



RADIATEARTS

Hidden Histories

A collection of personal stories and memories as told by
older residents of Cheshire



To find out more about the project and
hear people share their stories, visit our
website or scan the QR code.

[www.radiatearts.co.uk/hidden-histories-
2026](http://www.radiatearts.co.uk/hidden-histories-2026)

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This book is dedicated to the memories, stories and lived experiences shared by the participants of Hidden Histories.

Through conversation, reflection and storytelling, these voices have helped preserve moments of everyday life, personal journeys and the rich social history of West Cheshire.

Thank you to everyone who took part for your openness, warmth and generosity in sharing your histories.

About Radiate Arts

Established in 2017, Radiate Arts is an inclusive, not-for-profit social enterprise dedicated to fostering creativity, community wellbeing, and social inclusion.

Based in Chester and Mid-Wales, Radiate Arts provides marginalised and underrepresented groups with access to meaningful creative experiences and since its inception, has been committed to supporting diverse communities, including LGBTQ+ individuals, armed forces veterans, families affected by domestic abuse, people recovering from addiction, and people experiencing mental health challenges.

We work extensively with isolated older adults, disabled people, and young people managing anxiety and depression. This wide scope of engagement reflects Radiate Arts' mission to use creativity as a tool for healing, connection, and self-expression. We are committed to using creativity to engage diverse communities, break down barriers to participation, and celebrate the creativity and cultural heritage of the people and areas that we serve.

We partner with a broad range of stakeholders, including schools, universities, libraries, charities, and local councils, building a network of collaborations that amplify the positive outcomes of our work throughout our communities.

If you would like to work with us, get in touch at:
office@radiatearts.co.uk or call 01244 267806

About Hidden Histories

Hidden Histories is a social history project funded by the Allen Lane Foundation and UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund), engaging local older people and their families, some of whom are living with Dementias.

This project focusses on recounting and sharing pertinent stories and memories from their lives. It has provided an opportunity for participants and their families to share time together, reminiscing about past times from their lives.

Participants also took part in storytelling through video and audio recording, sharing their stories and memories first-hand.

With thanks to residents, their families, volunteers and staff of Oaklands Care Home, Loxley Hall, Wealstone, Florence Grogan and Hollymere, who all took part.

Sharing their time, their stories and their memories.





Carol Hackett, Florence Grogan

I grew up in Manchester as the oldest of four children; I have two brothers and a sister, and being the eldest meant I often helped look after the younger ones, It taught me responsibility early on, but it also gave me a strong sense of care and connection to family.

At school, I enjoyed science and art, but art was always my favourite. I found art calming, and it offered a place where I could slow down and focus on the internal things; that feeling has never left me. I still love drawing, especially working with pencil and shading. There's something magical about taking something flat on a page and turning it into something that looks three-dimensional. It feels like bringing something to life.

After leaving school, I knew art was what I wanted to do, so I went on to train as an art teacher. Teaching became my lifelong career, and I loved being able to share my passion with my students, seeing them discover their own creativity and confidence meant so much to me. Art was never just a subject to me, it was a way of expressing myself and finding a sense of calmness, something that I wanted others to feel too.

I was also lucky enough to find that love of art shared at home; with my husband Pete, I raised our two sons, Ben and Sam, and sharing creativity with them has been one of the greatest joys of my life. Art has always been a steady thread running through everything I've done, and it continues to bring me peace and happiness

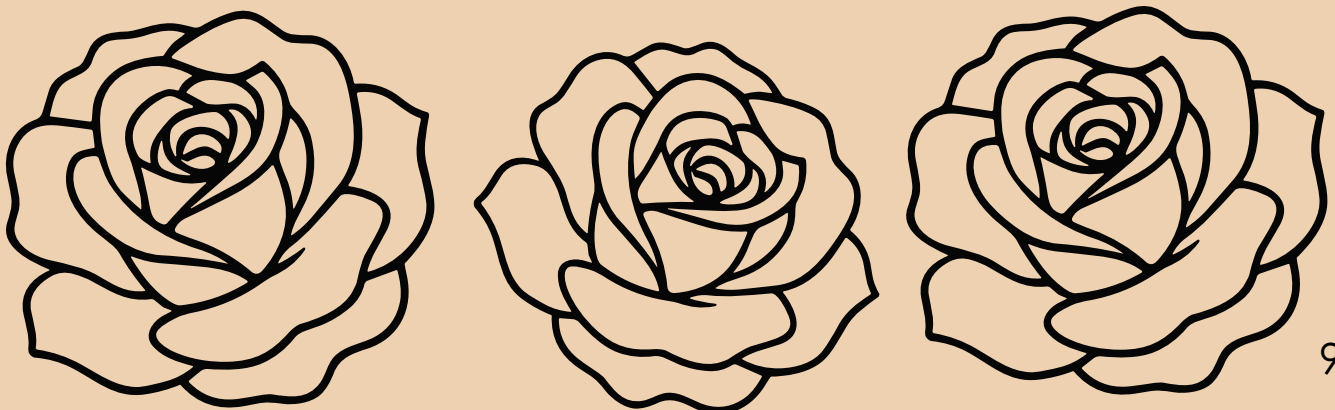
Christine Littler, Florence Grogan

My name is Christine Littler.

I have lots of happy memories of growing up in Warrington. I sometimes have to pause and really think about them, but I know they were good times. I lived there, worked there, and that's where my family was.

I have a photograph of myself from many years ago, when I was the Rose Queen, that I like to look at; In the picture I'm wearing a beautiful white dress with lots of embroidery, I have a crown made of roses on my head, and I look very special. My sister Lynsey and some other girls are in the picture with me too. I don't remember every detail of that day now, but I remember how special it felt when I see the photograph.

I love being around people and meeting new people, but my family has always been the most important to me. Even when things feel a bit muddled, I know that clearly. I love my family very much, and thinking about them brings me comfort. They are a very lovely family, and that feeling of love stays with me.



Sister Catherine, Florence Grogan

My Journey: Vocation, Jam, and Self-Discovery

I was born to two parents and a cat, and I am a Benedictine nun. I entered the monastery in Oxfordshire in September 1976 and received my habit the following summer. I stayed there until 2002, when the community dispersed, and then I came here to Curzon Park in Chester.

I was about 26 or 27 when I answered the call, but it was a calling I felt very strongly much earlier. When I was 12, a priest referred to me as "the Lord's servant." I went away and read passages in Isaiah about the servant being disfigured and shamed. That resonated with me because I had been made to feel like that at school. Later, a scripture scholar spoke about "eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven"- meaning the Kingdom got in first before you could choose. I knew then that I had to belong exclusively to Jesus. But I had a path to walk first.

Before I entered the monastery, I had a few different experiences. I tried to train as a nurse because my mother had been one, but I was absolutely rubbish on the ward.

I also worked at Blackwell's bookshop in Oxford starting in 1972, I worked in the Continental customer service department and even learned German for the job. Eventually, they moved me to a typing pool, which I loathed.

I wasn't suited to serving in the shop any more than I was on the wards. I didn't really find the place I belonged until I answered the calling and began my life in the Monastery.

When I finally became a sister, I saw it as home. My calling was too strong to ignore.

In the monastery, I spent roughly half my time running the refectory, which was safe but boring. However, I also worked in the fruit preserving department, which was exciting. One summer, I had 194 pounds of strawberries come in all at once. You can't freeze strawberries; they go to mush. So, I had to jam them all. It spoilt me for anyone else's strawberry jam.

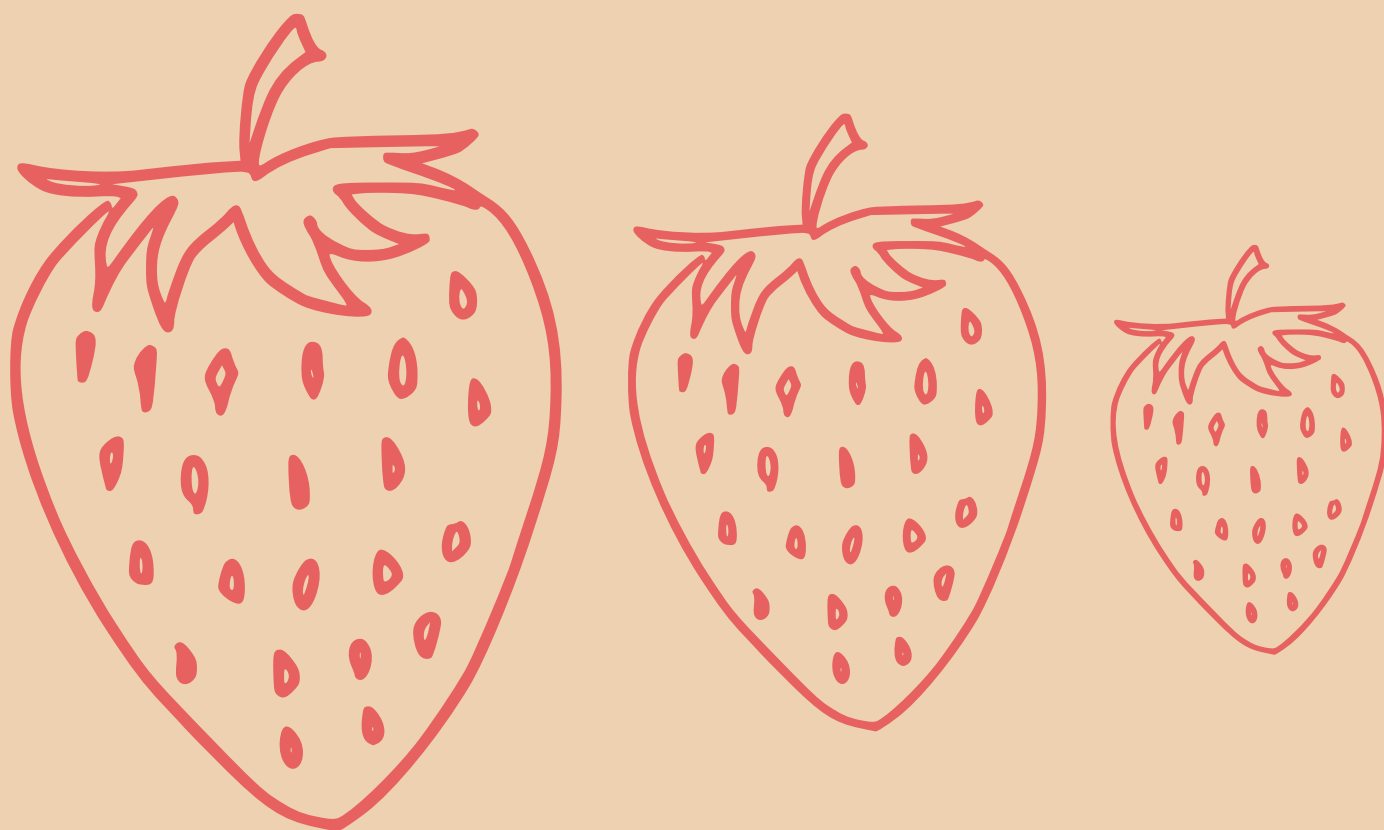
I was also proud of bottling fruit. It is technical work; you have to raise the temperature gradually and screw the tops down as hard as you possibly can. I bottled blackcurrants, gooseberries, and even tomatoes.

Life has been somewhat reframed since my move to Chester; it wasn't until I came here that I received an autism diagnosis. Looking back, it was a retrospective vindication. At school, teachers told my parents I wasn't trying hard enough, but I was actually dealing with executive dysfunction and complete disorganisation.

I tick the boxes for sensitivity to sense stimuli, like noises, bright lights, and touch. I also have poor coordination. For years, I struggled, and some people thought I just couldn't "take a hint," which is actually an autistic trait. The diagnosis was an enormous relief.

I have always been fascinated by language, and I have a special interest in Hebrew poetry. I type out the psalms and color-coded the consonants to find the links between words. I use red if they are in the same order, blue if they are different. It is really absorbing.

I also learned to read the Russian alphabet so I could check book orders in my old job. By a bit of bluffing and reading the words, I found I could read the Orthodox service in Russian.



Catherine May Kenny, Florence Grogan

My name is Catherine May Kenny. I was born in 1936, and I live at Florence Grogan House.

I spent my early childhood in Wigan and, when I was seven, my family moved to Ellesmere Port. It felt like a big change at the time, leaving a place that had been so familiar, but I remember finding my feet and settling in.

Church has always been a strong and steady presence in my life. We went every Sunday, and my favourite hymn has always been Abide with Me, it brings me comfort and a deep sense of peace whenever I hear it. Through the church I was lucky enough to meet Lord Crawford, and we became good friends, something that I still treasure.

I was christened in a Methodist church in Wigan, but later I became Catholic. Faith has always mattered to me, even though it wasn't always straightforward. My father was a Freemason, and because of that, we weren't allowed to be Catholic at one point. It was difficult, but it shaped my understanding that belief is deeply personal and not always simple.

I went to a council school in Ellesmere Port, where I learned practical skills like sewing and knitting. I enjoyed learning how to alter clothes, especially the challenge of making garments bigger, which was far more difficult than making them smaller. I was proud to pass a scholarship, which allowed me to attend Wirral County Girls' Grammar School. There, I studied scripture and music, two subjects that spoke to both my faith and my heart.

After my O levels, I began working at Bowater Paper Mill in Ellesmere Port, in the drawing office. I stayed there for six years before moving to Chester. It was during that time that I met my future husband, Samuel Stanton, at a dance at the new civic hall. He was from Cheshire and worked with letterpress printing. We married but later made the mutual and respectful decision to divorce. I've always believed that we are all different, and there is no point in life pretending to be happy.

After the divorce, I lived with my parents, Ann and Thomas Kenny, and my son Paul. We got on very well, and that time together was filled with support, understanding and warmth.

Music has always brought me great joy. I was a member of a large choral society, and we sang in churches and cathedrals. Singing lifts my spirit, and I still hold those memories very close. I went to Chester Cathedral last February and had a lovely time singing there, which reminded me how powerful music can be and I sing now whenever I get the chance.

If I have any advice for living a happy life, it would be this: have an interest in Christ, have a nice hobby, and look after your health. Those things have carried me through life, and they still matter to me now

Susan Sheldon, Florence Grogan

Golf, Coding, and Harmony.

My father was the one who encouraged me to play golf. I probably picked up a club when I was about 11 and I used to have lessons from a professional. I played at Upton Golf Club; it was literally just around the corner from where I used to live. I played for the ladies' team, it was seven-a-side, and we played in handicap order.

I do have a golfing trophy here which I won in a mixed competition. My partner was Albert Mitchell. I didn't just win one trophy; I did win quite a bit. I especially loved playing at Harlech, where I once won a trophy. A group of us used to go every year in August for a special open week. It is a beautiful place with the castle in the background, though sometimes the weather was horrific. Even if it was blowing a gale and pouring with rain, we carried on unless the course got closed.

I went to Birkenhead High School and eventually got a job as a secretary to the Personnel Manager at Vandenberg's in Bromborough, this is where my career unexpectedly began.

One day, we had arranged interviews for trainee computer programmers. One person didn't turn up, so I asked if I could take their place and be interviewed. I did it, and I got the job. When opportunity calls, you have to answer, don't you?

From that interview my career kickstarted, and I worked as a computer programmer and analyst until I retired.

I kept busy with other things too; I sang in a barbershop quartet called Mountain Harmony. We rehearsed in Mold and went to conventions and competitions. The Musical Director still comes to visit me.

I also acted in plays. I was in the Unilever Drama Festival and there is a professional photograph of me from that time. I did all sorts of plays, though never Shakespeare, I only studied him at school.



Brenda and Ron Downes, Florence Grogan

A Life in Chester: Over 75 Years Together

We have lived in Chester all our lives. Brenda was born right here in Chester, off Bridge Street near Commonhall Street, in Pierpoint Court in a three-storey house. We bought our first home on Ashfield Crescent; it was a new home back then.

We have been married for 75 years now. Brenda was actually going to marry someone else before me, but she didn't like his mum, so that was the end of that. It meant that I got lucky in life!

We used to go to River Park, near Grosvenor Park, to dance. We started going there about a year before we got married. Brenda was a good dancer, a good jiver. Our favourite dance was a slow fox trot.

We have a wonderful family with two children, Philip and Alison. Now we also have two grandchildren as well as three great-grandchildren.

Brenda spent her career working as a GP telephonist as well as working at the Royal Infirmary. She worked with a woman named Bunty. Back then, you used to have to push and plug the calls in, Brenda knew everyone's number off by heart and could connect the fastest. Her sister, Joyce, worked at the Bear and Billet just opposite Bridge Street Fords, where Brenda also worked for a while.

Brenda is very good at crosswords and enjoys doing them to this day. She has always been one for helping someone and there are many occasions where she has helped people, including on holiday in Crete.

We've had a lot of fun and been on many adventures; We went to America four times, mainly to Titusville in Florida, as Pam, one of Brenda's sisters, married an American. We even went to EPCOT once when they were just building it.

Closer to home, we've been to Benidorm. Before Benidorm, we went to Jersey three years on the run to see Ted and Vi. Whilst in Jersey, we would go out and take the kids shrimping.

We also travelled to Australia about four times. My brother, George, and his wife Jane decided to emigrate to Melbourne where they became farmers, which they did for a long time. George was in charge of dynamite and mining in Australia, and they ended up doing very well for themselves.

The secret to our long marriage is that we love each other. We always went everywhere together and never went without each other.

Brenda is one of the best; as I tell her, "You're my best."

Sandra, Florence Grogan

A Life of Travel, Elvis, and Happy Memories.

I think I have had a good life.

I was born in 1943, though sometimes you forget exactly when, don't you?

I had a very close friend who I met when I first moved to Florence Grogan.; her name was Dot. As soon as we first met, we just kind of clicked. She used to wear jumpers with Elvis's face on them. I was an Elvis fan as well, though I didn't quite have his face on my chest! We were so close, and we had such fun times together here.

We even used to dance together to his music and talk about our Elvis adventures from before we had met. We both went to Graceland, though at different times; I went twice. I remember the garden bit and the three graves where the door was. I have lost my friend Dot now as she died suddenly, which has left me feeling very sad.

I have travelled quite a bit, especially in America where I have had lots of adventures. I've done it "top to toe." I lived in America for about six months. I rented my own house out here to a friend and went to stay with someone in the Mid-west.

To stay that long, I had to go to the Embassy in London to get a visa. That was an adventure before the adventure even began!

They make you show bank statements to prove you can support yourself. I remember thinking it was strange that I had to go through all that, while others just seem to come in, but I loved living there. We went shopping at Walmart and travelled around.

I also went to Florida with my husband for our 25th wedding anniversary. We went to the Keys and saw the coastline. In my mind, I remember the Pacific and a 17-mile drive, though sometimes I get mixed up with which comes first!

When I first left school, I did an apprenticeship as a hairdresser. I didn't work for long because, in those days, getting a husband was the main thing. My husband was seven years older than me, he worked at a place that was shutting down, and he had to move for his job. He said, "If we get married, you could come with me;" So, I got married at 18. We had two children, a boy and a girl. My son is married and has a baby of his own now.

I lived on my own for a while before coming here. One night, I rolled right out of bed and got stuck on the floor. I couldn't get up, and I couldn't roll over, so I was there all night until the helper came in the morning and called the ambulance.

They decided I wasn't able to look after myself properly anymore. But I am quite happy here. I have my own room downstairs with a bathroom, so I don't need the lift. Molly, who works here, is lovely and tries her best to keep us all entertained.

I like to keep my mind working with quizzes, though sometimes my memory for things from years ago is better than for recent things. I used to love history at school, finding out about the Kings and Queens was my best subject.

I have my own television, and I like watching the old series like The Onedin Line and The Forsythe Saga. It's a nice place to be. My daughter visits two or three times a week, and I'm going to stay with her for Christmas, which will be nice.

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Karin Hassenkamp, Florence Grogan

My name is Karin Hassenkamp and I was born in 1953.

I grew up in Germany, in a house near the butcher's shop. Seeing it so often made a big impression on me, and when I was old enough to choose for myself, I decided to become vegetarian. It felt like an important decision, and one I've stuck to.

I enjoyed school, especially playtime. That was when I could really relax and be with my friends. I loved skipping rope and swimming, and those moments of movement and laughter still come back to me clearly. I didn't enjoy everything about school though. I didn't like my teacher, who I called "Reichert," which means bossy in German. Even now, I smile when I remember that.

When I left school, I became a scientist. I worked in organ donation, spending long hours looking down a microscope at DNA. It was detailed, careful work, and I felt proud to be doing something that could help other people's lives in such an important way.

These days, I enjoy the simple things that bring me comfort and joy. I like going to the local church and attending the Bouncing Back with Dementia group. I do yoga on my green yoga mat, take pleasure in painting my nails, and sometimes I enjoy a pint of Worthington's beer.

Dorothy Ann Evans (Dotty), Florence Grogan

My name is Dorothy Ann Evans, but everyone calls me Dotty. An important thing for me is that I've always loved entertainment, especially music and dancing, but I love anything that brings a bit of joy and fun into life. I enjoy everything I do, and I've been lucky to have many happy moments.

I lived with my partner for twenty years. He's not with us anymore, bless him, but he was wonderful. He kept pigeons and we were part of the Chester District Pigeon Association. We used to have these wonderful social evenings with buffets, and big gatherings at the Guildhall in Chester. We would have five-course meals, and people would bring their families, children, the whole lot. They were lovely times.

And of course, everyone remembers me for the can-can!

I used to get up and dance, not planned, just feeling the music and the rhythm. Wherever I went I took the party with me. One night, while I was dancing the can-can, I felt something on me fall - my underwear had given way! Oh, it was so embarrassing. I remember I was so shocked and upset at the time, convinced I'd be the talk of the club and wouldn't be able to show my face again. But still, it didn't stop me from going back, and it didn't stop me dancing. If I could do the can-can now, I would! It was so embarrassing at the time but now I can look back at it and laugh.

Music has always been a big part of my life. People used to ask me to sing, and they still do. They say, "Give us a song, Dot!" and I'm always happy to. Jim Reeves is my absolute favourite. I love singing his songs "Distant Drums," "I Love You Because," and others. I remember that it was such a tragedy when he died so young in a plane crash, he had such a lovely voice.

I wasn't born in Chester, I was born in Shrewsbury and came to Chester later with my partner, and I used to work as a gardener. I worked for Percy Thrower for a time, who was well known for his roses and flowers. I used to love take part in the Shrewsbury Flower Show, showing my flowers, and making window boxes; I loved planting the seeds and seeing everything bloom, it was so rewarding. A couple of years ago, I was able to make a hanging basket for Florence Grogan house and I loved it, I'll always love flowers.

Looking back, I can honestly say I haven't had a bad life. I've had ups and downs, but many happy memories too. Dancing was always special to me. I used to get such joy from it, even if I looked a bit of a fool sometimes! People would clap, and you could hear a pin drop when they watched me. They were enjoying the moment and I was too.

It's nice to reminisce about all of it - the club, the dancing, the flowers, and the music I love. I think it's good to look back on the lovely things, the things that make life bright. I've enjoyed everything I've done, and I still enjoy talking about it.

Rev James Durkin, Florence Grogan

A journey to God.

I was 16 when I left home to begin my journey to becoming a Franciscan Father.

During a stay in Wyresdale, I met a young man who was a keen tailor and teacher, quite popular among the young teenagers. One night he had had a vision, hearing the voice of God tell him: "repair my church, as you see it is falling to pieces." He was so moved by this that he was out looking for cloth to sell and bricks to build.

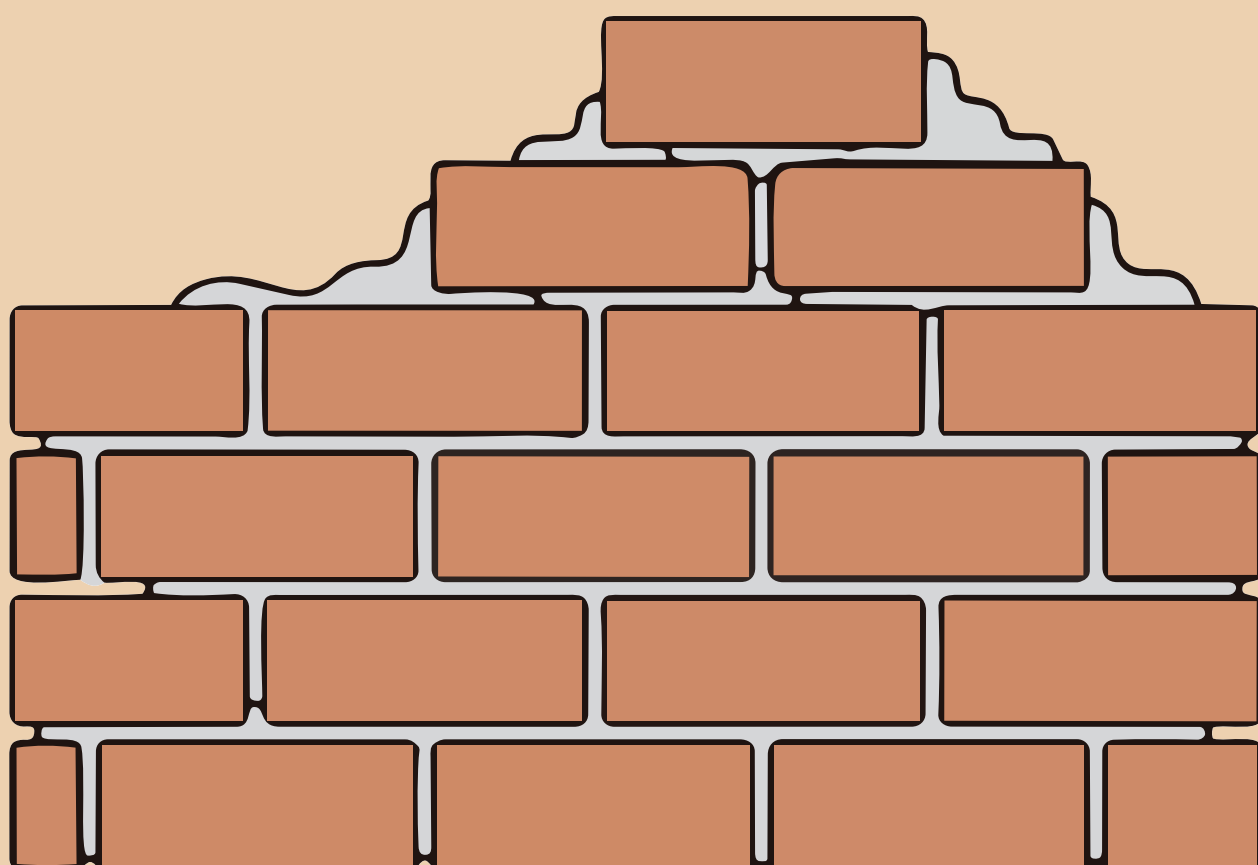
I had an idea that God might want me to be a priest, but at the time I was hesitant. I also thought that I would be happy to be a layman in the Church. In fact, I might have preferred it. But those doubts were soon dismissed. Whilst working in a church before becoming a priest, a young girl came to find me; she asked for me by name, and it was the first time this had ever happened. It was a moment that brought me to tears. That a person had sought my counsel was a moment that confirmed my decision to be a priest.

In 1956, during my ordination, the bishop said the words that have shaped my life. Words that have stayed with me always:

"Mr James Thomas Durkin, I appoint you to be a eucharistic priest of the Holy Roman Catholic Church in any of the countries of Europe; and as a priest for Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea and any adjacent lands."

I have travelled to many countries in my life, including Papa New Guinea, Scotland, and Columbia.

I was in one of these countries in 2013 when Pope Francis was elected and chose the name Francis, it was a moment of great delight for our order as a Franciscan order.



Jane Pleavin, Florence Grogan

I was born in Saughton and grew up in Huntington. I think being an only child, with parents who had their own troubles, shaped me. My dad had the rare Rhesus negative blood type, and I still find it fascinating how common it is among the Basque people. Little pieces of history like that always stuck with me, and I think ultimately fuelled my curiosity.

And now, here in Florence Grogan, I've found new connections. I've made friends, shared stories, swapped books and memories, and realised how much comfort can come from simply being around people with shared experiences and interests.

I raised two sons and a daughter through all that movement and change. When my marriage broke up, I worked because I needed to. I never had the luxury of choosing something glamorous, but I always took pride in doing a good job. I cleaned, I worked as a telephonist, and I served as a dinner lady. Each job got me through the next stage of life.

I've always been particular about grammar. Once I even corrected a sign that read "Please turn the light of." I couldn't help myself - I took out a pen and added the missing F. It felt like doing the world a small favour!



History, dialects, and family stories have always fascinated me. At school, they pushed us to speak in an RP accent, which never felt natural. I still remember being given a hundred lines for saying “shippen,” meaning “over near the sheds.” I was only speaking the way people around me spoke.

Religion has also been a steady part of my life. Being Catholic is important to me, and it has helped me feel grounded in every place I’ve lived. Here at the care home, I’ve been able to connect with other Catholics, and that sense of shared belief matters more as I get older.

Language has shaped my memories too. I grew up hearing that being born within the city walls of Chester was considered a great honour. Even now, these little bits of local history stay with me. And in my own family, language continues to play a role - my grandson is bilingual in English and Welsh, and his little claim to fame is that he did the translations for the parking signs.

I once got called “odd” by a family member, and it hurt at the time. But now I see it differently. If being interested in all these things makes me odd, then I’m glad to be who I am.

Carol Graham, Hollymere

I was born in Quebec, Canada in 1932. When I was about 18 months old, my grandfather used to write to my mum during the Depression, telling her not to stay over in Canada with a baby and no money. He kept on and on, and eventually my mum and dad agreed to come back home. They always regretted leaving, really, but it was a difficult time for everyone.

When we returned, we lived with my grandparents in London. My dad had been in the Royal Artillery, and once he was demobbed, they found jobs for the men. He became a commissionaire in the City of London, and I later followed him to work for the same company. One of the perks of his job was that whenever the Queen returned from a state visit, we would sometimes hear where she was going for a luncheon. I remember once finding out that Haile Selassie was arriving to join her. I joined the crowd waiting to see him, but he was so short and surrounded by people that I didn't get to see very much!

Living in London, I really got to see a lot of the city, though it has changed so much since then. My father taught me all the shortcuts, and the bank I worked for was right by St Paul's Cathedral, London Bridge, and Billingsgate Fish Market. I remember the market especially - they would have fires going to keep the flies away, and the men wore huge leather hats with wide rims. They would balance fish on their hats and tilt their heads, so they slid neatly into barrels.

My brother was in the army with the Gordon Highlanders and had been away during the Mau Mau Rebellion. We were told he would be arriving back at Southampton docks, and my dad said he had booked time off to go and meet him. I asked for a full day off work, only to find out later my dad had only booked half a day! I was cross at the time, but when the day came it didn't matter. The docks were full of people waiting for their loved ones, and the ship was enormous, with soldiers lined along the deck so you couldn't tell who was who. It was my mother who spotted my brother first when they disembarked. It was such a relief to see him safely home. I have a photograph of us together from my wedding day - he wore his Gordon Highlander uniform, complete with a heavy kilt made from at least 40 yards of fabric.

In 1955, I got married. My husband came down to London, and from there we built a happy life together and brought up two children.

I did learn to drive once. My husband always said that one day I would need to, so he taught me and sent me for lessons. I passed my test, and the instructor even said he didn't know why I'd come to him because I would be fine. But I was never comfortable driving. I always felt there were enough idiots on the road without me joining them, and if you're not confident, you can be more of a danger than a help, so I gave it up. These days there's so much more traffic anyway - I think it would feel even worse now.

I used to belong to a flower club as well. There are two other ladies here who were members too. It met once a month and was always a lovely evening. At first, it was held at Trinity Methodist Church in Whitby, but they used to run a raffle, and the church authorities didn't approve, so we had to move. After that we met at the Catholic community hall, and it was always well attended. Then COVID came, everything stopped, and sadly it never started up again. Some ladies later went to a club in Backford, but that stopped too when they planned to rebuild the site.

After my husband passed away, my children began asking what I was going to do. One lives in York and the other in Cambridge, and they asked if I would move closer to one of them. But I said if I moved there, I wouldn't know anybody. Here, everybody knows me and I know them. Many people around here grew up locally - some of the girls working here even grew up with my daughter Susan. I thought about moving, but neither of my children really had the space, and they would be out at work during the day anyway, so I'd be alone.

In the end, I decided I was better off staying where I am, with the people I know, and I've been happy here. They look after you well - they really do. They listen, and that means a lot.

My daughter has just been up from Cambridge. She drives all that way on her own - four hours each way - and she's been here for a few days because she's getting married. It came as a bit of a surprise, as she and her partner have been together for years, but suddenly they decided to make it official. She told me I had to come down and find a new dress for the wedding. I said I already had plenty of clothes, but she insisted - so I suppose I'll have to do as I'm told!

My husband's youngest brother lives locally and told me he'd received an invitation and asked if I was going. I said I'd like to but didn't know how I'd get there. He said, "I'm going, and I'm taking you." I thought that was very kind - it meant a lot, and I'm really looking forward to the road trip!





Left: Carol Graham on her wedding day, with her brother.
Story on page 29



Right: George Aird emergency ejects from his airplane. Story on page 57.



Left: Joyce Smith and her father on her wedding day. Story on page 45.

Below: Artwork made by Sister Catherine. Story on page 10.





Left: Annie and her puppy.
Below: Annie and friends in
Chester City Centre. Story on
page 41.



Below: Christine being
crowned The Rose Queen.
Story on page 9.





Above: Joyce Smith with her husband on their wedding day. Story on page 45

Below: Linda Davies showing a photograph with her mother. Story on page 49.



Mike Holme, Hollymere

I went to Quarry Bank school in Liverpool, which is where the name The Quarrymen came from, who, of course, eventually became The Beatles; they started out as the Quarrymen, and I think most people know that. I was at the school from the age of 11, and John Lennon arrived when he was 13, after passing his 13-plus.

He wasn't the most popular lad in school - far from it. I wouldn't quite call him a bully, but he had a mate, and the two of them would go around together; they had a bit of a reputation for taking dinner money off the younger boys. It was a regular thing until some of the prefects dragged him up and had a serious word, threatening consequences if it didn't stop. After that, it did. He wasn't generally well liked in the school, though he seemed to have more admirers at the girls' grammar school next door, than he did at Quarry Bank.

One of the stories that's always stuck with me happened in our final year. Every summer the school held a garden party for parents, teachers, and visitors. Normally there'd be a Union Jack flying on the flagpole, but that year, instead, there was a bra flying at the top. Everyone knew who had put it there, and he didn't deny it - he was leaving anyway. It didn't go down too well with a lot of the parents, as you can imagine.

After leaving school, I joined the police; I've got plenty of stories from those days. One that stands out is when I was working in traffic.

The chief constable had retired, leaving behind his Jaguar, which was then occasionally used as a patrol car, my partner had previously been a chief constable's driver, so we were allowed to use it on night shifts.

One night we ended up chasing a burglar who'd made his escape in an old Austin A35 van - not exactly built for speed. Somehow a Land Rover also got involved in the chase. The suspect turned down a road that turned out to be a dead end, with a tall chain-link fence at the end. He jumped out and started climbing it. We were thinking, "No chance we're going up there," when the Land Rover came flying past us and straight into the fence. The impact launched the suspect into the air like a catapult - he must have gone 40 feet up before landing. He was injured but not seriously, and that's how they caught him. The Land Rover driver probably had some explaining to do afterwards.

Another time, at the Picton Library in Liverpool, a man had climbed onto the roof. The fire brigade came with their ladders, and before we knew it, I was being told to climb up in the middle of the night to arrest him. The roof was domed, not flat, so that was a bit nerve-wracking.

There were more serious incidents too. One in particular involved a crane and a double-decker bus. The crane struck the bus as it passed, shearing off the roof and tragically killing two people. My partner and I were first on the scene, and we ended up dealing with much of it.

I even had to climb up the crane with a tape measure to record the height - this was before laser equipment - and that landed me on the front page of the Liverpool Echo!

After leaving the police, I worked in industry, eventually becoming a regional manager. At one point, a new managing director decided to transfer me from Liverpool to East Grinstead. The financial offer didn't come close to covering the difference in living costs, so I refused. He told me I'd go nowhere in the company, but I felt I had to put my family first.

That decision led to something completely different. My wife and I had done a bit of bed and breakfast before, and we decided - somewhat boldly - to look at buying a hotel. We ended up viewing the Talbot Hotel in Southport, which had 27 bedrooms. I said we'd take it, despite not really having the money. In the end, we arranged a private mortgage with the sellers and managed to buy it with very little upfront. We ran it for three years, then moved on to a 13th-century coaching inn near the Welsh border, which had four bars and a large function room.

Unfortunately, after a couple of years, my wife developed diabetes, and the doctors advised us to leave the hotel trade due to the long hours. So, we stepped away, but those six years were quite successful and memorable.

Before all that, when we lived in Colwyn Bay, I had a bit of a sideline in buying and fixing up cars with a friend. He once put together a car from two halves - it looked fantastic, but he forgot to change the badge, which gave the game away when the buyer noticed. We had to refund him, fix it properly, and sell it again.

Later on, we got involved in a timeshare in Spain, which turned out to be a bit of a disaster when the owner was jailed for fraud. Rather than walk away, I organised a group of the other owners, and together we bought the properties from the receivers. It turned into a successful venture - we held onto it for about 18 years, and when it was eventually sold, everyone made a decent return. That's one of the things I'm most proud of.

Back in my police days, I was also an advanced driver and was awarded a plaque for being the best police driver in Liverpool when I was about 22, I've since passed that on to my grandson after he passed his driving test. In training, I even managed to outperform a Jaguar in a Wolseley during a pursuit exercise, thanks to better handling on the corners.

Policing was very different then. No radios, no handcuffs - just a whistle and a truncheon. On foot patrol, you had strict routes and timings, and you weren't even allowed to speak to other officers on their beats. Looking back, it seems unbelievable, but that's how it was done at the time.

Annie Buckland

My name is Annie, and when I look back over my life, I realise I have lived through many hard things as well as many beautiful things, I think you can't have the good without the bad. People tell me I have stories, and they're right; I've lived a full life, and I like to talk about it.

The first thing people often notice about me is my two different eyes. One is green and one is brown. When I was a child, I cried about them because other kids made fun of me but now, I think they're a blessing. I grew up in Ireland, near Sligo. It is a beautiful place, but I had a difficult childhood. When I was very young, my sister and I were put in a home run by nuns, and they were cruel. When I was very young, my legs were burned badly at the home, and I was in hospital for a long time. That kind of cruelty stays with you. They told my mother I wouldn't make it, I don't remember it, but I was told everyone prayed for "wee Annie"; I lived, and here I am. I still have those scars all these decades later. That's why I can't look at a nun now - those memories run deep.

Even during the hard times, I still found joy in life and my religion. I love music and singing and one of my favourite songs to sing is "Danny Boy". The songs bring feelings up in me. I used to love to dance too, when I was young, and even when I was older. I was a crazy girl for dancing. I loved céilídhhs. Plenty of laughs and plenty of music. It gave me joy!

As I grew older and met my second husband, I left Ireland and travelled the world. My husband Ray and I lived in Singapore, Aden, and Saudi Arabia. I loved Singapore, it was warm, the people were friendly, and it was beautiful. People were very good to us, and I learned a lot about different religions and ways of living. I didn't always agree with everything, but I enjoyed the experiences I had.

Later, I had two sons, both lovely boys, and I'm very proud of them. I also now have grandchildren, one of them, Molly, is a nurse. They're all grown up, but still my babies.

I have had a few different jobs over the years, I worked at The Grosvenor Hotel and I even worked for the Duke of Westminster; Cleaning, tidying, digging up the grass, whatever needed doing. He was a humble man, not stuck-up, and always spoke nicely. I loved that place and I cried when I left.

I have lived in many places, but after my travels I settled in Shotton and now I've been in this place for a few years. I like it. I know people here, and I enjoy talking to them. Sometimes I sit and watch the sky. Time goes fast.

These days I enjoy seeing my children and grandchildren. I like talking to people who visit, I show them my photos that hold so many memories of Ireland, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, beaches, babies, family, and more;

I love telling the stories behind each one, Some make me laugh and some make me cry.

One of the biggest things in my life that I take pride in, has been helping homeless people. I volunteered regularly at Chester Aid to the Homeless. I think I do that because their lives remind me of mine. When someone hasn't been loved or cared for, you can see it. I know what that looks like. I never tell them my whole story because it's their pain that matters in that moment, not mine. I give them my time, a bit of kindness, and I always make sure to take them some biscuits or sweets, as they appreciate even a small thing.

Some of the men I would talk to would cry and I always tell them to never be ashamed to cry - It takes strength. Sometimes a bit of kindness goes further than anything else.

I've lived through cruelty and kindness, sadness and joy. I've seen the world. I've danced, sung, loved, forgiven, travelled, worked, raised children, and helped people who needed someone to sit beside them. My life hasn't been perfect, but I think all the suffering made me want to be good to others.

That's how I look at it.

Eddie Phillips

I was born in 1953, and I am from Blacon. I've lived in Chester all my life and it's always been home to me.

Football has been a big part of my life. I support Spurs and Chester FC. I went to see Chester play recently for my birthday and I had a great time. I once went to London to see Spurs play at White Hart Lane, they won 2-0, which made the day even better! I've seen a lot of players come and go over the years, my favourite player played for Liverpool in the 1990s – I can't remember his name now, but I remember he scored loads of goals.

For work, I was a painter and decorator, and I really enjoyed it. I did all sorts of jobs, including working on student houses across Chester. I took pride in my work and liked making everything look neat and professional, especially things like post caps and corner caps.

One day, I had a lucky escape. I was up a ladder when the support bar snapped. I had to launch myself backwards and somehow managed to land on my feet! I felt very lucky to walk away from that, and after that I just carried on with my day!



Joyce Smith (Baxendale)

Whilst I look through my photograph albums, I remember well one of the biggest days of my life which was my wedding day. I grew up in Alberton and got married in 1951. It wasn't a fancy or expensive do but it was what we could afford.

On the morning of the wedding, I remember getting ready at home, no fuss just me and a couple of family members helping. I chose a plain dress because it felt comfortable and it suited me, and I bought an expensive veil which was edged in Guipure lace.

We had the ceremony at Alma Street Methodist Chapel. I remember being nervous as I don't like being the centre of attention. My Dad walked me down the aisle, we said our vows, signed the book (register) and we were married.

Afterwards we had a small party with family and close friends. This suited us because neither Jimmy nor I liked big parties. Rationing was still in place so we had a simple buffet of sandwiches, cakes and cups of tea.

Looking further into the album, I can remember the years that followed – our homes, our children and our holidays. Money was sometimes tight, but we always managed to save for the little luxuries that we had.

Even now, when my memory fails me, I can still picture us standing there – me in my wedding dress and Jimmy straightening his tie over and over because he was just as nervous as I was.

Everyone has a story and mine is special to me. I've reached the age of 95 and realise how lucky I have been.

Joyce Green, Wealstone

I grew up in Tattenhall, and so did the rest of my family. My parents were from there, and their parents before them. It's always been home to me.

I've always believed in keeping busy. When I was younger, I worked for the Duke of Westminster, my husband had a farm where we raised animals for him and that definitely kept me busy! I loved it, especially as I got to live in the Handley countryside, I could go and walk for miles, enjoy the scenery, and I never got tired of it. It was so lovely.

I was lucky enough to travel as well, I went to so many places around the world, one country being Australia to visit a friend of the family. I travelled there on my own as my husband stayed with my daughters. I always loved sunny places the most, as well as the beaches. Wherever I went, I tried to take it all in. Some people rush through life and pass it by, never really noticing what's around them; I'm glad I paid attention and took it all in, because of that, I've got so many happy memories.

Now that I'm losing my eyesight, those memories mean even more. I can think back on all the places I've been and the things I've seen, and it brings me a lot of comfort.

If I could give one piece of advice, it would be this: live life to the fullest and appreciate the little moments. Take in everything while you can. It's worth it.

Janet Marion Lloyd (Astle) , Wealstone

I was born in Saltney, near Chester, and most of my childhood memories are tied to that area. I remember I would walk to school every day, even though my parents always gave me money for the bus. I'd tuck the coins away, walk instead, and use the money to buy sweets. It felt like my own little secret treat, and I still smile thinking about it.

I went to St Werburgh Middle School on Love Street in Chester. I loved school and I especially enjoyed my cooking classes. I can still picture my mum taking me to get all the ingredients I needed - flour, raisins, butter - piled into a little bag ready for class. I loved those lessons so much that I'd tell my friends how excited I was, and they'd groan and grumble, "Ugh, I've got Geography!" It made me laugh every time.

Chester was a lovely place to grow up. I loved walking around Grosvenor Park, especially when the weather was nice. Going to school in the city centre was great because we were so close to everything. We used to have swimming lessons at the old baths, and afterwards my friends and I would wander around town together, drying our hair in the breeze and chatting away.

Family has always been important to me. When I think back, some of my happiest moments were our big Christmases. Seventeen or eighteen of us would pack into one house: my older sister Rita, my twin sister Jennifer, Uncle Tom, and all the cousins; It was always chaotic and loud and wonderful.

The only thing I didn't like was having my birthday so close to Christmas - I hated it, actually! Relatives would hand me a birthday present but tell me I wasn't allowed to open it until Christmas Day!

One Christmas, Jennifer and I were sent to collect the turkey from the butcher, it had to be huge to feed everyone. We were walking back with it when the box suddenly slipped from my hands. The turkey shot out into the air, and I can still see it spinning and its neck wobbling in the most ridiculous way. We stood there in shock, then looked at each other and decided the only sensible thing to do was pop it right back in the box and not breathe a word to anyone. And we didn't.

After I finished school I worked as a cake decorator, learning how to pipe and decorate cakes and desserts. I loved it, and I know that love came from those early cooking classes I had enjoyed so much. I later worked in Marks and Spencer for a long time.

I've lived in Chester my whole life, and I've watched it change over the years. Old shops like A&C have disappeared, new ones have taken their place, but the yearly traditions: Christmas, bonfire night, watching fireworks, those have stayed with me, and I hold those memories very close.



Linda Margaret Davies , Wealstone

My name is Linda Margaret Davies. I was born in 1950, and I now live at Wealstone Care Home. I grew up in Leeds, in a house at the bottom of a long road with a beautiful view across the city. We had a big garden, and I remember the house as feeling warm, safe, and full of light. It's a place I still picture clearly and hold very fondly.

I spent my working life teaching deaf children, a job that mattered deeply to me. Many parents were frightened and unsure at first, they didn't know how best to help their child and often worried about how neighbours or other people might react. The children themselves were often frustrated, desperate to communicate and be understood. At the time, many schools discouraged signing and pushed children to use spoken English instead. Some of the children had deaf parents, but at school they wanted to communicate with their hearing friends, which could be confusing and difficult for them.

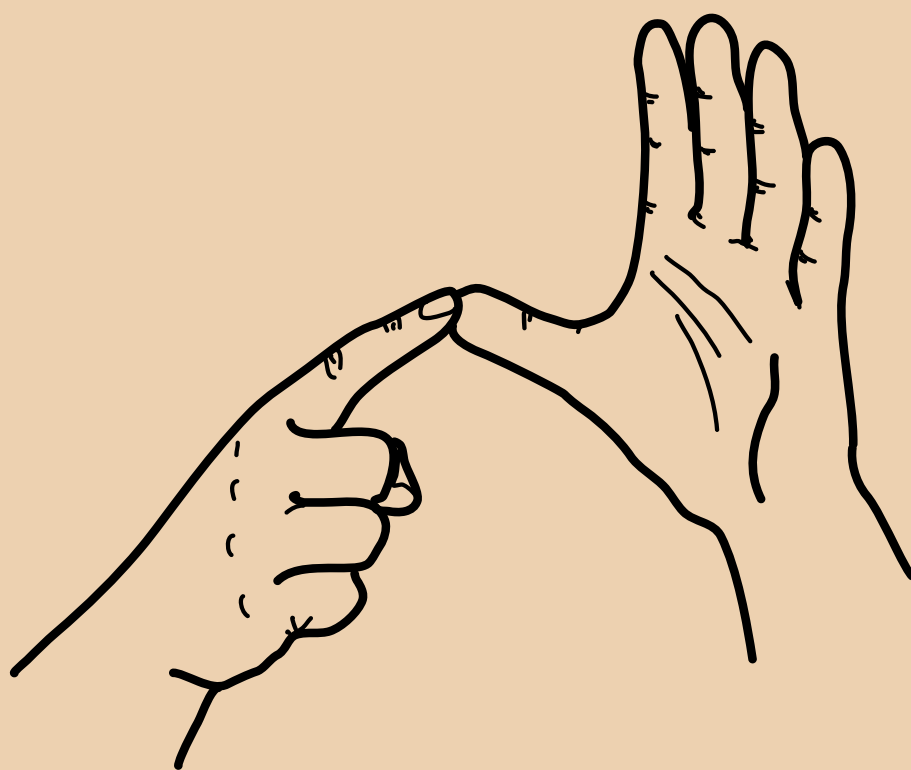
I was drawn into this work because I could see how much these young children were struggling, and I knew something needed to change. I wanted to make a real difference. I travelled to many schools and places, talking to staff and families, and bringing children together so they didn't feel so alone. The best part of my job was watching the children slowly gain confidence, find their voices in their own way, and begin to form friendships. That was incredibly moving to see.

I truly loved my work, I was always touched when parents wrote to thank me, sharing how much of a difference my support had made to their children's and family's lives. Those letters meant the world to me. Head teachers would often call and ask me to come and help their students, which made me feel valued and trusted.

I worked all across Cheshire and moved to Chester four years ago.

One of the most emotional parts of the job was seeing the change in parents, it was often difficult for them in the beginning, but once they saw their child grow in confidence and happiness, everything shifted. They began to understand, and then they became excited and hopeful.

I still think about those families, and recently I even saw some of the parents while I was in my car and waved to them. Moments like that remind me just how meaningful that work was.



Peter, Wealstone

I was born in 1937 in Liverpool. I try to keep up to date with things in life because I always think the busier you are, the more life you'll have lived. When you stop, that's it.

I have lived my life on the bike, quite literally. My biggest adventure was when a group of us, I think it was 6, left Liverpool and went down to Genoa on the French Coast. We then rode from Genoa down to Barcelona. The weather was glorious, and we had to do climbs in the Alps, which was absolutely fabulous. The camaraderie between us was just fantastic; we had all used to race together, so we knew each other well. I just wish you could bring those days back now.

My love of cycling really started when my father bought me a bike, it was nothing special, just a regular bike, but it inspired a life of adventure, friendships, and cycling. I joined the Mersey Hard Wheelers to begin with. After a few years though, I broke away with some friends, forming our own club called the Liverpool Premier Road Club. We were mainly a racing club, rather than a social cycling club.

I did my National Service in the RAF. I know my service number off-by-heart to this day; it's locked in my memory, just like a Co-Op number. I was based down in Cambridge during my service, and when I had time, I used to go to Herne Hill. I had access to the velodrome track there, and I trained there for hours and hours on my own.

I would ride round and round and use it as a training measure.

I have photos that mean such a lot to me, capturing so many fabulous memories. I look at them every now and again. There are lots of cycling pictures and photos of the terrains we explored. To have been able to cycle through and experience such wonderful places is something I wish I could do forever.

I have pictures of some of the great cyclists I have seen and had the pleasure of knowing. This is Stan Britain and he's 90 something now. I also used to race with Keith Boardman; he's the father of Chris Boardman. I have a picture of the memorial in the Alps to British rider Tom Simpson; he wasn't just a good cyclist he was a great communicator. He did so much for the sport, his loss was just so sad.

I also have lots of pictures of my adventures. There is one picture of us in Italy, sitting on the steps of a hostel, where we were chatting with some ladies from Switzerland. In another picture I am riding a horse in Southern Ireland with my good friend Stevie, who is now sadly gone. My horse was about 3 hands taller than Stevie's, and I remember spending most of my time looking down on him. Having memories like this is such a blessing.

Those days have sadly gone. I would be out there on a bike right now if I could be.

Rachel Gray, Oaklands

Family, Music, and Memories

I've always been very close to my two older sisters, Annette and Shirley. They often come to visit me, and we still have a good laugh together - just like we did when we were growing up in Hoole. I've lived my whole life in Chester, and it's always been home to me. I'm married and have a wonderful teenage son, and between my sisters and me, we've got quite a lively bunch of nieces and nephews!

Before moving into the care home, I loved to travel and see new places. I worked as a telephonist for the Chester Chronicle, which I really enjoyed. I loved listening to people's stories - everyone had something interesting to say, and it made every day a bit different.

Life in the care home has its own joys too. I enjoy playing Bingo and going out on little trips with the others - we've visited the zoo and the duck pond, and they're always such lovely days out. I especially enjoy when visitors come to the home to show off their retro vehicles - it's fascinating to see them up close. We even had a motorbike gang come to the care home once!

I like taking part in all sorts of activities, but the reminiscence class is my favourite. It helps me remember parts of my life I thought I'd forgotten, and those memories always make me smile. When I'm having a bad day,

I find comfort in looking at pictures of my mum, Pam, and my sister Shirley - they bring back such happy times.

Music has always been a big part of my life, too. I love pop music, and my favourite band has always been Wham! you can't beat their songs when you need something to lift your spirits. And when it comes to food, you can't go wrong with fish, chips and mushy peas - my absolute favourite!



Margaret White, Oaklands

I was 23 when I got married, that was back in Birmingham, where I'm originally from. Such happy times they were! Life was busy and full back then and I was always knitting something or other, jumpers, shawls, scarves - you name it! Everyone in the family got one of my creations sooner or later. My mother tried to teach me to crochet, bless her, but it never quite clicked. Knitting was my thing.

I also loved to keep active, too. Dancing and singing were my favourites. My husband and I would head off to the dance halls whenever we could - we hardly ever missed a Saturday night. Those were the days! I don't dance now, but I still adore watching Strictly Come Dancing. The costumes are simply fabulous, and some of those dancers can really move! We sometimes have dancers come into the home now and I love to watch them as well.

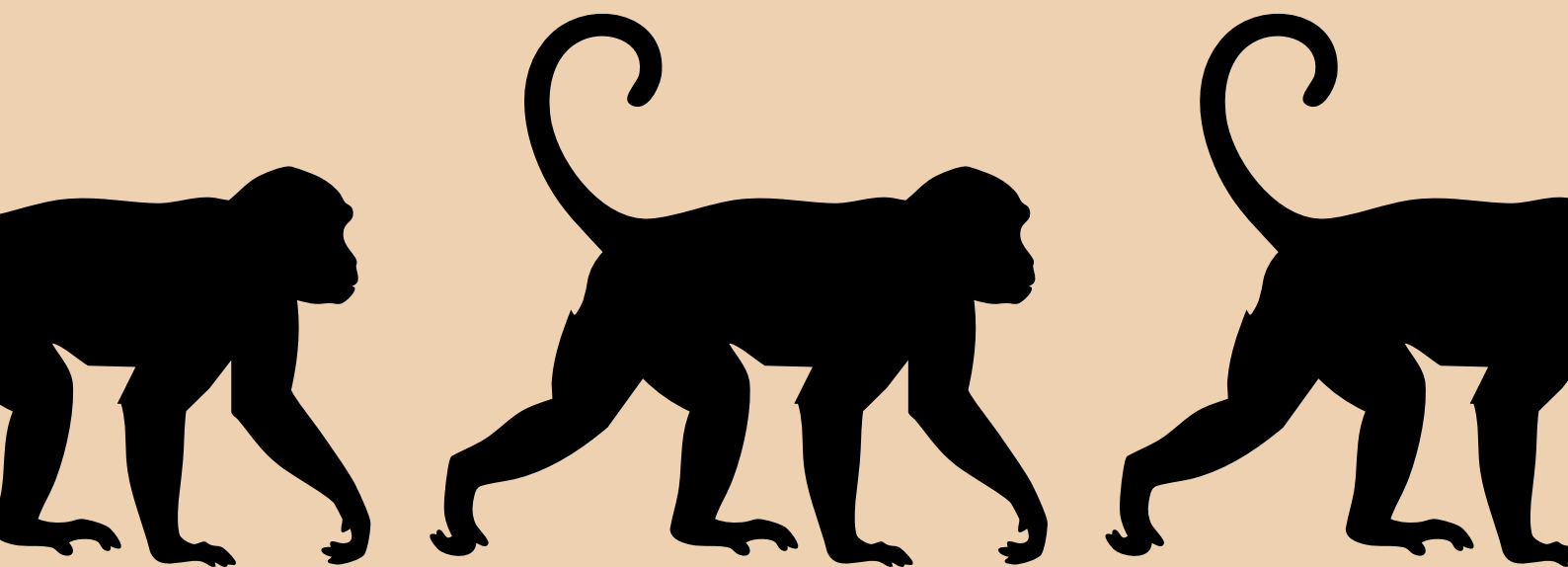
Travelling was one of my greatest pleasures. I went to America twice - New York was incredible! I'll never forget standing at the top of the Empire State Building, looking out over the city. What a brilliant memory, it was fantastic. We ate such a wide range of foods when we were there, I tried everything: diners, steakhouses, you name it. I still say now though that you can't beat a good steak and chips.

I travelled all over Europe too. Every place had its own charm, so I could never choose a favourite. I loved hiking back then; I'd walk for miles without thinking twice. Back home, I often wandered up the Clent Hills near Halesowen. Fresh air, beautiful views - I do miss those long walks.

These days, I still like to get out and about when I can, I went on a trip to the zoo recently when the weather was lovely and sunny it was wonderful, the sun was shining, and the monkeys had us all laughing at how cheeky they were. I'm not able to get around as easily as I used to, but I'm very appreciative of being taken on small adventures now, like the zoo and trips to the duck pond.

I've been very lucky with my family. My son Paul, my lovely daughter-in-law, two brilliant granddaughters, and now two gorgeous great-granddaughters - they're all such a joy. They keep me smiling.

If I've learned anything in my 96 years, it's this: make the most of life. Do the things that make you happy. That's what it's all about.



George Aird, Oaklands

I am a very lucky guy and have had a very happy life. I think a lot of it was down to serendipity; those little moments where things just fell into place.

I started my career training on faster aircraft before actually going into service. I was posted to Germany to Number 3 Fighter Squadron in Hanover. It was a very happy squadron with many mixed fighter pilots. I had hoped to switch to flying Vampires, but instead, I was only a bit disappointed to be posted to 203 AFS at Driffield in Yorkshire, flying the Meteor T.7, which felt like a step backwards in time!

I remember one time I accidentally visited East Germany. It was a long-range cross-country flight, and I went over the border. I got a little rap on the knuckles when I got back because they tracked me on radar on both sides of the United Kingdom. I only realized I was on the wrong side of the border by the derelict towns below me. So, I just turned around and got out of there as fast as I could.

Sitting on top of a layer of clouds, looking for faces in Europe. The Eastern Bloc was still flying MiG-15s, which were very fast and could have caught up with me; but I got away with it.

Later, I joined what was called Treble One Squadron and helped to form what became the Black Arrows aerobatic team flying Hunters. The Hunter 6 was a good sharp aeroplane. We even did a display at the Paris Air Show. It was there at the air show that we managed to go supersonic in a dive.

In 1957, the Defence White Paper got rid of all short-term pilots, including me. So, I joined a company owned by Short Brothers and Harland from Belfast, called the Naval Ferry Flight. It was very interesting because we travelled all over Europe and the Middle East, delivering aircraft or moving them from one place to another. We had some interesting characters, like an ex-RAF Scot called Pancho, who looked just like the cartoon character with a needle-black moustache. The job even included towing targets for fighters using live ammunition. You had everything crossed doing that!

I was surprised to be invited to join de Havilland Propellers in North Carolina, America. We were in the missile business, which was where I ended up in missile development. My boss was John "Cat's Eyes" Cunningham, a famous night fighter pilot from the war.

I had a few close calls during my flying days too. In 1962, I was flying an English Electric Lightning. I wasn't supposed to be flying it that day, but I swapped with another pilot. I was returning to base when a fire warning light came on. The reheat system fuel supply had ignited too early. I declared an emergency, but as I came into land, the controls went.

I pushed the stick forward and nothing.

I pulled the blind to eject, and when I woke up, I was being sprayed by warm water in a tomato field. One of the other pilots had been killed just a week or so before.

Remarkably, I was flying again six months later, despite breaking both my legs.

I have flown many different planes, but the Mosquito was lots of fun, such a very powerful plane. My wife, who was as keen on flying as I was, even had a go in it. She talked to the boss and said, "I'd love a flight in that," and then he insisted I take her up. It was very unofficial; she had to sit behind me. She took pictures, but at one point she realised she was upside down!

She's never forgiven me for another flight in a Tiger Moth where I did aerobatics and she wasn't strapped in. I likened her to a bucket of water; if you swing it fast enough, the water stays in!

We even had a free trip to Miami once because I delivered a Mosquito all the way there for an American buyer.

I've had a wonderful life, full of flying and adventure.

My wife is no longer with us, but she loved it just as much as I did.

Maureen Shuttleworth, Loxley Hall

I'm Maureen. I grew up in Liverpool, but I've lived in Helsby for years now and it's very much home. I helped set up the OPAL club - Older People Active Lives. Before that there was Help the Aged, but when that stopped we all thought, well, we'll just have to do something ourselves then.

It wasn't easy at first. Funding was hard to come by, but people really pulled together. Before long we had volunteers popping up everywhere offering to help for free. It was mainly women who got it all going - organising, cooking, running activities, making teas, sorting tables, the lot. Honestly, they were unstoppable. We held it all at Alvanley Village Hall and it became such a lovely place to be.

I helped run it until I reached my 80s, but eventually my health started slowing me down and I had to step back and hand it over to the younger ones. Zoe was brilliant at running it. I'd still be there myself now if I could. It was never just about activities really - it was the chats, the laughter, the catching up. We had such good times there. Even now when I'm out around town, people stop me for a chat. That's what I love about Helsby - we've got a proper community.

People used to laugh when I would share stories about my husband, Vic. He was an old-fashioned gentleman type and worked as a male nurse. He had a habit of asking questions at exactly the wrong moment.

One of my favourite memories was when we went to the MCG cricket ground in Melbourne. Massive place. We were being shown around and standing right at the edge of the pitch when the guide asked, "Any questions?" I saw Vic's hand slowly going up and thought, don't you dare... But up it went anyway.

He asked, completely seriously, "That logo in the middle of the field... is it a mosaic?"

The guide just looked at him and said, "I don't think so..." and everyone burst out laughing while I wanted the ground to swallow me whole.

Then there was the whale watching trip in New Zealand, it was a beautiful day, absolutely breathtaking; I wanted to spend every second watching the sea. Before we even got on the boat, I warned him: "If you put your hand up to ask a question, I'm going to kill you."

Of course, five minutes later, his hand went up.

The guide pointed out a whale; Vic immediately asked, "What kind of whale is that?" to which the guide replied, "A sperm whale."

I just remember thinking, oh my God, sit down before you ask anything else.

He always made people laugh though, and I've got wonderful memories of him; together we've got our lovely sons, Paul and David, who I'm very proud of.

How the stories were collected:

Older people across several Cheshire care homes were supported to share stories from their lives. Introductory visits were made to each home to familiarise residents with the team and gently introduce the project.

Sessions took place in relaxed, familiar spaces: shared lounges or residents' rooms, with support from care staff, personal carers or family members. This supportive environment helped participants feel comfortable, especially those living with dementia.

“I want people to know that I’m not a nobody, and that I have lived a full life.”

“It is important to tell your story and let other people know what you’ve done with your life.”

Stories were brought to life through meaningful objects such as photo albums and keepsakes, as well as music that prompted memory recall. Music proved especially impactful for residents with dementia, helping them to reconnect with memories and earlier parts of their lives.

Participants who have taken part in filming said the experience made them feel important and recognised.

Participants described the process as calming and emotionally supportive, with one person explaining that it helped them “get to the internal things.”

The Hidden Histories project also strengthened connections between family members and carers. Families reported that taking part created opportunities to reconnect with loved ones through shared memories. Several noted that having stories recorded would be a meaningful way to remember their parent or relative and preserve their legacy for the future.

Care home staff gained new insight into the lived experiences of residents, including memories that had not previously been shared. In some cases, personal carers observed that participants with significant memory loss were able to recall more than expected during the sessions.

The project also created space for participants to open up about personal concerns and feelings that had not previously been expressed. Through the storytelling sessions, staff were able to listen, respond with reassurance, and support participants in reframing difficult emotions.

This helped strengthen understanding between residents and care teams, and reinforced the value of everyday experiences as meaningful and worthy of attention.

Hidden Histories is a collection of memories, stories and personal reflections of local older people, in Cheshire, some of whom are living with Dementias.

Some participants also recorded their stories through video and audio, preserving their voices and memories for the future, which is available via the Radiate Arts website.

www.radiatearts.co.uk



To find out more about the project and hear people share their stories, visit our website or scan the QR code.

www.radiatearts.co.uk/hidden-histories-2026