The Chickenley Tales

A People Powered Project

CREATIVE SCENE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Chickenley Tales. People often call us Chickites - and they don't always mean it in a kind way - but we're a proud community. We've got spirit and stories by the bucketload. This collection of poems has been created with members of the different groups that find their home at Chickenley Hub (a.k.a Chickenley Community Centre) and the Chickenley & Earlsheaton Children's Centre. We have been working with Izzy Brittain on this People Powered project by Creative Scene. We would like to thank her & Henry for pushing us and encouraging us to believe in ourselves. If you're reading this and you've never been to the community centre or children's centre, feel free to come in and say hello or get involved in one of our groups. We're a friendly bunch and would welcome you with open arms. For now, enjoy the poems!

HERE, NOW

Here we dance with abandon
and nobody stops us. Our bodies
are soft things - like kittens,
and the hands of the walls hold them.

Here a community is cradled, aspirations raised
and we lay our feast out on tables of plenty
every Thursday. Hearts are thrown open
by baking, twirling, tenderness.

Here we come from all sources;
refuges, bedsits, big tribes, single mums,
spare-ribs and sausage, Guiness on Sundays.
Our tongues speak the language of unity.

Here Cathy has completed a thousand forms;
will help all-comers to decipher administrative jargon.
Our walls welcome new worlds, commiserate
old hurts; catch each other when drowning.

Chickenley Hub (a.k.a Chickenley Community Centre) is a community centre offering educational services, health advice and leisure activities. Many local groups & initiatives are based here, from Building Abilities to BCM Stars & Bread & Butter. Follow @chickenleycommunityhub for more.

TWIRLERS UNITED

We are sparkle and sass and resistance,
butterflies each year at Big Brid,
we are the taste of glitter spray in the morning,
we are post-comp Chinese takeaway bliss.

We twirl into other dimensions,
spin batons and dreams into space.
It's an intergalactic arena;
we were born to jazz up this place.

We're long hours, discipline, illusion.
Baby, dinky, tiny team.
We eat gigantic chocolate trophies for breakfast;
three generations of dancing queens.

We are sisterhood, heartbreak and fear,
glory, sweat, hairspray and tears.
Fuelled by Annie's home-cooked much-loved dinners,
we're a constellation of strong, fierce women

and one boundary-breaking young boy!
We come from Bernard, Maureen and Carol,
30 years of pure carnival joy.
We've got attitude and guts by the barrel,

with the stamp of our boots we transform.
We're learning to soar in formation,
with a twist and a twirl we throw poms.
We try not to get cracked with a baton,

but let's face it - sometimes accidents happen...

We're a proud parade of pink eyeshadow,
sleepovers on mats in the hall.
We pile on the minibus to Southport
and tumble from Chick to Blackpool.

We are brave, the arcade, flashing lights,
silver spinners, cartwheels and tights.
We're triplet towers, best pals and winners
but most of all, we are kind.

We are fireballs, flourishes, first comps,
so cosmic, our poms are aligned.
We're all ages, we make new traditions.
We're powerful and self-organised.

The rustle of poms is our signal
for shoe paint, hard graft and splits.
We are standing on the shoulders of divas
summoning magic with the flick of a wrist.

We hear the clang when we drop the baton
but we don't let it ruin the mood.
We're in the moment with coffee and confetti -
we keep smiling and working the room.

We're a majorette troupe of magnificence,
we shapeshift and move with the times,
we're inclusive, supernovas, futuristic,
we're in it, like family, for life.

BCM Stars are a long-standing Chickenley tradition. Founded in 1988, they have teams for all ages from 2 upwards. Run by a team of dedicated volunteers, they compete and perform annually at competitions, shows and events across the North.

I COME FROM

By Kadi

I come from a council estate
with kids running everywhere
and parents shouting in the streets.

I come from family and friends
who have picked me up in my darkest
times and helped put me together again.

I come from tears and a broken
heart, from the people I cared
for who hurt me.

I come from bricks and mortar,
from the walls I've built
around myself over the years.

I come from an amazing mother,
she's strong and has always given
us everything she could.

I come from the fire and fuel
that has driven me to be the resilient
woman I am today.

Kadi is a volunteer at Bread & Butter. She enjoys arts and creativity in all its forms, and is a talented writer. Kadi and her mum Jo's hard work, creativity and dedication formed the backbone of the team that created this book.

BUILDERS IN A BUILDING

We are builders in a building.
Gathered around these tables.
We are welcomers.
We are volunteers.
We are sweepers.
We are knitters.
We are scarers.
We are a Security Ghost.
We are flashing lights in caravans.
We ride tiny trains.
We are cooks.
We are keeping an eye on time.
We are hedgehog-finders.
We are grafters and crafters.
We are Christmas celebrators
(the best time of year).
We are party planners.
We build parties and discos like Lego bricks.
The bricks are: Music, Decorations, Invitations,
Lights, People, Action
(and sometimes cameras).

We build support like concrete,
build dances like mirrors,
build meals like mixing cement.
Layer by layer, trust is gained.
You just have to keep going back to it.
You've built a friendship when you know you can hug someone;
You've built a relationship when you can take them to the pub;
You've built respect when you can take them to Blackpool.
It's bits at a time, like a jigsaw puzzle.
So you can plan for Paris (Disneyland!)
We big each other up,
we're curious, have a laugh.
Think of our happy moments.
On a sunny June morning, we reminisce with these laughs;
Jane face down, chuckling in the mud getting a free mud-bath,
5-6-7-8 dancing to Steps and joy in the Hall,
Jason's rewritten song about the 2p machines and chicken-balls,
Sabaa and Umran's fear of the dogs trying to take us picnic,
But this is my ice cream and only I can lick this.
Told off for lighting cigs at the wildlife park,
and all the animals hid,
Dan's steering side-to-side on the Tandem,

Annie feeling on a white knuckle ride off into the random,
Paul: the van driver,
Kerry: the merry organiser,
colouring the Queen's hair blue, the Queen's face blue.
DJ's embarrassment on the climbing frame splitting his pants in two!
Stay calm, embrace the manic,
like Shibden Park and Dean and Kerry in the rowing boat:
arms folded, relaxed through the panic.
We have built a bridge to community.

Building Abilities is local and personalised day service for adults with learning disabilities, promoting greater independence and a more inclusive society. During the creation of this collection, Dean, a member of the group, sadly passed away. The group would like to dedicate this poem to his memory.

THE MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS

Take 13 years of austerity, bellies full of empty and the largest estate in Dewsbury. Mix in a strong dose of community and the milk of human kindness.

Add a tonic for broken promises. The endless work of Jane. Stir in 80 hearts of various nationalities. Swirl into a bowl full of love.

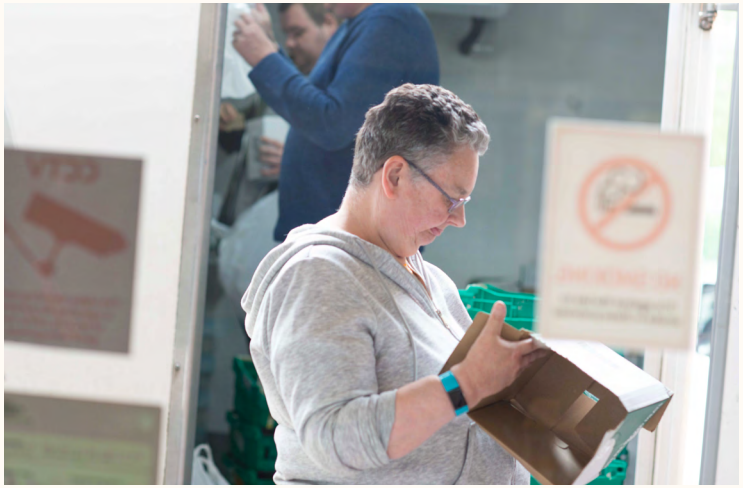
Melt 347 hours of banter and laughs. Pour in who knows how many litres of graft, preparation and 240 carrier bags.

Be grateful for 6 volunteers & 3 more outside, packing as fast as they can. 2 men breaking boxes. 1 man & his van. An extra cheeky smile 'coz that new driver's quite cute!'

2 volunteers having a bit of a vent; 'I'm not so happy with the stuff they've sent', while others look chuffed - happy as can be, 'looks like we're having Spag Bol for tea!'.

1 volunteer, starting to flag. 'Sod this', she says, 'I'm off for a fag'.

The Bread and Butter Thing, one of the UK's leading community food organisations, launched a weekly service every Thursday at Chickenley Hub in March 2021. It provides access to low-cost food plus a programme of wraparound services offering financial, employment and health support.



WHAT'S OCCURRING?

By Jo

Barbecue occurring.
Neighbours glaring.
Sausages sizzling.
Alcohol fizzling.
Teenagers bragging.
Adults fagging.
No apologising.
Some vaporising.
Women roasting.
Men boasting.
Food's frazzling.
Sun's dazzling.
People bed-hopping.
Chick bopping.
Neighbours knocking.
Garden's rocking!
Barbecue's smoking.
Everyone's choking.
Neighbours overlooking.
People taxi-booking.
Everyone's boozing.
Cars cruising.
Neighbours are losing.
Kids gobbing.
Mum's head throbbing.
Dealers in-hiding.
Friends confiding.
Fires igniting.
Dads fighting.

Everyone's lighting.
Neighbours calling.
Police car crawling.
Everyone is defending.
Neighbour offending.
Barbecue ending.

Jo is a volunteer at Bread & Butter. She enjoys arts and creativity in all its forms, and is a talented writer. Jo and her daughter Kadi's hard work, creativity and dedication formed the backbone of the team that created this book.

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC

By Kadi

He's a piece of elastic springing around Chickenley.
Here comes Captain Fantastic.

Somersaulting over barstools – he's very gymnastic.
Here comes Captain Fantastic.

Spinning through the streets – he's so acrobatic.
Here comes Captain Fantastic.

Wearing a bike helmet and his hi-vis jacket.
Here comes Captain Fantastic.

Owned hundreds of vinyls made out of plastic.
Here comes Captain Fantastic.

Sometimes sarcastic, a little over dramatic.
Here comes Captain Fantastic.

Manic and up to all antics.
Here comes Captain Fantastic.

To everyone in Chick, he'll always be a classic.
Here comes Captain Fantastic.

Down in the Book Nook where saggy nappies live,
we munch porridge and pasta for lunch. We cuddle
each other's kids while we have a little moan
draped in messy play and fancy dress.

We head to the Water Park to forget our woes;
from the cost-of-living crisis to the baby blues.
Yes, some of us are lonely, some of us are new,
but we are super mamas, happy mamas,
friendly faces, healing sisters.

We may be covered in Wotsits and snot,
but there is grace among chaos.
We make edible soil and fake frogspawn.
We're living our best life!
We also have the absolute best local midwife.

Hearts live in mouths as tiny hard hats scale the walls,
we bust with pride as the brood and sunflowers grow.
Outside in the garden there's a digger in the sand,
inside is Auntie Pam's Rainbow Baby Bank.

Little ones are splishing and sploshing watering cans,
super mamas are ready to clean the messy gang.
With biscuits & blossoms, we imagine better times,
there is laughter, chatting, squealing, crying;

wow! She's learnt to crawl! Our superpower
is friendship. Our language is gentle acceptance.
Our society accepts no judgement.
Together, we summon self-cleaning rooms,
make a wish to help everyone.

Yes, some of us are lonely, some of us are new,
but we are super mamas, happy mamas,
friendly faces, healing sisters.

Super Mamas Happy Mamas are a volunteer-run playgroup based at Chickenley & Earlsheaton Children's Centre. The Children's Centre also hosts baby banks, baby weigh-in, midwifery, health & legal advice, education & training programmes and more. Follow @communityconnectdewsbury on Facebook to stay updated.

HERE TOO, SPIRITS LIVE IN THE SINK

And it looks like

a portal to another world on the park, where all the people of this place - past, present and future - collide

every hedge bedecked with cobwebs, neighbours chatting about how any day now they'll be enchanted

little kids unseen on the full moon and the local doctor says this shift is always a stinker; bruises, fake blood, guts and family bust-ups

the swivelling head of a zombie baby

and we've all heard that Stew's Brews has a poltergeist. It lobs egg sarnies at the wall when it's feeling mardy

and Katie said she refuses to open up on her own these days, and that the poltergeist also sprays HP on the wrong sarnies…

the local hypnotist levitates at number 35, deals in past life regression and grants freedom to a woman who was stalked

a boy breathes in sharp air and gives out salty prophecies
a girl gasps as tendrils of smoke escape her edges

someone somewhere has split open and a lone siren sings a lullaby
- an epic of gruesome decorations

SEE THEM IN THE STREET AND STOP TIME

Women who know the way the light hangs on Green Hill.

Women who were raised on make do, who feel like fire and mountains, swipe away cobwebs and fake blood from hedges six weeks after Halloween.

Women who don't suffer fools but gift every child on the street an ice lolly, gladly.

Women who have felt grief.

Women who spit at kids and get sectioned, booze till the cows come home but they're alright really.

Women who hold together the blood, bones and breath of this community.

Women who listen like the wind; let you lay your head down on the promise of a prayer.

Women who sound like laughter, the boom of thunder, who sleep only after everyone else sleeps, and often on the sofa.

Women who can't explain why there are walls inside them.

Women in search of the magic money tree, a place to stop time, a way to rewind and start over and over again.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

I'm sitting in my temp one-bed flat, my kids are asleep,
the scars of survival are starting to weep.
My head's a shed, it's not too clear
as I reach out and open another beer.

I slump back and shake the empty can
thinking back to where this all began.
I wanted a lot more for my kids and me.
A house, three bedrooms, a garden, a home.

The council keep telling me I'm high on the list,
but it's been so long I think we've been missed.
I'd love a nice table and chairs for the dinners I'd serve,
instead it's microwave meals on knees at every curve.

And what about me? I feel lost and gone,
my world's just like some sad radio song.
This flat's got me in the drink. I've tried to stop
but my mind's going to explode like a balloon going pop.

There's not enough money, there's nothing to do.
This temporary accommodation
has destroyed my mental health.
How about you?

HOW TO SPELL CHICKENLEY

Start with a few cans on the doorstep.
Don't complain about the neighbours.
Make a skipping rope from a washing line
one sun-drenched Saturday.

If times are tough, raid the potato fields.
Everyone struggles, but your garden is your castle.
The streets are full of holes which the council never fills
and all you can do is go home and put them down in the kitchen.

You can still smell the lager and lime from The Crown;
hear tell of the days when Pat Plant was Queen of Chick.
The local kids still think Annie lives at the Community Centre.
She shows them the stairs to the roof and says

Shhh! That's where the bedroom is…

There are arguments about taking the bins out
and forever feuds about stolen maypoles -
we know how to throw a party!
Once upon a time we learned how to skin a rabbit.

Now we spell loose-lipped, lads on motorbikes,
and when Calippo-sun sets, you'll find dogs fighting
over leftover flesh from the barbecue, parents drunk on cider,
legs akimbo, splashing their dignity into the paddling pool.

The Chickenley Tales was a part of Creative Scene's People Powered project. Izzy Brittain worked with the folk of Chickenley to create these poems. Photography by Shy Burhan.

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