering source materials from its Oral History Unit holdings. The council's Oral History Unit had a team of paid, professionally trained historians who, between 1983 and 2008, went about Southampton with one simple and hugely important aim: collecting stories.

The Unit was committed, from the very start, to collecting diverse stories. It covered a staggering breadth of experiences and topics: from place-based projects looking at Woolston and other areas of the city, to the experiences of female dockworkers, to the stories of South Asian women. It captured a city in all its multiplicity, its rapid demographic, economic changes, its resilience and heart. It reached far back beyond the time it existed, far beyond the locality of Southampton, within the life stories of those who were gracious enough to give interviews to those with the sensitivity and passion to listen to and record them.

We worked with some of the interviews with African-Caribbean and Polish interviewees, engaging first with short quotations which I selected, and then the full, transcribed interviews, as the basis for new stories. Through doing so, it felt as though we got closer to the interviewees, empathised with their experiences, and reimagined the world around us from their points of view. The pieces that follow are some of the results of that imaginative, empathetic work.

When Jimi Met Lenny

At the very first workshop a selection of quotes from interviews undertaken in the city's Oral History Project were placed upon a table. We were asked to pick a quote and imagine the person behind it. I chose the following:

'It was difficult in 1956 to get a room because there wasn't many coloured people around. Some time you walk all day an' you don't see no coloured person.'

Why did I choose this one? Well, I needed help to make a choice and therefore something for me which stood out. 1956 was the year I was born and it was only four years later that my parents moved to Southampton from Bournemouth. In a later workshop we were given the text of the interview from which the quote was extracted. I had imagined the person to be an African-Caribbean male and of fairly mature years. I was right: he was 38 when he arrived from the small Caribbean volcanic island of St Vincent and 65 when he was interviewed for the Oral History Project. I do not know his name but Lenny sounds right to me.

St Vincent was a British colony until 1979 and many people worked on the same plantations as their slave ancestors. In 1948 the Windrush brought the first major wave of Caribbean immigrants to Britain. Lenny was asked why he came to England and he answered that it was like most West Indians – for work and a better standard of living. He speaks of how they sang British songs at school. Britain was the mother country. Like many West Indians who arrived in the early years, the welcome was mixed to say the least.

I lived in a suburb of Southampton in the sixties and Lenny was right – there were very few 'coloured people' in the suburbs. The vast majority of immigrants were concentrated in the Newtown area of Southampton, near the Royal South Hants. Hospital.

Fortunately for him Lenny found steady work at the Pirelli General Cable Works, built on the Western Esplanade in 1914 and situated behind where John Lewis is now. I remember as a child passing this massive redbrick building with its name on a metal arch over the entrance. It covered an enormous area and was demolished in 1990 to eventually become the retail area we see today.

Just before the workshop started I had just finished a biography about Jimi Hendrix, considered by many to be the greatest electric blues guitarist of all time. He was born in 1942 in Seattle, USA and had a deprived and impoverished childhood. African-Americans were Seattle's largest racial minority. Jimi Hendrix would become one of the first black rock musicians to appeal to a largely white audience. His own ethnic heritage was multiracial and included a complex mix of Native American, African slave and white slave master ancestry. Though Seattle was not as segregated as other cities, there were clubs for black people playing black music and clubs for white people playing white music. Hendrix saw music as a transcendent force – something which could cross boundaries of race and background. As so often, it was a chance meeting that changed history – in this case Hendrix's fortunes and the history of rock music.

Chas Chandler was the bassist in the British group The Animals and when on tour in America saw Hendrix play. Hendrix's act was wild, too wild for some. He could play the guitar with his teeth, behind his back and continue a number after throwing his guitar in the air and then catching it. Chandler brought Hendrix to England in 1966 and he came to Southampton in the spring of 1967, playing in a package tour and occupying a slot in the bill of an unlikely line up comprising the Walker Brothers, Cat Stevens and Engelbert Humperdinck.

The venue was the Gaumont, now the Mayflower Theatre, a stone's throw from Watts Park. Hendrix played two shows that day and in between them may well have taken a walk in the park where Lenny was enjoying the spring sun on a bench during his lunch break from the cable works. In 1967 flower power was reaching its peak and people were getting a little more used to men with colourful clothes and long hair but Hendrix still managed to turn heads; his hat with silver metal band, his antique military double breasted jacket and bright coloured velvet flared trousers. Hendrix plonked himself next to Lenny who, in his work overalls provided the perfect foil to the exotic Jimi. Lenny did not have a clue who this man was.

Hendrix to Lenny: Hi man, how are you doing?

Lenny: Very well thank you sir.

Hendrix: Are you coming to the show today?

Cold White City

Lenny: What show is that?

Hendrix: I am playing in the theatre across the road. There are a few of us on the bill. The Walker Brothers, Engelbert Humperdinck, Cat Stevens.

Lenny: I have heard of Engelbert Humperdinck. He has a nice voice. He's a real crooner. What sort of music do you play?

Hendrix: Well I cannot say I am much of a crooner. I call my music a mixture of freak out, blues and rave music. I like crossing boundaries. My music is universal man. I am playing to everyone whoever they are, whatever colour they are. Do you get treated alright here?

Lenny: Mostly.

Hendrix: Well, you take it easy man.

I think Lenny may have enjoyed Engelbert Humperdinck but I doubt he would have enjoyed Jimi Hendrix. When Lenny gave his interview in 1983 Hendrix had been dead for 13 years. When Hendrix and Lenny shared a park bench for a short time, I might have passed by in the park. For just one day in 1967 all three of us were in the same city. On that day, like Lenny, I had never heard of Jimi Hendrix and, in any case, I was a bit too young to go to the show, but just a few years later, I sat in a friend's bedroom listening to the last album he made. If Lenny is still alive he is 96 years of age. Even if he is not, he brought his wife over and had five children so no doubt at least some of them are still in Southampton.

Southampton is a much more cosmopolitan city than it was when Lenny arrived. Lenny had arrived in a drab, insular country which, by the sixties, was suddenly exploding in creativity. Colour TV arrived in the mid-sixties which in itself seemed to be a literal expression of a world which was becoming more colourful. Revolution was in the air.

Recently, as if something which was thought to be dead and buried many years ago has once again reared its ugly head, there has been an echo of that drab black and white insular world. However, I am placing my hope and faith in young people, the vast majority of whom would I am sure would never allow the world to become black and white again.

Richard Blakemore

The piece below was inspired by the account given to the Oral History Unit by a man from St Vincent who travelled from that Caribbean island in 1956 for a new life in Southampton.

As children we sang songs to the mother country and I sailed to her from my small island of St Vincent in 1956. It was for a new life, a better life. We were told there were many jobs there. We were needed. When the ship sailed away from my island it became smaller and smaller and then it was just a speck in the distance and I could see it no more. In St Vincent the turquoise sea is all around, lapping on the beaches. The beaches of black sand. The black sand of the volcano. After a while the sea became grey and all I could see around me was grey. A great lonely empty grey ocean. After days and days the white cliffs of the mother island was sighted. Just a strip of white mist at first then slowly clearer and clearer, bigger and bigger. An island so big I could not tell where it ended.

I caught a train to a city called Southampton. On the way the train passed by backs of houses each with their strip of garden. Sometimes I could see people in their garden. Hanging out washing or doing something or other. Rows upon rows of houses and their strips of garden. When the train arrived at the railway station in Southampton it was so noisy I wanted to cover my ears. People rushing here and there, whistles blowing and doors slamming. The rush of trains coming in and the noise of trains moving off. So many people. Stony white faces. Some stared at me but most stared through me.

When I left the station it was just row upon row of houses like I had seen from the train. The houses themselves seemed to look down coldly at me as I walked up and down looking for somewhere to stay. Hard bricks and stony faces. It was so cold with a bitter wind and there was no sun at all. I walked for hours and no one smiled when they passed me in the street. With some it was as if I was invisible, others stared at me like I was an animal in the zoo or something. As I asked for a room some doors slammed shut in my face. I thought of home which now seemed so very far away. Once I felt a panic, wondering just what I had done. Where were these jobs? Where was somewhere to call my new home? Why on earth had I come to this cold white city?

From Jamaica to England

However the man in the Labour Exchange was a polite man. He gave me some addresses of factories. At one I was told there was no work. No questions, no nothing. Just go away, there is no work here. At last a great big building. Hundreds of people working there. Making cables, all sorts of cables. At last a job for me. I will take each day as it comes and hope and pray, that each day the pain of homesickness hurts me just a little less. Pray that God will give me strength to carry on and make a new life in this cold white city.

Richard Blakemore

We were going home – to the mother country, to live there. I asked mum if we'd meet the Queen and she said yes but Miss Woodford, our teacher at the missionaries' school said no. She said we might see the Queen but very few ordinary people got to meet her in person, only lords and ladies.

She also told mum that England was very cold and we'd need warm clothes, so mum went out and bought us all cardigans.

It was hot when we left Jamaica – really hot, but the closer our ship got to England, the colder it became and the sea and the sky were both a grey colour I'd never seen before. I put on my cardigan to try to get warm but it didn't make any difference. I never knew cold could be like that.

When the ship docked in Southampton we were all shivering. There were people waiting for us in the customs shed; men and women in uniforms and they had large, cardboard boxes on tables in front of them. One of the women smiled and beckoned us over. Inside her box she had lots of clothes and she started lifting them out and holding them against us to see if they'd fit.

One of them was a big, thick coat. It was much too large for me but I didn't care because I was so cold. She saw the sleeves came right down over my hands but she said, 'Don't worry, you'll soon grow into it.' I did, and then I grew out of it and my little sister had it after that.

I never did get used to the cold. I trained to be a nurse and loved it, not least because the hospitals were always so warm in winter. I worked my way up to become in charge of a maternity unit. I always loved the babies and helped to bring thousands into the world.

I still go back to Jamaica but it's changed a lot since the 1960s and it certainly doesn't mean the same to my kids and grandkids; they look on themselves as being English. They don't notice the cold so much either.

Oh, and I did meet the Queen. It was when I was awarded the OBE for services to nursing.

Judy Theobald

Borrowed Landscape

The given quote: "I love to have space around me"

January

I long to go outside and feel space around me. At home I used to go out into the garden almost as soon as I awoke, to see what was changing and what was growing. I loved my garden and I loved, too, the generous beauty of the countryside beyond it, the lush fields and vast lakes embraced by spectacular mountains. I enjoyed the sense that my life was moving in time with the cycle of the seasons, and I would marvel at the simple pleasure of being able to feel the sun, the wind, the rain and even the snow upon my skin as each year turned around. Even though the snows at home could be harsh during these winter months, they always lent a dramatic, magical quality to the landscape.

But here, in this grim, perpetually noisy city, I can find no such sense of space or harmony. The houses in the street where I am living squat, cheek-by-jowl, along roads choked by cars, and the dark winter sky seems to be in constant danger of being torn apart by the furious vibration of aeroplanes. The yards in front of the houses are planted only with bins, from which rotting litter cascades, and everything feels dismal and cramped.

I am almost too afraid to go out, but I do try to make myself leave the house at least once a day, and to venture a few streets further each time. I wrap my scarf tightly around me, not just to keep out the cold but also to give myself comfort, because it still carries the slightest scent of home. Occasionally someone will smile at me. That makes a difference – it helps me to feel less alien. I dread hearing someone telling me to go back to my own country, or worse. I suppose that's funny in a way, because I wish I could go back. I had to leave so many friends behind. When I told them we were going they all said, 'Don't worry, Magda. You'll be fine. You could make friends anywhere.' I'm not so sure. Oh, how I long to see them, those dear friends made over a lifetime. Sometimes I miss them so much that it hurts.

When we first arrived we were living in one room, and that was awful. I don't know how I managed to survive the first days and weeks. Piotr said that coming here was going to be such an exciting adventure, but I felt we'd made the biggest mistake of our lives, and when he went out to his work I would just sit and cry. I still feel sad and scared, but I am trying to

make myself believe that, as long as I can manage to get up out of bed each day and spend even a few moments outside, it will eventually get easier.

We have moved into a house now, and it does feel a little better. There is a rough concrete yard at the front, and those huge, ugly bins, but there is a small garden at the back too, and an old shed with a few tools inside it. Most are blunt, but perhaps someone loved them once as I used to love my own tools back home. I promise myself that when the weather is warmer I will go out and try to make a proper garden. I know it will be good for me.

April

I need to go outside and feel space around me, to shake off this feeling of imprisonment. At home I used to think that every spring brought with it the gift of a new beginning. The winter months would provide a time of restfulness and planning, but once the spring came around I would be eager to start sowing and planting again, excited about all of the things I might grow. I am trying to feel like that here too, but it's just not the same. While at home my body used to come alive when spring arrived, here I feel constantly tired and beaten.

I will make a start on the garden today, truly I will. Piotr tells me I could make a garden anywhere. He says he'll be able to help me break up the ground and plant potatoes to improve the soil. I want to try, for his sake, because he works so hard every day and because, like my friends back home, he has such faith in me. The thing is, though, I don't think a garden has ever made me feel sad like this before. There are huge slabs of broken concrete in it, and even where there is soil, it is covered in layer upon layer of debris. I don't think anyone can have tended it for many years, and now I can't seem to find the strength to begin.

I pick up my precious notebook, the one I have owned since I sowed my very first seeds, and I look at the lists of plant names that are so familiar to me. They too are old friends. I draw a long breath to steady myself. Then I put on my coat and walk out into the street. I need to try and see my new neighbourhood through fresh eyes. I look at yards like ours, studying them intently to see what grows, and although many are cluttered with piles of rubbish, there are some in which I find a glimpse of hope. In one I see herbs growing bravely in a wooden box, and in another, just as I am about to turn back to the house, I catch sight of a pot of narcissi, their

petals like cheerful little trumpets announcing the spring. 'While there's life there's hope,' I murmur, though I can barely hear myself above the disorientating roar of yet another aeroplane passing overhead.

Later, standing on the back doorstep of the house, I view the small garden with renewed determination. Then I wade in and begin to pull away at the weeds that are springing up. I tell myself that this is a good sign; it means that the ground is getting warmer, and that at least something will grow in this neglected soil. In the centre of the garden there is the gnarled, broken stump of a dead willow tree. I spend the afternoon chopping and tugging at its roots but, however hard I try, I cannot move it. Once again, I am defeated.

When Piotr comes in I am sitting at the kitchen table, crying. I don't know how long I have been there. 'I can't do it!' I sob. He hugs me and says that things will get better. He tells me that I have done well in making a start, and then he talks to me, for the first time, about his grandmother, Anna. He says she used to live in the city back home. She had a tiny yard where she grew fruit and vegetables, as well as flowers. When she first went to the city she was sad, but she learned to love her home there, and when they were growing up in the countryside he and his sisters would beg their parents to let them visit her. They enjoyed the bustle and excitement of the city, and they loved Anna and her friends, who were always full of life and fun. 'Tell me more about Anna,' I say. He tells me stories of Anna's childhood, of a life in which the threads of tragedy and courage are interwoven in equal measure. He tells me about the wonderful dishes she used to cook and how, as she prepared them, her kitchen always filled with steam and the glorious aromas of spices and herbs, she would sing the old songs of home. I am moved beyond words, and I begin to feel my despair lifting. Until this year of exile, mine has been a far easier life.

As May approaches, my daily walks are getting longer. I have found a path that leads downhill to a park beside the river, and if I carry on a little further there is a bend where tall reeds grow. On the toughest days I can just sit on a bench and watch the river. I am growing to love the special place I have discovered there. I find that concentrating on the movement of the river blocks out the noise of the traffic, and it soothes me to think of the water flowing, as surely as time passes, towards the sea.

July

I am going to go outside and feel the space around me. On my walks I have begun to notice the gaps where houses must have stood before the wartime bombs were dropped. I have been wondering about all of the lives that were cut short, and I feel a new sympathy for this city which has suffered such destruction and loss. I have begun, too, to see in it a beauty that, in all of my sadness, I had failed to notice before.

This afternoon I am sieving out the debris from the soil to try to make my garden, and I wonder where it all comes from. Broken bricks, nails and glass – so much glass! Yesterday I visited the library for the first time. I felt I would find sanctuary there, too. I started to read a book about the city, and on one of the pages there was a black and white photograph of women picking through rubble after the war. I was struck by their faces, a look of camaraderie mixed with determination to get the work done. Now I imagine their ghosts here with me as I dig. I wonder what they were looking for. Treasures that had been lost in the blast, bricks that can be used again? I feel pity for their situation but envy for their easy friendship – I still know barely anyone here.

It's grim work, digging in the dirt, but the scene captured in that photograph stays in my mind and spurs me on. I pick out bricks worn by age and weather, and I pile them up beside the broken fence. Soon I find I have enough to lay a rough path between the slabs of concrete. I shall think of it as a path that joins the lives those brave women to mine – the years of war and wanting leading, through courage and toil, towards a more hopeful future. I will plant herbs beside it: rosemary for remembrance, thyme for strength and courage, marjoram for happiness.

It is the hottest of days, and as the sunlight fills the garden I can feel it warming my skin. I suddenly realise that, even though I can see no real end to this back-breaking work, I am smiling.

For Rachel and Wendy

Madeleine O'Beirne

Beyond the Fixed Fence

Mary

Jimmy went out for a bite, his Friday treat, fish and chips from Fred's shop. And of course, a pint with his mates in the marketplace. He'll be back soon. I can't yell. I wait for customers to come. At any rate, they do come. The stall has been here for years. Now for them it is a habit to buy from here. Funny enough, to my Jimmy, yell to sell is a habit! His voice is pretty hoarse, now. I remember those days he was in our church choir. Later he had to quit the choir because his voice broke. Very next year, he had to quit school too. Because his Dad returned from the war without the lower half of his right leg and loss of vision in one eye. And poor man had lost his marbles too - he was absolutely nutty! The things he did in drunken fits! My Dad never came home. In a way, not being cruel, it was better than ending up like Jimmy's Dad. So, to support his family, Jimmy started selling fruit in the market place before his sixteenth birthday. That was how the war changed our lives. My Jimmy is clever, with no time he expanded it to a grocery. That was more than two decades ago. Those days Jimmy was slimmer and had a mop-top hairstyle. Instead, now Jimmy has a little paunch and his hair has started to thin at the back.

Rohini

Oho... there's a woman at the grocery stall instead of the usual man. Change of ownership... no, my educated guess is she is the wife of the vendor. I haven't met her during my last three visits, though. Perhaps, he has gone to London to stock up stores or he may be unwell. Do they have children? I assume they have two or three children. If I go by the Enid Blyton stories, they seem to be very economical that way. I have a feeling she is quite older than I - closer to Ram's age is my guess - with her brown hair and white face especially with freckles, difficult to guess her age though. The vendor may be a shade older to Ram. Ram is also not young. He is ten years older than I. When mother proposed Ram to me, didn't I point this age gap to mother! She swept it away reminding me that father is fifteen years senior to her.

The female vendor marks me with a ghost of a smile and a nod of affable acceptance. This is probably what they call English prudence. To me it looks as if it is their conceit. Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* and Adela in *Passage to India* come to my mind. They and their English pride! I feel like

saying The Empire fell almost two decades ago. Also, my paternal uncle had been in the III Corps and laid down his life in Malaya to save their King. That was before I was born. Why can't she greet me with a Good Morning?

Showing off my convent education, I ask for a pound of beans, especially stressing the word please. After all, we know our manners. We have a culture too.

'They're fresh. We got them from the local farmer, this morning,' she says while balancing the scale.

'Indeed, they look very fresh. Are all your wares from local farms?'

'Most of our vegetables come from them. We get fruit from different sources. Though, these strawberries are local.'

Although I have heard of strawberries, I haven't tasted them. I wonder would Ram eat them. Anyway, there's a first time for everything. I ask for half a pound of strawberries.

Extending a brown paper bag the English woman states, 'You are welcome to pick the best ones from the pile.' 'Then with a smile, she adds, 'I haven't seen you before. Where are you from?'

Oho, suddenly she has become vocal.

Mary

'Tea comes from India, doesn't it?' Placing the cup of tea at his elbow, I ask Jimmy. Leaning on his elbows, spectacled eyes focused on the newspaper spread on the table Jimmy is in another world. I repeat the question. Jimmy nods vaguely.

'Today, a woman came to the stall. She's from India. A newcomer. She has been living here only for two months. Newly married. Apparently her husband has been living in Southampton since '61.'

Jimmy nods without taking his eyes off the newspaper. News, news, news! After reading the newspaper cover to cover, he watches evening news on TV. His head must be filled with news.

‘Initially, I dreaded talking to her. As you know, half the time, I fail to gather what they say - I mean even in English. But her accent is okay.’ Another nod. Raising my voice to get his attention properly, I say, ‘Jimmy, India is a bit of a primitive country, isn’t it? I’ve heard when husband dies wife has to commit suicide by walking into her husband’s burning pyre. Have you heard of it?’

‘India is a large country with millions and millions of people. Most of them are poor. In some states, they practise such barbarous rituals. I read in the papers that the present Indian Government wants to ban it.’

‘So what would happen to their children? Who would look after them? What a primitive way of thinking! It’s a blessing to be born here - in the UK. No wonder they come here. I’m certain the woman I met today may be in her late teens - eighteen or nineteen.’

‘They marry young. I read in papers child marriages are common there. Poor Indians!’ Jimmy turns the page.

‘They should be grateful to the Empire.’

‘Indeed! After we left all they do is fight with one another.’ Jimmy shakes his head in deprecation.

Rohini

‘Taste this and see - strawberries with cream. That’s how English people eat them,’ I say expecting a favourable comment from Ram. He rubs his tummy while screwing his eyes up at the bowl of strawberries before him. I suppose he expects me to serve strawberries and cream to his plate. I mean, he too has two hands. I wonder how he survived before I came here. He has been in this country almost ten years before the marriage. I’m sure those days he cooked his meals. What do I know of him? I saw him in person for the first time only on my wedding day. The photo I saw of him, I’m sure was taken a good few years earlier. He is not unkind, though. I’m contented. And I’m here in England.

I serve strawberries into his bowl and top it with cream.

‘Add sugar. I’m not English. They drink tea without sugar.’ He laughs mockingly.

‘I learned in school that sugar is bad for teeth.’ I say while placing the sugar canister before him. While serving he spills sugar crystals on the tablecloth. Shutting my eyes, I drag a deep breath in. During mealtimes, I spread an old bed sheet over the table because I’ve learnt the hard way the chances of Ram dropping gravy on it are high

‘Today when I went to the market instead of the usual greengrocer, there was a woman - his wife. Initially she was a bit cautious. She must have thought I can’t speak English.’ Ram making a slurping noise takes a spoonful of strawberries into his mouth.

‘I saw a couple of colleges around here. I wonder if I could attend,’ I suggest, changing the subject.

‘To do what?’ he hisses.

‘I can become a teacher. I can teach English. That was what I was aiming to do when I was in India.’

‘To teach English to English people! Not a bad idea. Not at all.’ He laughs. ‘Your accent is different. They wouldn’t understand.’ He shakes his head in scepticism. I agree he has a point there. During last few weeks, I too have noticed English people speak English differently to us.

If my elocution teacher heard the way English speak English, she would definitely end up having a fit!

Ram serves some more cream into his bowl. Next, with an exaggerated sigh, he adds, ‘Anyway, Krishna will soon be a father.’ He looks at my flat tummy sceptically. *What, I have been here only for two months.*

Leaving the empty bowl on the table, pushing the chair back he gets up. By now, I know his routine. Blowing smoke rings into air, he will watch TV. I too love TV. But he doesn’t watch English soaps and comics. He says they are silly. I pour Fairy Liquid into the washing bowl and open the tap. Steaming, water gushes out and soap suds of different sizes and shapes pop up.

Mary

Jimmy is having his pint munching spicy mix he bought from that Indian shop near the stadium.

‘This mix is tasty,’ he says.

‘I prefer the roasted cashew pieces in it. The fried spaghetti-like bits are not bad, though.’

Cutting vegetables for a casserole, I ask him.

‘What do Indians eat at home, Jimmy?’

‘Rice and chapati. They eat that with curry.’

‘Curry! That sounds like a surname - Mr Curry, Mrs Curry. Very funny. Curry is spiced up gravy, isn’t it?’

‘Something similar. They use their fingers to eat. Eating food with fingers must be an art.’

‘Have you eaten rice and curry?’

Jimmy looked at me as if I’ve gone mad. I laugh.

‘Do you know how to cook them?’ Jimmy asks throwing a cashew into his mouth.

‘No.’

‘Good. I can’t eat with my fingers. To me good old fish and chips, a nice pie or a casserole: that’d do.’ Stroking his chin he continues, ‘The Asian food shop in the Main Street is expanding. Soon they’ll start selling our fruits and vegetables there. Indians, wherever they go they put up shops. Soon they’ll impinge into my business territory.’

‘But Jimmy we don’t go to their shop to buy our fruit. Don’t worry. That Indian woman’s husband is an engineer at the docks.’

‘That’s how they start. That’s what they say. Wait and see.’

Jimmy has a point there. The road behind the hospital is like a little India. There are so many of them living there.

Rohini

‘What do you know of this woman? She is a stranger, Rohini,’ Ram says censoriously.

‘No. she’s not a stranger. I meet her weekly. She is the local greengrocer’s wife,’ I say to Ram while mixing gram flour and water. He is always sceptical.

‘Why do you want to give her *murukku*? That’s our food.’

‘Exactly! She said they buy it from the shop in the main street. So, what’s wrong with treating her with homemade *murukku*?’

Hands folded in front Ram walks up and down in the kitchen. White smoke curls up from the cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth.

‘These English people have sensitive stomachs. They can’t tolerate our spices. If they develop a tummy upset, police will be here, woman. I don’t want trouble.’

Unvoiced, I add salt to the mix and stir it. I know my hygiene. Ram thinks only he knows about English people as he has been here longer. But my convent education and books too taught me a good deal about them. I reply with a silent sigh. My parents consented to this marriage because Ram resides in England. They wanted to send me abroad. Although I didn’t have much of a choice, I didn’t mind it because I want to see the country of Jane Austen where Elizabeth, Emma and all lived. I crave the adventurous good-mannered well-spoken children of Enid Blyton. Looking at the clean-shaven face of Ram I ask myself, what do I know of him. Although in the proposal it said he is a mechanical engineer, the way I gather he is only a mechanic. Yet, he owns a house and he has a steady job.

‘They think we are dirty, uncivilized people. They don’t want your food. You should have asked me first.’

I abstain from responding.

Mary

‘Jimmy, remember our Indian customer whom I was acquainted with recently?’

Eyes on the TV screen, he nods. A can of beer is at his elbow. Resting his feet on the coffee table, he is going to watch the football match. For another one and half hours, he will be dead to the outside world. What a boring game! A few years ago, England won the World Cup. What a commotion he made! Everyone did. Football is too rough for my taste.

‘She gave me this. Home fried.’ I place the bowl half filled with fried mix. ‘She said these are called *murukku*.’ Jimmy’s eyes screw up at the bowl. He empties a spoonful into his mouth - and his spoon reaches the bowl for the second time. ‘Hmm... tasty.’

I too munch a spoonful. ‘Freshly fried. Smell it,’ I say.

‘Did you pay her?’

‘No! Last week I said we buy them from the shop in the Main Street, So, she told me she makes them at home. It’s a sort of goodwill gesture!’

‘Pooh! They and their goodwill gestures. Wait and see. This is a sample. Very soon she’ll start selling them. They do!’ Jimmy nods self-assuredly. Emptying another spoonful into my mouth, I tell him, ‘She says she wants to go to college to learn English.’

‘That’s what they say! Wherever they go they open up their shops.’

Jimmy resumes watching football. After filling the bowl to the brim with *murukku*, I walk to the kitchen to prepare our dinner. My gut feeling is at this moment she too must be cooking rice and curry in her kitchen. Hmm... and her husband must be... I can guess where he is.

Champika Wijayaweera



Unwritten Wars

As a port and industrial town, Southampton has always been imbricated in national and international conflicts. As part of our work with City Archives resources, we looked at photographs and source materials that related to the involvement of Southampton and its people in the First and Second World Wars, as well as some material about dock strikes and other conflicts and tensions that have reverberated through the city.

Here Mary Frisby reimagines a rather peculiar archival photograph into a vivid story with a fascinating twist. Richard Blakemore takes inspiration from an incredible diary in the Archives by a Communist Party member, who meticulously recorded his unique perspective and experience of the war, a voice of dissent and scepticism not often heard in more typical representations of the Second World War.

Peter Nicol addresses a different kind of historical silencing in relation to the tragic Great War story of the sinking of the SS Mendi, which was the basis of a moving show at the NST City in July 2018. One of the twentieth century's worst maritime disasters in English waters, the sinking of the troopship SS Mendi off the coast of the Isle of Wight in 1917 resulted in 646 deaths, most of whom were black South African troops, but its story is not widely known. Peter considers why this has been the case in his two powerful pieces.

Stand Together

2018

So, which one is she? Great aunt Kathleen? Or was it great, great aunt Kathleen? Whatever. She was the family pride, and its sorrow. Surely she can't be the smiling girl standing tall in the back row? She doesn't look anything like I imagined. In fact, she looks quite ordinary. That's a relief. Of all of them, she looks the most normal. Still, I don't think I can look at her for that long. Her gaze is too steady; it makes me want to look away.

The photograph must have been taken before it all began. I found it amongst battered black and white pictures, snapshot memories dumped haphazardly in a plastic carrier bag, secured by a casual knot. In the aged and grainy image, seventeen young women pose for Dennis Turner and Harlow Photographic Studios. It was easy to tell that they were in a studio because the backdrop was so false. Italian mountains and palazzos betrayed the reality of industrial Redbridge. I know what the studio was called because the men's names are engraved at the base. The girls are wearing overalls, with mop hats and incongruous lace collars. Their faces are young but they are tinged with grey; the room, regardless of its Italianate backdrop, manages to evoke a powdery grime; even the rabbit is shabby. Yeah, it surprised me too. A stuffed rabbit sits in the front row, perched at the feet of an austere, grim-faced, middle-aged woman.

1913

Kathleen felt her right foot go numb. She was on tiptoe trying to appear taller than the others. She stared at the camera as she had been told to do, but she couldn't resist having a bit of fun by pinching Eileen, who was standing next to her, shoulder to shoulder. No reaction. She stifled a sigh and wondered for how much longer this would go on, and whose idea it had been to put that insipid rabbit mascot in front of 'The General', Mrs Drummond. It made the girls look like some kind of demented Beatrix Potter fan club.

Kathleen looked at the photographer and knew that Daisy Milton, wearing what she thought was a fetching little neck bow, would be giving him the eye. Daisy was desperate to have a ring on her finger. Not that a band of gold would mean an escape to a better life: just a different kind of servitude. Daisy was many things, but she wasn't stupid. Love and happy ever after wasn't Daisy's aim. Kathleen knew a little of Daisy's stepfather;

Daisy just wanted an ending to that chapter. Kathleen had no faith in marriage as an escape tactic. She was destined to a different fate.

"Holy mother of God. Would you look at her?" Kathleen muttered to Eileen under her breath, whilst maintaining her fixed smile for the photographer. She had glanced at the fragile Mary McIntyre, Our Lady of Sorrows as Kathleen called her, who couldn't crack a smile even if she had lost a farthing but found a shilling. Mary had never wanted to come to England. Her family was back in the old country – that green and pleasant land where the children wore rags and no shoes. Incredible as it was to Kathleen, Mary still wanted to go back, to go home where she belonged. Where she was one of us rather than one of them.

Kathleen preferred England. Obviously, it wasn't perfect and there were some things on which she preferred not to dwell. She chose to ignore the rumour that the Prince of Wales dined by feasting on seventeen sumptuous courses in his exotic Brighton pavilion, whilst, across the water, his subjects slowly starved and rotted to death in boggy ditches. Who wanted to think about that? Life was for living.

At home, Ireland was called the Land of Saints and Scholars, yet no one that Kathleen knew in County Mayo could read or write, and they laboured on the land every hour that God sent. It seemed to her that their lives were ruled and dominated by the Church: no dissent, no contrary thoughts allowed. Here, in England, there weren't as many priests trying to tell you what to do, and in this city, no one knew your business. That suited Kathleen fine. She was paid well and she sent money home every week. Her Mammy boasted to the neighbours how well Kathleen was doing, how Kathleen wore a lace collar every day (not just on Sundays) and how Kathleen's hands were clean. She was practically a lady.

Mrs Drummond was tired of posing and, contrary to the jolly comments being made, she knew that her forced smile was unconvincing. The wasted amount of time spent on this photographic session was unbelievable. She had only agreed to be in the picture because Mr Wolff, the manager of Schultze Gunpowder, thought that it might be great free publicity. The photograph would be printed in the *Hampshire Advertiser* and the *Echo* and could attract more girls away from domestic service to his factory. That's the reason he gave for putting the ludicrous rabbit in front of her.

“The ladies like a soft toy,” gushed Wolff to Turner, the fey photographer. Kathleen winked at Eileen. No reaction.

Mrs Drummond was brooding over her dilemma. The last thing she wanted was more new staff. This mixed mob was enough for her. The English girls were riddled with ringworm and nits; the others, the foreigners, couldn’t understand a word she said (or that’s what they wanted her to think) and the biddies from the Bog were not as stupid as they let on. That Kathleen was one to watch, always looking for a quick laugh, but she was a good worker and Mrs Drummond liked good workers.

Kathleen did too. She liked workers so much that she had started to go to meetings where they would congregate. Any meeting would do: Trade Unionist, Bolshevik, Fenian. She could pick and choose depending on the mood she was in. What else was there to do in the evenings? Stay in and sew with Mary? If she was lucky some brave chap might buy her a glass of port in a public house. In return, all she had to do was smile and feign an interest while he rambled on about ‘The Cause’ – any cause. It was all the same to her. When her boredom level exceeded her alcohol intake, she used Mrs Drummond’s curfew as her excuse to leave. The General had a formidable reputation and most men, from her experience, feared a strong woman.

Annie Kennedy was a strong woman, a mill worker, with a loud voice and modern notions of equality. Kathleen had seen her at one of those mundane meetings held by middle class women who, in her opinion, had nothing better to do with their time than moan and protest about how unfair everything was. She’d only gone because there had been nowhere else to go that night. When Annie spoke, she wasn’t like the others. She knew what it was to work, to have to make a living in a man’s world. As loud and clear as she was, her dissention, her words, could not be heard because the men shouted her down; they bellowed obscenities and drowned her out. They didn’t want to listen so they hadn’t let her speak. Kathleen, standing at the front of the speakers’ stage, heard her protest.

“Only a few more minutes, ladies,” rose Mr Turner’s beautifully modulated voice from beneath the heavy velvet camera cover. Enough time for Kathleen to decide which post box she would set alight tonight. She caught Eileen’s eye. Eileen smiled back.

2018

Written on the back of the photograph: *Kathleen Murphy, arsonist. Starved to death having refused force-feeding, Holloway Prison, London, 1913.*

Mary Frisby

In Memoriam – 13 Ways of Looking at SS Mendi*

(also known as the Black Titanic)

with thanks to the poet Wallace Stevens and to the memory of Isaac William Wauchope Dyobha and the 645 other volunteers who died

Now-Here: One History Hidden No More

- 1) Among twenty hundred fathoms
The only moving thing
Was the eye socket of a corpse
 - 2) I was of one mind
Like a war grave
In which 646 dance the death drill
 - 3) Racism still whirls in the winter whitewashing winds
I hoped that it would be stilled by now
 - 4) A man and a man are one
A black man and a white man
Were not one then
 - 5) I much prefer
The beauty of oral history's rallying cry
Which endured in memory
To the ugliness of the innuendoes and
The Court's cover-up
Which came just after
 - 6) Water engulfed those below decks
With barbaric horror
The shadow of race
Still crosses to and fro
The mood
Traced in the shadows of
Dancing the Death Drill
 - 7) Oh thin men of power
How did you imagine non-culpability?
Did you not see how your legacy
- Walks around the presence
Of your black brothers?
- 8) I know of no noble accents
But only lucid inescapable rhythms
But I know too
That we must all now be involved
In Standing Together
 - 9) When the SS Mendi sank out of sight
It now marks the site
Of one of many such tragedies
 - 10) At the sight of racism
Still being given the green light
Will the fence-sitters
Continue to stay quiet?
 - 11) They rode without guns over the seas
In a foreign boat
Oblivion pierced them then
It will be a mistake to think
That their ship's bell
Will not toll again
 - 12) The seas are moving on
Where will the tides now take us?
 - 13) Will it be evening evermore?
It was icy then
And it was going to happen
Posterity will sit in judgement
How will we be seen?

**(which Peter personally agrees with)*

Peter Nicol

Another Way of Looking at SS Mendi*

White Matters: Our Empire Fights Back

- 1) Throughout the twentieth century
The most important thing
Was the need for us to stand together
- 2) I was always of the same mind
We needed to maintain morale
However many we sacrificed
- 3) Bleeding heart liberals and left-wing whingers
Still need to be silenced
- 4) We white men must remain one
If we make concessions to the darkies
Then we will be divided and fall
- 5) I much prefer
the beauty of our Commonwealth
To the ugliness of innuendoes
Some histories should stay hidden
- 6) With our white South African brothers
We were right
We did nothing wrong
Together we wrote history
We will never be apologists because
The end always justifies the means
- 7) Strong men of power
Why do you imagine
Taking back control?
Do you not see... We never lost it!
After Elizabeth the Great
The world will kiss the feet of Charlemagne the Greater

- 8) We spoke with noble accents
We shout and people listen
But I know too
That we must all continue to be involved
In keeping the barbarians from the gates
- 9) Remember Titanic
Mark that site
Every sinking does not have to be commemorated
- 10) At the sight of political correctness
Still being given the green light
Won't you fence-sitters finally cry out sharply
- 11) We rode on Britannia's waves
With our mighty navy
Future history will praise us
The bell shall toll for them not us
- 12) The world moves on but
Our Empire will never die
- 13) There will be another dawn
We were great then
We will be great again
We will control posterity in our pockets
Britain, the Greatest Empire

**(which Peter personally doesn't agree with)*

Peter Nicol

Keeping the Red Flag Flying

The one-act play below was inspired by our visit to the City Archives during which I read extracts from a diary kept by a self-declared Communist during the Second World War. There are diary entries which convey his anxiety that the Nazis seem to be winning the war and invasion seems imminent. This is an imagined scene between the Communist diarist and his wife.

(The back room of a small Victorian terraced house in Southampton. Clothes of two adults and a baby hang over the hearth to dry. A man in his early thirties sits at a table in the middle of the room. His wife of about the same age is standing by a baby's cot which is next to a sideboard.)

MARGARET: Archie we need to talk.

ARCHIE: What about?

MARGARET: If, as you seem sure, the Nazis are soon to invade, what are you going to do?

ARCHIE: What do you mean, what am I going to do?

MARGARET: *(exasperatedly)* We have had this conversation so many times. You know what I want you to do. To leave the Party. They will want you to join the Resistance. The Nazis will not take kindly to a Communist member of the Resistance. God knows what will happen to you if they get you. God knows what will happen to us. To your little girl. Annie needs her daddy.

ARCHIE: Maggie, now you are blackmailing me. You know I cannot renounce the Party. Just give up the struggle. If the Nazis do get here they will be doing all sorts of things. To our way of life, to people. I cannot just do nothing.

MARGARET: I am not asking you to renounce the Party or the struggle, not in spirit. Just keep a low profile, not advertise yourself to the Nazis. Will you do this, for me, Archie?

ARCHIE: *(angrily)* Are you making me choose between you and the Party? To become just a private individual burying his head in the sand while the Nazis oppress us, torture us, destroy us? It is against all my principles to live like that – like an island as if no one and nothing else matters except our own little existence.

MARGARET: Why do you have to put it like that? Everything has to be a matter of principle with you. Yes, I want you to put our family before the Party. Before this wretched war. It has always been the same with you, Archie. Principles, principles, principles. Well can't I, can't we, be one of your principles for once?

ARCHIE: Now you are being stupid, Maggie. You know you and Annie mean the world to me. You are just tired. We are both worn out. The air raids and Annie not sleeping.

MARGARET: *(sarcastically)* Of course, I am just being stupid. Stupid, stupid me.

ARCHIE: *(starting to lose his temper)* I'm going out.

MARGARET: *(sarcastically and upset)* That's right Archie you go out.

ARCHIE: This bloody war is going to be the death of us.

MARGARET: *(tearfully)* You said it, Archie. You said it.

Richard Blakemore



The Character of Place

When I first arrived in Southampton seven or eight years ago, I was struck by the complex, intricate micro-geographies of the place. Where exactly does Inner Avenue end and Bevois Valley begin? Where is the line that separates Upper and Lower Shirley? The answers are not always evident on maps. The geography of Southampton is something that is lived and learnt over time.

Each of these micro-places connotes particular things. They have distinct identities. We discussed these in session one day when considering the writing of place. I asked the group to pick an area they knew well, and to write it as a person, in a first-person narrative. This ended up being a truly delightful bit of work and produced wonderful, often hilarious, wry observations in the monologues that were produced. I think they will elicit a great deal of pleasure and recognition amongst readers in the city.

What's in a Name?

Common - something that is ordinary and not special in any way. I don't take it personally. I used to be known as Shirley Common, but I was never sure about that moniker. Now, the Royal Victoria Country Park, Queen Elizabeth Country Park – they're both majestic titles conveying awe and aspiration. What did Will Shakespeare say? 'What's in a name?' I'll tell you what, everything and nothing. Before seeing, before meeting, before knowing, people make judgements. We all do. Names matter.

I'm also known as a SSSI, Site of Specific Scientific Interest. How's that for a name? I like to think it stands for Simply Stunning, Specially Interesting. Some don't agree with my interpretation. Some don't think I'm all that special. I see them though. I watch them leave. Their bags of crisps and beer cans scattered around like sordid pus-filled scabs. Well they can keep their consumerist cast-offs. I have enough to deal with. That old road, Winchester, he cuts right through me. Talk about leaving a scar. Oh he made his mark all right. I can't shake him now.

I won't moan. I'm not opposed to change. When you've been around as long as I have you learn to expect it. I could tell you some stories. I've seen it all I have. Little kiddies running about; one minute they're playing hide and seek around the tombstones, next thing you know they're here to stay. I've seen my fair share. I remember when the soldiers used to visit. Those GIs all had a part of me. Nudge, nudge, wink, wink. Oh you've got to laugh, haven't you? Those trekkers – what larks! They kipped here to avoid the bombs and they partied like there was no tomorrow, and for some, there wasn't. So they laughed as well as cried. What else can you do?

I'll tell you one thing, I can't get used to the noise. I did like the quiet. Back in the day, cattle grazed on my grasslands and people foraged on me for food. I liked that. I liked being needed. Once, would you believe, I even had a race track for the horses? Well, we all like a flutter, a gamble, we all need a bit of hope. Had a zoo as well. I did feel sad for them, sorry, scared little creatures, all cooped up behind bars. My animals used to creep in at night just to stare at them. Outsiders looking in, except this time, they wanted to stay as outsiders. Look at me, I'm getting sentimental. So, what's in a name? Oh I can't tell you. All I know is I'm proud to be called Common. I'm here for anyone and I don't judge nobody. You come see me if you want. I've no plans to go anywhere soon.

Mary Frisby

Shirley

OK, I'll admit I'm a bit common – basic I think it what they call it nowadays – but I don't really care. And I know I'm a bit shabby, not very attractive but that's because I've worked so hard for so long, been useful, and that's been my true purpose.

People look down on me, say, 'You don't really want to visit her,' but what happens when you need something? I'm the one who's there for you and you're quite happy to come and take what I have to offer. I've housed you, fed you, looked after you when you were ill, made you look beautiful, provided you with life's basics and entertained you for decades.

Yes, I admit I've seen better days, was once young and fresh and what you might describe as more natural, but you've got to change with the times. I've had so many changes that's why I look a bit random, a bit thrown together. And I'm friendly; look at the people I've welcomed over the years, quite literally thousands, and I don't care where they came from, they're all the same to me. So call me common and ugly if you like but just appreciate what I've done for you.

Upper Shirley

I like to think I'm what you might describe as an awfully nice class of person and I'm not ashamed to say it. I make sure I always look smart and presentable, quietly elegant, and put up a good front, even if I'm falling apart inside. I'm never untidy or unkempt and take great pains to improve my appearance but without standing out from the crowd. People looking at me will see me as professional, reliable and with high standards.

Mostly I keep myself to myself, I'm a kind of elegant fortress defending myself against others, those not like me, although I do see some of them such as the window cleaner or my gardener. In fact, a lot of them are the salt of the earth; I just don't want to have to live with them. To tell the truth, I'm not even sure about those around me so I make sure I've put up strong barriers between me and everyone else.

I know a lot of people would look at me and think I was a bit aloof, a bit of a snob, but secretly, in your heart of hearts, I know you'd give anything to be me.

Judy Theobald

My Voice

Hullo, my name is Mary.

I was born, praise the Lord, over 100 years ago. I've only ever lived in two places. Apparently I was named after a Saint, because I grew up near the Church of that name.

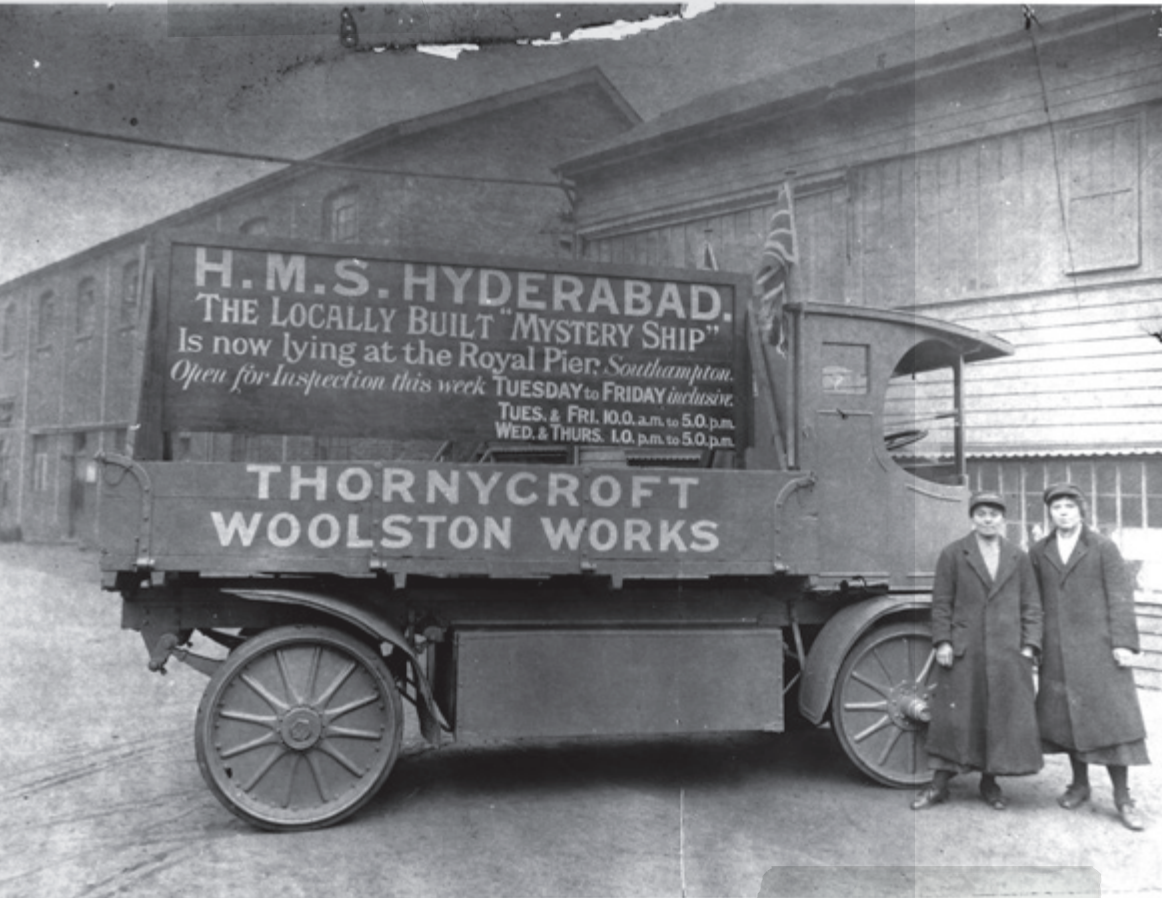
I was very happy in my first home. The best thing that ever happened to me was in 1976 when I felt that for the first time I had achieved proper national recognition and that my cup had runneth over.

Some years after there was a terrible fire elsewhere that killed 56 people. Later the Government decided that my home was too old and dangerous and that I had to move. I could stand it, but it was hard to take it sitting down.

Every time that people visit me they like to sing "Oh, when the Saints go marching in". Call me a snob, but I like to think of myself as Premier through and through. But I was worried recently that I might become relegated to a mere Championship type of person. But now I feel that I can still hold my head up high.

Talking of which – the highlight of this year was on the 29th of May when the Rolling Stones came to visit little old me! But I didn't invite my much younger sister. She lives in Fratton Park and we've never really got on.

Peter Nicol



This Sceptred Isle

Our final set of archival material related to the stories of evacuees from the volcanic island of Tristan de Cunha in the South Atlantic, who arrived and stayed in Calshot in the 1960s. To introduce this new material, I first wanted us to think about island-ness.

Does being of an “island” mean anything in particular, I wondered? Does it mean openness, for example, or insularity, or a strange combination of both? I asked our writers to reflect on these questions in some free writing on the theme of “island.” And this produced some powerful poetic meditations in the writing session. Perhaps it is because as a word, it has such a powerful visual and conceptual resonance, at the heart of which is an irreconcilable tension between openness and closedness, community and isolation. In Southampton, a sea-city which has lost its waters, those contradictions and resonances seem very palpable, and produced the following pieces.

Island

Is... land
Is... home

Is... refuge
Is... safety
Is... sanctuary

Is... full
Is... resistant
Is... narrow
Is... cold

Is... dominated
Is... dominant

Is... changed
Is... ravaged
Is... beauty

Is... open
Is... closed

Is... valued
Is... lost
Is... sheltered
Is... alone

Is... sea, the sea

Is... land
Is... home

Mary Frisby

Island of Islands: England and EU-LAND

Shet land Isles

SCOT LAND

NORTHERN IRE LAND

Isle of MAN KIND ENGLAND

HARD/SOFT CUSTOMS BORDER IS-Land mentality

IS-LAND OF IRE-LAND IS-Land just ENG-Land

WALES IS-Olationist

IS-Lander = Insular?

IS Land Universe (a former name for galaxy)

IS our star soon going to shine brighter? OR

IS our star soon going to fade when we drift

away from our continent?

IS the British ISLES going to lose again its land

bridge to Europe?

Scilly Isles Isle of Wight (Open or Closed Border?)

English Channel (or La Manche?)

Stream of Consciousness

In-Continent (!) or Out of Continent? Open Door/Closed door Br-Exit or Br-Entrance?

Chorus

“This land is your land

This land is my land

From the Shetland Isles

To the Isle of Wight

From Northern Ireland

To the South of Wales

Th-IS-Land was made for you and me.....

This Land is for... everyone”

Red Lines

NATIONAL

B

R

I

D

G

E

CONTINENT OF EUROPE

INTER-NATIONAL

Peter Nicol



Reflections on Writing from Archives

Personal Response to So:Write Stories

In January this year I went along to the first meeting of the So:Write Stories group at Southampton Central Library. I was curious to find out more about how the project would use the city's archive materials to create stories, and I hoped that exploring these would also help me to develop my own writing. It was a long time since I had written for myself, and I felt I needed to find some direction. I had already joined the So:Write Women group, and had been surprised and thrilled at the way in which stories, when given a starting point and a little help, would begin to flow.

The other thing that drew me to this group in particular was my sense of having been cut adrift by a move from my home town. I had only been in Southampton for a short time, having spent more than half of my life in Bradford, West Yorkshire, and I wondered whether writing might provide a remedy for my homesickness. I moved to Bradford when I was in my twenties, and I brought up my family there. It was a city I had grown to love, and I was desperately sad when I had to leave it. It is interesting and also reassuring to me that we can find ourselves part of a place even when we are not from that place.

My own family history, like that of so many other people in Southampton, is one of migration, mainly from Ireland. I am interested in the stories of movement from place to place, the coming to terms with change, the settling down. One of my favourite reads recently has been the novel *Brooklyn*, by Colm Tóibín. I have learned from my own experience that migration can bring sorrow, but it can also bring adventure and a new sense of enlightenment, and we only have to look around us to appreciate that the movement of people into a place can enrich that place enormously.

I liked the idea of exploring the City Archives because I realised that this port city of Southampton had an extraordinarily interesting history, and I also hoped that perhaps, by reading other people's stories, I might be able to put my own, minor, experience of migration into perspective. We can learn a great deal, not just about the world, but about ourselves and the way we relate to others, through the stories that are shared and passed on.

In the fortnightly So:Write Stories sessions, with Nazneen's help and guidance, we looked at and discussed photographs, letters, diaries and the transcripts of interviews. This was fascinating, but the visit she

organised to the Archives offices was a revelation to me and a high point in my learning. I could never have imagined just how many moving personal stories I would find in those archived materials; even the simplest of them evoked such strong emotions within me. I discovered that not only had Southampton been a place of refuge for many people, but also that it had been a place from which thousands of children had been evacuated during the war years. Some of the letters I read about this were just heartbreaking.

My own story in this collection is unfinished. It emerged from a few lines of a transcript that I read in the first So:Write Stories session, together with a photo that I looked at in the third, and the words that caught me were simply these: "I love to have space around me." In the notes I scribbled down, I imagined that my character would begin, tentatively, to make friends with a neighbour who had arrived in the city in the years during or following the Second World War. They would start by sharing seeds and plants, then recipes, then personal stories. I am still waiting for the Magda of my imagination to reveal her story to me. What was her journey here like? Who were those friends she left behind, and what were their shared histories? Would she eventually settle, and what would be the turning point?

And in reflecting upon this I realise that there is a similarity between storytelling and the act of migration, a difficulty in pinpointing where it began and where it will end. That is one of the interesting features of my own writing journey in the So:Write Stories group, a journey which has helped me to grow in confidence as a writer and also to find my place in the city.

I am delighted that this group is going to continue in September, and I feel it is absolutely appropriate that it will continue to be held in the library. Library and archive services support us all in our learning, by providing the resources from which we can learn and also a space in which we are able to explore and express ourselves safely and on equal terms. We must continue to support these services and projects.

I would encourage anyone who is interested in writing, and in the stories and poetry the city of Southampton holds, to consider joining the So:Write Stories group. You will find it friendly and supportive and you do not have to be a writer; you just need to have an interest in writing and in finding your own interpretation of the stories the city has to tell.

The Polish Project: Thoughts on Reading an Oral History Interview

To find out more about So:Write Stories and other writing initiatives in Southampton, take a look at Nazneen’s residency blog or visit the main So:Write website:

<https://sowritestories.wordpress.com/>

<https://www.so-write.org/>

Madeleine O’Beirne

“I was only 21 years old. In Poland teenagers live with parents. We are not going to live on our own. So it was scary, very scary.”

Brought up in a small market town in the north-east of England in the 1950s and early sixties I couldn’t wait to get away from home and experience the bright lights of London. So the opportunity to study there was what I and all my friends aimed for. It promised to be an exciting and enriching experience and would be, free, out of sight of the parents.

Of course in reality London was not paved with the thick layers of gold I had anticipated. Student grants were very basic and being penniless in any big city is hard whatever your nationality. Nevertheless, London in the 1960s was a fantastic place to be. It was alive with peace not war, hippies inhabiting the Eros roundabout in Piccadilly, free love, marijuana, the contraceptive pill, sexual freedom, the Beatles, the Stones. It was a real awakening for me and took me some time to function in my new surroundings, but essentially I was within my comfort zone because I was still in England and was familiar with all the customs and traditions which that implies and I had been, from the age of four, to a boarding school. So leaving home was not a problem for me. It taught me to be independent and self-reliant.

My immediate thoughts about the young person from my quotation were that she had been closely protected by her parents and siblings in a noisy household in a small town or village where their family was well-known and they preserved the local customs. She never really spent time on her own and her views were adopted from her parents’ beliefs and she had not been encouraged to think beyond her limited horizons or to make her own choices. When I had the opportunity to read the full interview it was clear that my first impressions of her family were probably reasonably accurate, but what I had really failed to appreciate and what had made it so very scary for her was of course the language barrier. Like me, realising that London’s streets weren’t paved with gold, she soon realised that that there was nothing especially different in England. It’s the same wherever you go and in her own words, ‘except the economic situation is better here and that is all.’

Valerie Claisse



Poems for a Library

Over the course of my residency I have come to appreciate in a new way the sheer beauty of Southampton Central Library, and the special, almost numinous quality that all libraries possess. Inhabiting this space for a year at different times of the day, I was inspired to research the history and the design of the Library in the City Archives, where I discovered the material which inspired several of the following poems.

Nazneen Ahmed

List of Some of the Books Added to the Library in 1900

Gold Regions of South Africa
Korea and her Neighbours
Head Hunters of Borneo.

Lives of the Saints (2 vol.)
History of English Literature and Language (2 vol.)
The Game of Polo.

Unity in Variety.

Lotus Time in Japan.
The Sikhs and Sikh War.
The Lives of the Saints (15 vol.)

Gaiety Chronicles.

Marriage Customs in Many Lands.
Samplers and Tapestry Embroideries.

Ancient Faith Embodied in Ancient Names (2 vol.)

History of Hand-made Lace
From Sea to Sea (2 vol.)
History of the Merchant Shipping (2 vol.)

Intimate China
Signalling Across Space
Life Studies in Palmistry
Flower Garden.

Popular Progress in England
English Village Community
Victoria History of Hampshire and Isle of Wight.

The Case for Protection.

On the Children's Librarian's Forthcoming Nuptials

The 1940-1 raids at Southampton
Where she told stories to children in the shelters and parks,
As well as the libraries,
And distributed books to the children evacuated from the town,
Are recalled by the announcement of the engagement
Between Miss Norah M. Johnson
And Mr Albert Sanders

9.33am outside Southampton Central Library

There is a queue outside the library before it opens.
Before the timber shutter is rattled aside,
There is a queue
Waiting in front of it.
They sit quietly
Some on the floor
Some holding files and books tightly to themselves
Eyes focused but elsewhere
Mouths set firm
Quietly ready.
They move into single file five minutes before ten
The anticipation coils
A thread pulled taut.

There is a queue inside the library before it opens
The books lined up in their single file rows
They hum with quietly fizzing energy
Waiting.

Both are in a kind of stasis
Incomplete
Without the other.

Dwelling Place

The yacht timber shutters are drawn open
And the library sighs into life
They flow in, its lovers, a stream of life and hope

The mothers for whom the soft, squashed sofas are a refuge
When the day has already been too long at 10 o' clock.

The tiny children who for whom the books are still just toys
The marks upon them mysteries yet to be unfurled.

The tutors who teach maths in hushed voices
To students for whom classrooms have closed their doors.

The job applicants who need the internet
Faces lit with hope by the old curved screens
Fingers tapping the soft worn keys.

The ones without shelter
Who go to the quietest corners to sleep
Among Biographies or Religion.

The library does not ask anything of you.
No need to fill in a form with your next of kin.
No requirement to make a purchase
At the gift shop on the way out.

The books will keep you company,
Even if you have no other.
No need to even pick one up,
The library will not judge you for it.

You are welcome to just sit
In the hush that exists nowhere else now
Except perhaps a church on a weekday afternoon.

The library is a place
You may just be
Just like the books
In their resting peace
And infinite possibilities.

Sanctuary

The light streams through the giant plate glass windows
All throughout the year
At Southampton Central Library.
It weaves and dances upon the glittering curved railings
The smooth fat white pillars.
Before it opens
It feels like an inhaled breath,
Pent, full,
Waiting.

I trip down the secret stairs,
And then, when I try to go up,
I lose them again.
It is mischievous, this library,
As if guarding all those books for all this time
Has given it an intelligence
Beyond all of ours.
If I asked it questions,
What could it tell me of what it knows?

It speaks through the silence.
I cannot walk through without voices calling to me –
I did not know that I wanted to learn to crochet,
Or understand maritime history
Or learn to speak Balinese
Or know more of the life of some minor television star
And yet – and yet –
These are the ones who call to me this time.

To be here when it is closed
Is a secret I always dreamt of keeping.
As a child I thought:
I wish I could live here,
In the quiet constancy
That home should be but was not.
The safety and the stories
Would have been enough
To sustain me.
Even after I left with my books
It nourished me with the hope
Of other ways to live.

Now I am here, tripping up the steps
Losing them on the way back down
At home, at peace
Among the voices and the silence.

Transport

The curve of the white and steel railings
Arching over the fan of shelves
Give a sense of being on some strange circular ship,
The carpet below the pale aquamarine of a tropical sea
Studded with tiny lilac fish
The shelves white sanded islands
Open, pristine, unexplored.

This ship can transport you anywhere.
The tickets are there,
On those shelves.
Lift one out, open it
And your journey will begin.

Biographies

Nazneen Ahmed

Nazneen lives Southampton. She writes fiction for children, creative non-fiction and poetry for adults, all of which are often inspired by the theme of migration, which is the topic of her work as a researcher and historian in the Geography department at University College London. She was selected for the 2016/17 round of Penguin Random House's Write Now Live mentorship scheme for underrepresented writers for her historical fantasy novel in progress which is aimed at readers aged 11 upwards. From June 2016-July 2017 she was the SO: Write UK Southampton Libraries' Writer in Residence. She is represented by Louise Lamont at LBA Books.

Richard Blakemore

Richard Blakemore retired from a Civil Service career in 2014 and was suddenly faced with no longer having the excuse of being 'too tired to do any writing' other than the occasional poem and short story. He is pleased to report some improvement in application and an increase in output. He was delighted to join the So:Write Stories creative writing group as the use of archives and oral history has provided the imaginative stimulus of reading the perspectives and experiences of others and thus weaning Mr Blakemore away from his favourite creative writing subject: himself.

Following a family move from his birthplace of Bournemouth, by default rather than design Richard has lived in Southampton for nearly sixty years. After attending local schools, he later studied social science at Southampton University in Highfield during which time he married a born and bred Sotonian.

Through the workshop discussion and research he has realised, as well as many personal memories, that he has accumulated a fair amount of historical knowledge of the city. One of the opportunities and challenges the workshop has presented is to weave both in to creative fiction and to hear again some of the voices from the past.

Valerie Claisse

Val spent forty years marking pupils and students' literary efforts but never really found the time to write anything of substance herself.

Retired now and determined to be 'a writer,' she discovered to her chagrin that writing creatively was not as easy as she had fondly imagined. She also felt guilt and remorse about the amount of red pen she had scribbled over her students' scripts!

Val joined a local writing group and wearing L plates is beginning to make progress whilst really enjoying listening to and learning from the other members. She is also looking forward to being a more regular member of Nazneen Ahmed's forthcoming writing sessions at Southampton Central Library.

Mary Frisby

Mary Frisby is of Irish heritage and claims to be a descendent of Brian Boru, one of the High Kings of Ireland. As a child she attended Gaeltacht Phort Lairge where she won several awards for her fluency in speaking Gaelic. She lived and worked in London before moving to Southampton where she obtained a B.A. (Hons) degree in English Literature. Since then, she has studied in California, travelled through Southeast Asia and lived in Australia. Her dominant motivating force is to place the lives and experiences of ordinary, working-class people in the forefront in her writing.

Peter Nicol

Once upon a time...

Peter, Mike and Rachel went to the New Theatre in Oxford to see Alan Ayckbourn's "Improbable Fiction" about a Writing Group. In the bar afterwards Mike suggested forming our own Writers' Group by asking all our friends...

...and that is why, over ten years later, there is still a thriving Group in Oxford. However, after over five years Peter retired to the sea and sadly had to leave his Group made up entirely of old friends. Peter so loved being

in a Group that he wanted to join a new one immediately. There was a free Haiku session run by Pearl May at Southampton Central Library (Thanks Library!) and Peter stood up at the end to ask if anyone wanted to make up a Writing Group. Val (and later Judy) then strangers, but now friends, came forward to form the Netley/Hamble Group.

We three have loved being in Nazneen's Writing Workshop ...

...and we all wrote happily ever after...

The End.

Madeleine O' Beirne

Madeleine has spent much of her life working in library and information services. She has always loved writing and a few years ago she set up her own small editorial business. She says of her work, "I find great joy in the crafting of language, and I love being part of the process of enabling people to express their ideas to full advantage." Madeleine moved to Southampton in November 2015, and is enjoying getting to know the city.

Judy Theobald

I left school and college before the first Equality Acts came in so when I tried to get into my chosen career of journalism, I was repeatedly told I was 'exactly the kind of thing we are looking for but we don't train girls and we won't employ women'. It was crushingly disappointing to realise that the one aspect about me which I couldn't change was the barrier to how I wanted to spend my life.

Over the next 18 years I had a variety of jobs and careers which included working as a secretary, a London police officer and running an engineering business. I also had a couple of husbands who came and went and two children who stayed. I always valued adult education and in my younger years took courses in subjects such as dressmaking and cookery. When the children were small I went on a creative writing course and someone showed my work to the editor of the local paper who gave me a freelance job, writing a weekly poetry column. This lasted for 23 years. The same editor soon asked me to write advertising features and then offered me a job as a reporter.

Journalism was what I'd always thought and hoped it would be. I loved the access to different people and their stories, and the chance to accumulate what I've always described as a margarine scraping of knowledge over an incredibly wide area. I enjoyed the discipline of writing to a specified word count, identifying the most salient points of a story and even producing work to a deadline.

After 10 years I became a subeditor then changed jobs and became the editor of a county magazine. After that I worked for the BBC as a daytime presenter on local radio, finally retiring four years ago.

During my working years, I attended lots of evening courses run by the Workers' Educational Association on a variety of subjects which included creative writing, critical thinking, film, literature and history. I am greatly saddened by the demise of the adult education system and by the attitude that everything one studies has to be directly translated into something which makes money rather than learning for pleasure. It was learning for pleasure which led to my 30-year career in journalism.

After I retired I missed the buzz of a newsroom and the sense of working in a team but have made up for that by joining a writing circle and book group in the village, and volunteering on a steamship, in my local library and with the Good Neighbours. I have also enjoyed the writing workshops in Southampton very much as these have enabled my mind to take a run at a variety of topics from a completely different direction. They have also taught me how to interpret different source materials enabling people's stories to be told thereby creating a greater understanding of their lives. I have found this both fun and challenging.

Champika Wijayaweera

Born in Ceylon, raised and educated in Sri Lanka, Champika is an anatomist, medical researcher and a writer. She currently works and writes in Hampshire, UK. Her poetry has appeared on *Lakeview International Journal of Literature and Arts*. She is working on her first novel.

Archival Sources from Southampton City Archives Office

Images (in order of appearance):

OH153: *Passport photograph, 1958.* Oral History Collection.

OH335: *Group of workers at Schultzes, including Mrs Spencer, 16 other women in uniform and mascot (toy rabbit).* Studio photograph. Oral History Collection.

OH384: *Oriental terrace c. 1928. Row of 2 up, 2 down houses on left hand side. There are children playing in street.* Oral History Collection.

OH167: *Photograph of donor taken with her mate and lorry. This advertised the "mystery ship" built out the Woolston yard, then brought back to Southampton and put on exhibition in the docks. Mrs Dumper is on the right. She drove this lorry until 1921.* Oral History Collection.

"I just make here become a home now": Oral History Transcript B0008, Oral History Collection.

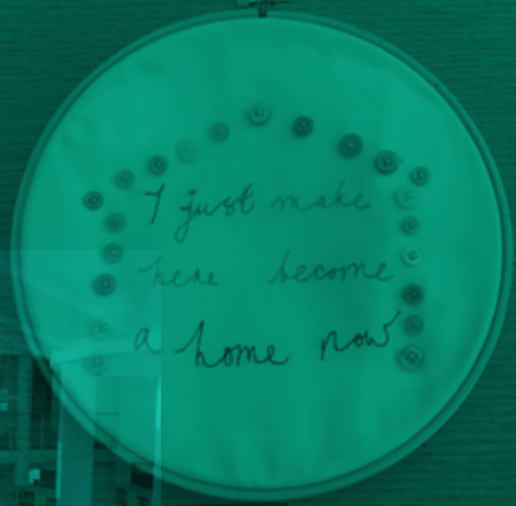
When Jimi Met Lenny and Cold White City by Richard Blakemore: Oral History Transcript B0015, Oral History Collection.

From Jamaica to England by Judy Theobald: Oral History Transcript B0008, Oral History Collection.

Borrowed Landscape by Madeleine O'Beirne: Oral History Transcript PO16, Oral History Collection.

Stand Together by Mary Frisby: Photograph OH335, Oral History Collection.

Poems for a Library by Nazneen Ahmed: Records of the Public Libraries Department, Southampton City Council, SC/LY-.



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