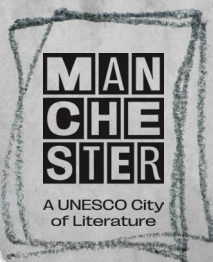


**Manchester  
City of Literature**



**THE BOLTON  
LIBRARY  
WORDSMITHS**



**Festival  
of Libraries  
Bolton**



## INTRODUCTION

Screenwriter, Poet and Performer Anjum Malik has written extensively for screen, stage and radio. Anjum joined Manchester Metropolitan University as a Lecturer in Creative Writing in January 2017. Anjum also works with community and arts groups, and has been commissioned to write drama for radio and film. So far Anjum has had at least over 80 scripts commissioned, performed/ transmitted.

As part of the inaugural Festival of Libraries 2021, coordinated by Manchester City of Literature and funded by Arts Council England, Anjum Malik was in residence at Bolton Libraries, exploring the past, present and the future through poetry with a local writing group, the Bolton Library Wordsmiths. This pamphlet is a collection of the writing they produced during the festival, inspired by libraries.

Bolton Libraries provide library and information services through a network of ten libraries and a Home Library Service. In addition to the Central Library in the Crescent, there are 9 Community Libraries providing access to resources and information across the borough.

**Bolton**  
**Council**

**Bolton**  
**Library and**  
**Museum Services**

We'd been going to the library together for as long as I could remember. On the lintel, above the revolving door, was a stone carving which exhorted us to, "*Read, Mark, Learn and Inwardly Digest*". Of course we didn't always do that. Often we went to check if any boys were in (hardly ever); sometimes to shelter from the rain or cold. But when we were there our chief interest was making up stories about the adults based on the books they were taking home. Judith said she was collecting material for a book when she was older. I did it because I was curious about them. Were the ladies plotting revenge or murder? Were the men really taking out romance novels for themselves? Judith said I was just plain nosy. I said she'd never write a book.

Our research meant hanging around the counter a lot and from there we could watch Miss Proctor in action. She was magnificent. Patient, courteous, calm, knowledgeable and "always beautifully turned out" as my mother would say. She indulged the two of us too. She would seek out the books we asked for, even obscure ones, (we liked to give her a test now and then), and she suggested writers we'd never heard of, American ones, Styron, Levin, Vonnegut, Friedan. "Stick to writers who are alive girls. Feed your imaginations."

She was steering us towards other stories, other possibilities, other lives. I wanted to be Miss Proctor. I wanted to be smart inside and out. I thought I could do that by becoming a librarian.

When I got a temporary post in the university library one summer I was deliriously happy. I knew what would be expected of me after my years of observation and I would rise to the challenge. I would demonstrate my knowledge of the Dewey system. I would be patient and encouraging with the students, knowledgeable with the professors and, most important of all I would be custodian of the date stamp.

But holiday jobs are bottom of the pile basement jobs; not a borrower to be seen, stuck in the stacks with papers, boxes, files and folders. And there was dust. It was everywhere, on the documents, on me, and in me. I left after 2 weeks with allergic rhinitis and my sinuses have never really recovered.

All those years in the library it had never occurred to me to ask for careers advice from Miss Proctor. It wouldn't have helped if I had. She was the face of the library. I bet she never went into the basement. Judith must have spoken to her though, but she never told me.

So, my career dreams thwarted, I went to work with criminals instead. Different in so many ways but still about other stories, other possibilities, other lives.

Even after all this time my inner librarian surfaces from time to time. I'm still happy to lend books to visitors and I often rearrange my bookshelves, sometimes alphabetically, sometimes by genre and recently by the cover of the spine. Judith says that's a ridiculous thing to do and very confusing but then she did become a Miss Proctor.

I was right about the book though, she never wrote it.

## Angie

I'm a fiction fan, full of admiration for writers who can conjure up compelling characters and stories and transport you to another world, even if only for a few hours of the day. Reading has been a great comfort during the pandemic and staying in touch with the library's Reading Friends group throughout this time has been really important to me.



## ***IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU***

### **Early Years**

You know it's there, the door to the junior library, set back from the side street, covered in dust from passing traffic. Neglected but not forgotten by middle aged shoppers scurrying home to warm centrally heated houses. Others pay no attention to the grubby doorway where the trash of cigarette butts and crisp packets eddy and swirl in the corners driven by a Northern wind.

Behind the unfashionable door lay the land of lost content where you spent many hours roaming the world. Unlocking ideas, gleaned facts or most of all sitting in a quiet safe place away from the drudgery of running errands, or caring for younger siblings. Just being yourself.

Dust motes hung in the air, floating like dandruff, filtered by light from windows placed high enough to prevent prying eyes peeking in. Quiet hung like a cloak upon the readers, munching their lunch time away in the warmth of the library: idly turning the pages of Arthur Mee's Children's Encyclopaedia, or flicking a rubber band from the end of a broken ruler at the child on the next table but all happy to be in from the biting moorland wind.

The attendant always looked at you as if you had no place there, you with your clunky tie up black shoes and long grey knee socks instead of the dolly blue white ankle socks most schoolgirls wore: but no matter how disapproving the look you both knew it was your right to be let in. She still kept a watchful eye on all your comings and goings.

You wanted books lots of them, not one stingy book but two, three. Would it make a difference to the hundreds on the shelves? They would never be missed. You would always try it, defiantly taking three to the desk, but the attendant always sighed, put two aside and thump the date stamp on the remaining book.

You wanted to take home the enormous reference books until you read the sign 'FOR LIBRARY USE ONLY' What a bummer!-- Still, it was no big deal they would hardly fit into your satchel.

You riffled through the latest additions, Enid Blyton,--nah, What Katie Did next, forget it!-- Treasure Island, read it! -- Tom Sayer, read it! --Hey up! King Solomon's Mines, that looks interesting, and the stamp thumps down on your latest prize.

You stand back and inspect the doorway again. It has happy memories, childhood dreams of a new and better world than a lifetime of clockwatching and wage slavery. A doorway into another world where everything was possible. You look again at the neglected doorway remembering the land of lost content that will not come again, and smile.

### **You Capture the Castle**

It becomes a ritual; approaching The Crescent from Victoria Square savouring the majesty of it. That magnificent sweep of stone declaring the determination of the working classes. It deserves a grand entrance. Built in the hungry thirties it contrasts the Victorian opulence and bombast of the Victorian Town Hall with its classic restrained design. You always feel a sense of pride that you belong to a town that had such vision. It was the town's birthday present to you, started in the year of your birth and finished just before war broke out.

You stand entranced by the grandeur of the entrance hall; but you are not here to admire the architecture, you are on a mission. Last week the Daily Mail had the headlines 'Lady Chatterley's Lover, taken from the banned books list, and released for public sale' you are here to find it.

In the main library you scan the latest editions in vain. In frustration you



approach the desk and ask where you might find the book of your choice, the one all your friends are talking about. The book that you see Marjory Lomax reading every day on the bus. You know what it is, even though there is a brown paper cover on it. The attendant smirks before saying, "I think you'll find it at John Reade's, you know the bookshop on Newport Street and resumes her job of stamping the pile of books with 'Property of Bolton Municipal Library.'

Sarky cow!

You return to the trolley of latest additions, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, *Hawaii*, they look promising. You take a chance, that's the beauty of the library because if you make the wrong choice there is always another chance next week.

There's forty-five minutes left before your next bus. It's a toss-up! Up the marble staircase to the art gallery, or down to the aquarium? You head for the art gallery, thinking it would be a different way of killing time, better than staring at the ageing eel in the aquarium. He never stirs even when you tap on the glass with a half crown. You usually rap on the glass loud enough to wake the dead until the attendant spots you and asks you to leave.

You never did like that place anyway,-- it's no big deal. All that subdued lighting and dozy fish. Not to mention the dodgy men! They always wear gaberdine macs, whatever the weather and trilby hats pulled well down over their eyes, and they stare. Stare enough to make you feel uncomfortable. Undressing you with their eyes. That's one of the reasons you torment the lazy eel. You know it will attract the attendant's attention and every one will be asked to leave.

You arrive at the art gallery and resist the urge to stroke Peggy Jean's head. She's your favourite Epstein, could the bust of the woman be Peggy Jean's mother? Mental note, find out! The Epstein's are a trio of bronzes and are

always displayed at the top of the staircases. You can never touch them, there's always an attendant sitting feet away, usually doing a crossword or studying the *Racing Post*. A quick tour and a cursory look at some dark oily pictures reveals nothing of interest, they could be portraits of walrus all beards and moustaches, hardly a woman among them. Ah well! Famous to some but not to you. Times rolling on! Bye bye Peggy Jean. See you next week. Maybe, next week you'll get lucky and Marjory Lomax will lend you the book!

### Full Circle

You take the ramp into the library, because it's safer, the foyer is not as forbidding of old, it's light, bright and airy. The old men and job seeking youths have gone, the reading room where they stood, shuffling from one foot to the other has also gone, its place taken by a small exhibition of wartime memorabilia. The keeper of the gate has gone, replaced by a bank of machines. A faceless soulless machine for everything. The technology bewilders you.

Upstairs, downstairs or straight ahead. confronted with the same old dilemma you choose. Straight ahead, that's the ticket! Children dodge past, excitedly rushing to the children's corner,-- that's changed,-- there are papers and crayons and some toddlers are clustered around an assistant who's kneeling at child level reading a story. Sounds as if it could be the *Tiger Who Came to Tea*.

You wander around, a visitor in a dystopian land, everything is familiar but different. How many years since you were last here? Too many! -. Well, books have become so cheap; You can buy them at the supermarkets then throw them away. Are you part of the throwaway society now?

Closer inspection reveals the old men and jobless are still here in another form, hunched over computer terminals Googling the day away. Grateful to be safe and warm. You shoulder surf at one of the units then turn away,

embarrassed at your actions: reminded of reading the Evening News over someone's shoulder on the bus, saddened that your generation has been dis enfranchised by 't internet.'

Once filled with ambitious young men studying for exams and a passport out of The North the reference library is now filled with students from the four corners of the world.

You take the lift to the Art Gallery to save your legs, not that you can't tackle the stairs, but your parking ticket expires in a short while. Just time to have a quick look round. Would it still be the same, cases full of stuffed wildlife, polecats, their cousins the weasels and the odd fox or owl? But it's not They've had a revamp and not before time!-- It's light and bright and airy like the foyer. welcoming.--More visitors, showing more interest since last you were here. children laughing and running around, dragging Dad to look at the mummies. Dead bodies never lose their attraction!-- They always intrigued you and your friends.

You notice they have a local history section, although they haven't displayed the stained-glass window from Wm. Heaton & Sons offices to its optimum... It needs to be backlit to reveal its true glory. Every morning you would stand in front of that East facing window and admire the confidence it reflected of the cotton kings who commissioned it.-- You recognize some of the items from your early working life. Now you are becoming history too!

There is time for one last goodbye! but Peggy Jean is nowhere to be seen. She's lost her pride of place at the entrance doors. On enquiry the attendant shrugs and says,

"Peggy Jean, who's she? Think you mean Norma Jean, mi old duck."

Ignoring the insult you mutter, "I hope she's gone to a good home."

In the precinct you sigh! The council have ripped out the trees, removed the benches where people could sit and re arrange their shopping or have a chat. You wonder if they employed a Soviet Bloc architect to re design

shoe shop alley. If you didn't know better you would swear it was East Berlin in the fifties.

In the fading light you take one last look at the building that gave so much hope to a town in the depression of the thirties Where had all that ambition and pride gone? When did your town lose her self-respect? Selling your heritage to the highest bidder, nibbling away at the edges, a piece of parkland here, a playing field there. Gnawing the heart out your town. They are becoming braver by the year. What will become of The Crescent? The people's palace. Once it housed a medical centre, a pre-natal clinic and a sexual diseases clinic, entered discreetly via a rear entrance. Now the court rooms are being redeveloped as a boutique hotel. What's a boutique hotel?

A television outfit arrives in The Crescent. We could re-invent ourselves into a media hub, The Crescent is not unlike St. Petersburg, the moorlands would be the perfect backdrop for a moody Bronte film. The driver runs his heavily loaded vehicle onto the stone flags and you hear the crack as yet another kerbstone breaks. Ah well! Suppose that calls for another dollop of Tar Mac Adam, when the media circus has left town.-- Still, it's progress 'innit' as your friend from the Art Gallery would say.

Today a small town in Lancashire, tomorrow Bollywood -on-le-Moors.

**Barbara**

Alumnae of Derby Street Secondary Modern, full time retiree, avid reader, sometime scribbler, proud Boltonian.



## **WORTH IT**

Breezy yellow sunshine and the sea, blue-grey in the distance  
Heavily laden hawthorns arching over the pavement  
Rapid rush of traffic, adjacent  
Swiftly trotting down the long, sloping hill..into the town  
The library, grandly porticoed but modest, an unassuming beacon of peace and quiet  
Amongst the bustle of bus stops, flashing balisha beacons, scrubby shops, taxi offices  
The weighty half-glazed door, brass handle smoothed by many hands, swings open at a shove,  
Exposing the hushed 'home of dreams'  
Children's library to the left  
Reference library to the right  
Thomas Hardy.....ahead, illuminated and enhanced by soft sky lights  
Serried ranks of books, no colourful dust jackets here, just prim, severe volumes, standing straight with silver lettering..

The Mayor of Casterbridge  
Tess of the D'Urbervilles  
Far From the Madding Crowd  
The Trumpet-Major  
Return of the Native

Choose, card, stamp, out..with a light step of anticipation.  
Trudge up the now steeper hill, traffic close and dirty, labouring cars, trundling trucks, laden buses

Branch off onto a chalky path through the scraggy downland undergrowth,  
Puffing and pushing until emerging onto the skimpy grass and open space  
Up and on up, puffing more and still more  
The slope eases, a blessed bench heaves into sight  
Now seated, Hardy in hand, puffed out.  
The view over the city, the harbour and the glinting sea to the high-rising island  
The warm wind blowing gently in the face  
Ready to read, ready for delight.

### **Jane**

Hello, I'm Jane, a book and library lover all my life. An incomer from the south coast, Manchester's variety of wonderful libraries impressed me when I arrived in the north. I now volunteer with Reading Friends and have tried my hand at a bit of writing, all at Bolton Central Library. It's a graceful building housing not just the library but a museum, an art gallery and even an aquarium.  
Delightful.



## ***THE GOLDEN TICKET***

I was always quite a truthful child. Well, no George Washington, but generally brought up to. "Tell the truth and shame the devil!" as my mother used to say.

So, my trip to join the local library as a four-year-old, caused me some confusion.

I loved books from an early age, my mother usually reading them to my brother and me, so I saw joining the library and getting my own library ticket as a sort of "Rites of Passage." for me. To me, my own personal ticket was a tangible sign that I was growing up, no longer the baby of the family, it was exciting, an adventure, something I couldn't wait to do. This event was timetabled for my fourth birthday and, when the big day arrived, my grandmother was delegated to take me to the local library to join me up.

We were completely unaware of the rule in place at that time in libraries in Edinburgh, that a child was not allowed to join the library unless they could independently write their full name. This was what we were told when we approached the desk by the more than efficient librarian. I was asked if I could do this task and truthfully admitted that I couldn't, thinking it wouldn't matter, but we were refused an application form and had to leave. I remember walking home, very disappointed, but my grandmother reassuring me, "Never mind. We'll sort it out." I expected lessons in name writing but my name was difficult, and it was deemed to be too hard for me to complete at that time so that was that, or so I thought.

However, the next day we make another trip, this time more clued up, savvy, forewarned. A different librarian this time, (did my grandmother have inside shift information?) and the form was handed over after some mumblings by her to the lady on the desk. Then she took the application to a small window ledge just out of sight of the librarian and in a loud

voice said, "Right Kathleen, write your name on that line!" whereupon she took my hand in hers and guided my fingers to form the letters of my name. When finished, she announced, "Well done, very neat!" and then she handed in the completed form.

"Did she write her own name?" came the expected question.

I said nothing as I could feel the grip on my arm tightening, so kept my mouth firmly shut.

"Oh yes!" said my forked tongued grandmother without hesitation, "She is a clever girl!"

Whether the librarian had her suspicions about the curly, cursive grown up handwriting or not, she kept her doubts to herself and the ticket was duly issued, the door was opened and, that day, my journey into the realms of magic and mystery began in earnest. It was the Golden ticket of its day, the passport to adventure and wonderment, opening a window on to another world.

I knew my grandmother had lied but then, as she said, "Well, you did write your own name, you certainly didn't write anyone else's did you?" I couldn't argue with that.

Oh, the bounty to be derived from a few white lies and a conspiring grandmother, setting me on the path to reading and affording me all the years of joy and happiness that I have had from the membership of various libraries throughout my life.

### ***Kathleen***

Since I retired, I have been a member of various creative writing groups in Bolton, which I have found inspiring. I enjoy playing around with words and ideas and listening to the work of others I usually write prose pieces but have attempted some poetry too.

## ***REVOLVING DOOR***

Saturdays were special for a seven year old. They involved a trip to town on the bus with my nan and sister, to go to the library. Walking there, holding my nan's hand, I felt a flutter of excitement in my stomach. My sister and I would try to push the heavy revolving door into a warm and cavernous space, lined with shelves of books. It felt like entering another world, of musty smells and hushed silence.

We were led through a long corridor to the children's library, which was dark and austere. At first, it seemed incredible that we could choose books AND take them home. Finally, I chose three books, and took them to the main desk. Standing on tip toe, I handed them to the stern librarian. She flicked through the cards, and punctuated the silence with a harsh metallic STAMP.

Clutching my treasure, we tried to push the heavy door round, and out into the cold wide world.

Fast forward thirty years, and I was the one taking my children to the library in Bromley Cross after school. Its a hidden gem of a library, maybe the smallest one in Bolton. The children were excited to be out of school, they ran up the steps and were in before me. When I arrived they were in the children's section chatting to some friends. The room was light and airy, and the books were in large boxes at floor level. It was a joy to watch the children sitting on the floor, rifling through them, deciding what to take home for the weekend.

### ***Kathryn***

I have lived in Bolton for 35 years. When I retired from full time work, I decided to do a course in creative writing run by Enjoy Learning, something that I had wanted to do for some time. The Libraries project has been a good opportunity to write about something important that has stayed with me throughout my life - trips to the library. This has been a constant for me as a child, student, parent, and even during the recent pandemic.

**KATHRYN**

## ***ANONYMOUS***

A library card what more could you want?

Plastic or paper, a key to untold delights

From cradle to grave

More books than you could ever read.

Where's Spot, The Gruffalo, The Very Hungry Caterpillar

Early readers for eager minds

Let Enid Blyton or J K Rowling take you to a magical place

Classics for pleasure Treasure Island and Little Women

Young Adults – entice from phones

Modern fiction, Classic fiction, poetry and plays

Audio books for busy lives and failing eyes

E books so easy to access; will they ever replace the joy of turning the page?

With children and grandchildren, the cycle begins anew.

**ANONYMOUS**



## LOVELY LIBRARY MEMORIES

Took my young son to the library  
tightly clutching my hand  
he enjoyed the walk from our house  
through the Clock Tower Gardens  
listening to the clock striking  
the hour the quarter and the half hour  
The garden had beautiful flowers  
In beds around the Clock Tower

Then on to Manchester Road  
where Bury Library majestically stood  
approached by a white stone stairway  
Philip enjoyed climbing these  
almost as much as the library  
When he got to the children's section  
Oh what enjoyment he had  
He sat on a little stool and looked  
Through the little boxes of books  
The Very Hungry Caterpillar  
The Tiger who came to tea  
Were his favourites at that time  
Also he used to enjoy  
The big book of Nursery Rhymes

We used to read these at night  
when he was tucked up in bed  
he learned them off by heart  
because they were repeatedly said  
he was able to recite them  
putting him in good shape for  
remembering information later  
when he was at school

LINDA

Once we had borrowed a book from the library  
Philip really enjoyed it  
but when it was time to return the books  
that one was nowhere to be seen  
we turned the house upside down trying to find out what had happened  
to the book but to no avail  
When we returned the other books I explained  
I expected a library fine  
but the librarian was very understanding  
she told me to return it when I found it  
Several months passed  
Philip wanted to play a board game  
that was in a box and Hey Presto  
we opened the lid and there  
was the missing library book  
I went with Philip and we returned the book  
The librarian was very grateful  
and she thanked Philip for being so honest

All's well that ends well

**Linda**

I wrote my first poem at the age of 8 and received a gold star  
from the headmaster for it. Our teacher showed us how to write a  
poem with the rhythm and something clicked.

I wrote funny poems for a few years that had a rhyme. Years later  
I went to creative writing and learnt not all poems had to rhyme.

Now I have had poetry published in Never Bury Poetry,  
Livefromworktown and Irwell Writers Anthology. For Forward Press  
20th Anniversary I had a poem published in Poets of Northern  
England. I am still writing poetry now and am a member of several  
writers groups.

LINDA



## **A QUEST**

The bell rang at 4pm and school was over for the day, I could not wait to get home and switch on the radio or wireless as it was called when I was 10 years old. 1948 was a time when most people listened to the radio and Children's Hour with Uncle Mac was a must for most young boys and girls. It started at 5pm and I waited for the serial book which was at this time Pigeon Post by Arthur Ransome. This was about boys and girls around my own age having adventures in the English Lake district, which at that time I had not even visited. This particular book was about prospecting for gold in the Lakeland fells and using pigeons to relay messages to their mother and baby sister who stayed in a nearby farm.

When the serial ended, I wanted to know more about the Walker Children and their friends the Blackett's so I raced round to my local library, and asked the lady behind the counter if they had any Arthur Ransome books she said we have quite a few of his books, start with Swallows and Amazons that was when the Walkers and Blackett's first met".

During the ensuing weeks I devoured all the Arthur Ransome books that my local library possessed. I sailed on the Norfolk Broads protecting nesting Coots, travelled to Scotland to outsmart an egg collector trying to steal a Great Northern Divers eggs and also met the mysterious Missee Lee on the China coast all from the comfort of my own arm chair. I then started to try and find all the outstanding books on my A.R. reading list.

Living on the south side of Manchester at the time, my trusty bike, a battered Hercules roadster took me to libraries at Longsight, Didsbury, Levenshulme, and even Manchester Central Library in my search for my outstanding favourite books. I waited a long time and had many fruitless journeys until that wonderful day when my final book was found. I located Secret Water in Withington library then settled down to read the final book of my quest.

**TED**

Now 70 plus years later, all Arthur Ransome's books are on my bookshelf and still give me the same pleasure they gave me many years ago.

## **THE TEACHER'S READ.**

Our teacher every day read the class, a chapter from a book,  
It was The Exploits of Brigadier Gerrard by Arthur Conan Doyle  
Gerrard was an exciting, adventure loving scoundrel, a teller of tall tales,  
We hung on every word the teacher read, about this bold hussar,  
But he left us wanting more, when his reading book he shut,  
A new wooden library had been built near where I lived,  
And the urge to know the stories end, lead me up the steps,  
The counter seemed so very tall, on tiptoes I did stand,  
And asked the lady standing there, how to join this special land,  
I filled in a proffered form, my handwriting rather scrawly,  
And the lady oversaw this act, her look was high and haughty,  
Clutching my precious card, I looked at all the books,  
And searched the titles for the book, my teacher had just read,  
At last, I found the very book and headed for the counter,  
Had it stamped, clutched it tight, ran home, and felt elated,  
I sat and read my book that night, what joy when all was told  
And when my teacher read next day, the ending I exposed.

**Ted**

My name is Ted Morgan I am 83 years old and am a retired Senior Nurse Administrator., I have published 3 books of poetry., served as a medic in the RAF and also was a member of a Mountain Rescue Team for 20 years.

**TED**

## **MEMORIES OF LIBRARIES**

My aunt Mary, an unmarried retired primary school head teacher proved to be a significant influence on myself and my sister. Early in primary school, we spent lots of time with her, she took a great deal of interest in our education.

She taught me piano when I was seven and she took us both to the local library where we read all the Enid Blyton series. She gave us extra tuition in reading and writing which helped us both to achieve scholarships, aged eleven to local grammar schools.

The library itself goes back to the 1950s, my memories are very vague of the library itself, quite dark, no carpet or seating, long rows of bookshelves, a musty smell, and a very quiet atmosphere. I can't recall any activities; it provided a very basic facility for borrowing books.

The university library was the complete opposite in size, design, and internal facilities. Much more inviting furnishings, carpeting, lighting, extended study space, specialist staff and a wide variety of study journals, increasing provision of computers, catering for 'research projects' with an 'international' feel to the whole building.

### **Joseph**

I grew up and was educated in Northern Ireland until I was 18 before leaving to study at University of Manchester.

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