

LET WORDS PAINT A PICTURE



August - September 2025

# OUR

*A collection of reflections, ponderings, poems, pictures and prose on Freedom 80 years on from WW11 voiced by the women of Atherstone*

# FREEDOM



# Freedom Road

A poem by Simon Armitage

© Simon Armitage, 2025

If we want to walk along Freedom Road  
then away we go. It's a slog at times  
but look at the views: deserts, the airport, a lake.

On the move, passing through towns and cities  
we dance with the locals. Come as you are,  
they say, do as you wish, sing us your dreams.

Or if we decide to stay put, Freedom Road  
is our home address. A neighbour's washing  
flaps in the breeze like hilarious friendly flags;

in the house and over the garden fence we agree  
to differ; someone's grazing a horse on the common  
where Freedom Lane becomes Freedom Green.

You can't dig up freedom like a potato  
from the verges of Freedom Way, or pan it  
from Freedom Beck like inklings of gold;

it won't be delivered to Freedom Avenue  
gift-wrapped in silver string. Where it goes unnoticed  
-that's where it exists. Listen, when people ask

where they can find Freedom Road, we don't say  
turn right by the church, left by the bank,  
we stroll where we want and live as we please.

And there it is.

# An Invitation....

## to explore the meaning of FREEDOM with us

In Summer 2025, Warwickshire Libraries was invited to take part in 'Our Freedom 80: Then & Now' - a national programme involving 80 arts organisations. Warwickshire Libraries NPO subsequently commissioned Arts in Action, led by Heidi Pendergrast to carry out the project and work with several groups across Warwickshire.

Spanning towns, cities, libraries, and arts centres, Our Freedom: Then and Now, is engaging thousands of participants across the UK in conversations about what freedom looks like – past, present, and future. The forthcoming exhibition in partnership with Open Eye Gallery will be of the photographic documentation of each community project.

Each project has been assigned a photographer from The Socially Engaged Photographers Network in order to capture the feel of each place and people. Launching in London and then touring nationally, It will be a powerful reflection of that dialogue: diverse, grounded, and deeply human. It will elevate the visibility of community-driven visual storytelling across the country and celebrate the creative energy that has fuelled the wider programme.



In Atherstone, a small country town, a group of women in their middle and twilight years came together to explore their thoughts on freedom — to look at how it has changed across generations, and to reflect on what it means to them now, what it meant to them in the past, and what it meant to their mothers and grandmothers before them.

The project was entirely co-created and organic, beginning with a poem by Simon Armitage and the open question: What does freedom mean to you?

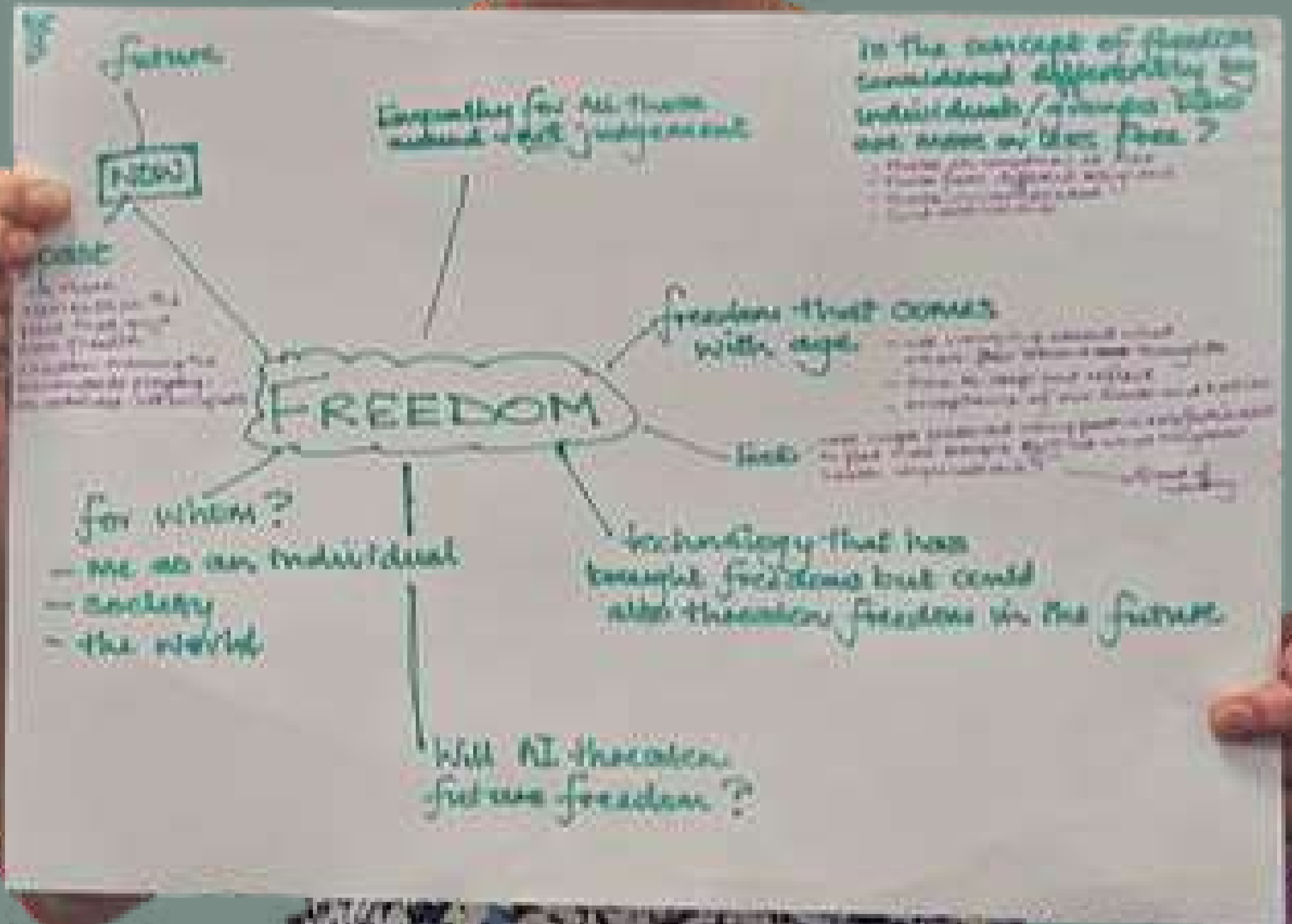


Items, objects, and stories representing freedom were brought in, sparking conversations that grew into a stream of thoughts, memories, and shared reflections. These were transformed into poems, prose, and sentences of reflection.

The women considered how personal freedoms had shifted across their lifetimes: wartime work opening new possibilities and roles for women, some had been born abroad after the war, when their young mothers had travelled on seas and boats to join their husbands, sometimes undercover! Many elements were reflected upon from the Welfare State, aiding people, extending healthcare and education, with contraception and abortion rights in the 1960's offering control over their bodies to household technologies freeing time for work, study, and leisure. Wider changes were also considered —some had lived abroad for periods of their life and had experienced the Apartheid journey in South Africa and had tales of witnessing the lack of freedom for some. They reflected how decolonization reshaped Britain's global role, how gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights expanded identity and belonging, how lockdown and Covid 19 temporarily had the ability to remove our freedoms and how today, issues of digital privacy, economic inequality, Brexit, and current societal events around refuge and immigration have raised fears of eroded rights and increased polarization.

It was unanimously agreed that freedom has always carried complexity. The right to work or stay at home, to marry or remain single, or to divorce or endure, came with both opportunity and judgement. Women's choices were often shadowed by expectation, revealing the paradox that freedom itself can bring new pressures. Yet many, in their later years, spoke of new freedoms: in thought, in time, in no longer needing to follow societal expectations, and in having space to carve their own paths..... and just be still.

This zine gathers together their words, reflections, and concerns. It captures both personal memory and collective thought — from the washing lines of the 1950s, to the freedoms of education and work, to fears of a surveillance society or dystopian loss of rights. It celebrates women's voices, resilience, and the continuing fight to hold onto freedom for future generations. At its heart, it enters an ongoing dialogue, tracing freedom's shifting meanings across decades, and revealing it as a road both personal and political: at once a gift, a struggle, and a responsibility.



Fight for what I believe In

Room Freely

Experience Things

Enjoy Life

Discuss openly

Own my decisions

Make  
Choices

BE KIND! ITS A SMALL WORLD  
AND THERE'S ONLY ONE THING WE CAN ALL  
AGREE ON: WE'RE ALL HUMAN!

WHAT IS

# FREEDOM?

of speech? to vote?  
of thought? to decide?  
of love? to say what you think?  
of action? to be consulted?  
of choice? to prefer?  
of movement? to debate?  
of real action? to decide for yourself?

is freedom  
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY  
IN LIFE  
FOR ALL  
REGARDLESS OF  
AGE / RACE / SEX  
RELIGION  
WEALTH / COUNTRY

GENEROSITY  
OF SPIRIT

CARING FOR  
OTHERS

# KNOWLEDGE

LACK OF  
SELF INTEREST

# TOLERANCE

# EMPATHY

~~GOOD~~ is good for everyone

is it different for everyone?  
at every country?





Freedom Lynda

Media files 15:11



I've been pondering on how my grandmother wrote her stories; how I began to write at nursery; how I wrote for my students and how I write now. Before and after, the tools we have used, and still use, to express our ideas and knowledge freely. Or are our devices today intruding on our privacy more than in the past? 🤔

15:12



freedom Awen

My mum who is 87 recalls the arrival of the home telephone and then the mobile as bringing freedom from the telephone box- and the freedom to be in contact with people whenever you wish- not having to queue at the telephone box with your change to make calls!

09:31



2



Freedom Lynda



I found these old photos of my Auntie Daisy. The smiling version is dated 1937 the other photo is not dated but I think it's around the mid to late 1950s. She is divorced from Uncle Peter.

13:33



freedom JOy barrows

She's lovely.

13:34



Freedom Lynda



Photos of my dad and uncle. (Dad, John Reginald, known as Reg and Alan his elder brother) My dad is the one with the darker tie.

I'll write their war story and send it to you before our last meeting .

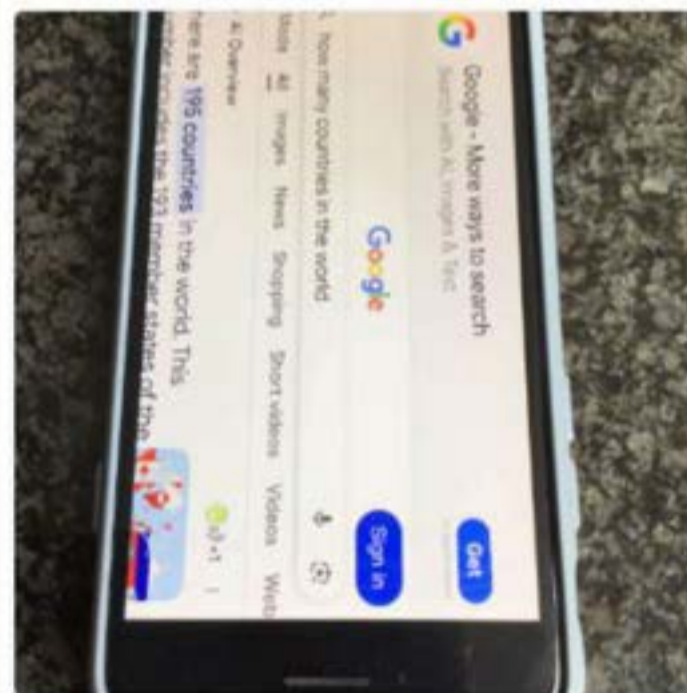
09:14



3



freedom Awen



This photo showing a google search with AI response alongside a copy of encyclopaedia Britannica if anyone still has a copy? The freedom that has come with instant search results ( counterbalanced as we discussed by the uncertainty the lack of bias/ truth???)

16:36



2



freedom JOy barrows

I feel that many children in the UK have lost a large amount of freedom since the '50's. I remember playing with friends in our gardens and in the street until dusk and walking to each others houses and to school unaccompanied by parents. Children seem to be tied to their phones now and parents are reluctant, and scared, to give their children the kind of freedom I took for granted when I was young. Many children seem to be happy in their homes if they've got a device to play games on.

Edited 17:25



2



freedom lynn

Absolutely agree .. I was talking to a friend & asking what freedom meant to her .. she said the same ..

17:27



2



freedom JOy barrows

Adults are spending more and more time on their phones. Sometimes the detriment of family life. It was just a tool when it had a cord but it's much more now. One lady said to me that her partner was distant and rarely off their phone.

17:29



2



Freedom Lynda

Our son mentioned remembering the freedom of his childhood compared to the restricted freedom children have today. He's 43. Definitely unaccompanied travel for children is rare these days. The internet is providing intrusive stimulus, that is often unhealthy. There are many ways to "exit", a relationship; being unavailable by watching a phone, is now one way to do this. So sad.

17:45



2



freedom Awen

Yes- the freedom as a child to wander for hours - all day in the countryside- just playing and exploring nature on my own or with friends - a freedom that has been lost - partly due to technology but also partly due to worry that the 'out there' is no longer safe!

17:55



100



Freedom Lynda

I was thinking about freedom from childhood diseases such as polio and measles, thanks to the development and introduction of vaccines and vaccination programmes. I remember having a sugar cube polio vaccination at primary school. I feel concerned to hear that measles has been reported to have reappeared, due to the decline in children being vaccinated. I'm not certain if this is true though 🙄

17:19



2



freedom JOy barrows

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Edited 17:25



2



freedom lynn

Absolutely agree .. I was talking to a friend & asking what freedom meant to her .. she said the same ..

17:27



2

## Freedoms Spiral.

Freedom curves and doubles back.

It is spiral, never straight.

It is as light as a thought, and as  
heavy as history.

It is gifted, borrowed, grasped,  
fought for, lost, won,  
and  
sometimes stolen.

Freedom road curves & winds. It's never straight. Freedom is not linear.



*‘ Sometimes the road to freedom feels like a spiral, the road winds, curves and branches and is never a straight line ’*



Damage in St Nicolas Parish Church.

# Plane Destroyed Near Nuneaton Came Down in Flames

The 'plane brought down near Nuneaton was seen to come from the direction of a West Midlands town. The 'plane was hit first of all by anti-aircraft gunfire, and smoke was seen pouring from its tail as it flew on an uneven keel into another area, where a British 'plane poured a burst of bullets into it.

### Burst Into Flames.

The German 'plane then burst into flames, and after passing through clouds, which temporarily obscured it from view, it dived steeply down in flames and fire until it crashed with a tremendous noise near Nuneaton.

For a short time the wreckage about was lit with fire and explosions were heard.

It is understood that the pilot baled out, one of the men on board was captured by members of the Home Guard and handed over to the police. It is not known what happened to the others.

The German bomber was a Junkers 88, and the member of the crew who was captured said he was the navigator. An eyewitness of his surrender stated that he appeared to be about forty years of age, and spoke good English.





Capt. J. David, Team 1, and Squire, Mr. R. P. ... Mrs. F. G. ... U.S.C. ... U.S.C. ...

# Impact:

My dad, John Reginald, known as “Reg” by friends and family, is the young man wearing the dark tie. Next to him, is his elder brother Alan. Alan had been in the army for some years when this photo was taken. Alan joined up at the beginning of the war; my dad was eligible somewhere near the end.

Both young men had been born and raised in a hamlet in the county of Westmorland. They were country lads who had enjoyed freedom of movement and a simple rural life. Like many other people their life was interrupted and disrupted by World War Two.

When he first joined the army, my Uncle Alan was pleased to demonstrate his skill with a gun and the army utilised his talent. He spent his war years, “somewhere in England”, training new recruits how to use firearms.

By the time my dad was eligible to serve in the armed forces, the war was almost over. Dad was sent to Egypt, where he and his friend Chris Abbott were amongst the troops who guarded trains full of prisoners of war. No shots were fired, no prisoners escaped.

In Egypt, dad caught typhoid fever and as I was growing up, he told told the story of how he had nearly died. “I had an out-of-body experience”, he said. “I floated up and looked down, and saw myself in bed. There was a nurse sponging me down with water “. Thankfully, dad survived.

When the war was over, both brothers returned to Westmorland. Alan was happy to settle down to life there. He married Jean and they moved to a house in Penrith, where Alan remained until he died.

My dad could not settle back to country life. He applied for a job in Birmingham, to work for a company called Thomas Hedley. He got the job. There he met my mum, who was worked as a comptometer operator and telephonist. Dad was five years older than mum and my grandparents wanted her to wait until she was twenty before they married. It was a happy day when they did marry.

I arrived nine months later.

Thomas Hedley did offer dad a promotion and he declined the opportunity, because mum’s parents offered to pay the deposit on a new build home for them. Dad’s travelling days were done for many years to come.

When I was growing up in the suburbs in the 1950’s, I loved to hear his stories about growing up in the countryside. I loved holidays spent visiting my nanny in Westmorland. I also found dad’s stories about Egypt fascinating and longed to travel and have adventures of my own.

In 1972 and newly married, I had the opportunity to travel overland to Africa with my new husband. We did not return to England until 1994, twenty two years later.

In 1974, Westmorland , a county since the 12th century, became part of Cumbria . My dad was not happy.

Before he died, my dad told me that the nurse in Egypt and my uncle Alan had probably saved his life during the war. Dad said, “They told me in the hospital, after I started to get better, that the nurse would not leave my side day or night, until the fever broke. And Alan told me, when I began my National Service, not to show them I could shoot. So I didn’t. “

Choices and decisions can make a difference. We impact on each other. - Lynda Papworth



*W. Stanley Powell*



## Choices and decisions

Choices and decisions

Matter

Yours, mine, theirs

They echo down the years

Shape what we become

You, me, them

Impact on each other

How we think

How we feel

What we do

You, me, them

Repeat?

Repair?

What was said or done?

Do you, me, them

Blindly carry on?

Can we let questioning seep in?

Become who we could be?

Make different choices and decisions?

Leave different echoes behind?

New ways to carry on, and on, and on

The choice is ours, you, me, them

Us. Humanity.

Lynda Papworth



## Inner Freedom


Freedom to Be  
Freedom to make mistakes,  
to write, to talk, to feel.  
Freedom to protest,  
or simply to be.  
Even in chains,  
the mind can be free.

## Faith and Freedom

For some,  
Faith brings peace and release,  
a freedom of spirit.  
  
For others, religion is fences,  
rules and restrictions.  
  
Faith can be wings or walls.



# Pondering on Freedom



I've been pondering on how nothing stays the same.

A spiral of change.

How I can resist change.

How often I long for change.


How I wait for change.

Take action to enable change to happen.

How I'm often afraid to change,  
hesitate.

And I came back to pondering, how does this link to Freedom?

Then I remembered -  
we only have this day,  
this moment;  
time is Now.



So, is Freedom only ever Now too?

Lynda Papworth



# Atherstone News

AND DISTRICT ADVERTISER

The Only Paper Printed and Published in Atherstone

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1944

## ATHERSTONE. Bride Stowaway.

SECRET ATLANTIC UNDER  
INVESTIGATION.

"There wasn't any other way."

When President of England was visiting the ship at the Atlantic he was told by the captain, a young pilot and American, that she had stowed away on the ship to get to America. The story was anything but true when she was found.

## P.C.'s Son Killed.

KILLED BY HORSE.

A shocking tragedy occurred on Friday evening when a young boy, the son of a local police constable, was killed by a horse.

## £1,000 Raised.

FOR WAR EFFORT.

A sum of £1,000 was raised for the war effort at a public concert held on Friday evening.

They married in 1944 and the army was going back to America so he had to go home. They made arrangements for her to go to USA but the boat didn't dock. Disappointed, and feeling they'd both waited long enough to be together, my Ince Bob joined the navy and smuggled her home.

Edited 13:25

## Atherstone Inquest.

RETIRED MINER'S DEATH.

Was in Military Service.

A coroner's inquest was held on Friday to determine the cause of death of a retired miner who died in military service.

## In her own words.....

*'It was September 1945 - my sister & I were out for a night in Tamworth & we met 2 soldiers - 1 American (ex POW - captured in Algieres and escaped) & 1 British. The next day the American appeared on our doorstep to see me, but I wasn't very fond of being followed around. We went out a few times - and it took him 3 days to ask me to marry him - then he had to return to Paris to join his unit. He came back from Paris and we were married (at St. Mary's, Atherstone) within 3 months - my mother and father were not thrilled at the idea of me marrying an American. A week later he had to return to the States, but then he left the service and joined the merchant marines so he could come back to England and smuggle me back to USA. The troop ship was called the Irving McDowell. I was the only woman on board a ship of soldiers. The journey took 11 days and for the first 2 days I was very sick on the ship. The Captain was great and let me use his shower. We came into Boston and they put me in the House of the Good Shephard for a couple of days where all the bad girls are because I was charged with being a stowaway. I'd had a passport and visa issued in London which wasn't valid in America - but they dropped the charges within a year. My husband had to forfeit his wages for smuggling me on the ship. The story caused a lot of interest and was in all the papers. I had to stay for 5 years to become an American citizen. I returned to England (with 2 sons) for 1 year and then went back to America and had 2 more children (twins) and then a daughter 10 years later. I came back to England every year to visit but my husband was not interested in coming back. I was married for 35 years before my husband was killed in a small plane crash - then I married his best friend.'*

Contributed by North Warwickshire Libraries People in story: Donesse Nancy Heath Kuhn Lindsay Location of story: No. 12, Station Street, Atherstone, Warwickshire Background to story: Royal Navy Article ID: A2761607 Contributed on: 19 June 2004

*The aunt who took action to decide her own future and live free .....*

## ATHERSTONE BRIDE STOWAWAY

Credit : Friday, October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1943. Atherstone News

### Crosses Atlantic under husband's bunk.

“ There wasn't any other way”

Whilst thousands of English wives of American soldiers are waiting this side of the Atlantic to join their husbands, a 20 year old Atherstone girl has succeeded in reaching the other side. Stowed away under her husband's bunk. Her story rivals anything that has come out of Hollywood. She is Miss Doneese Nancy Kuhn and the 20 year old wife of the ex paratrooper of Penfield, NY and the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. JW Heath of 12 Station Street, Atherstone. A message from New York states that four days out, she was forced to reveal her presence owing to sea sickness. She is now held by the immigration authorities at Boston, USA, and the report reads she is happy about her adventure “There wasn't any other way in getting here” she said.

Paratrooper Kuhn was in the first Tunisian campaign and he was taken prisoner at Palmero. He made 4 escapes from prison camps in 20 months and in his last successful bid for freedom brought him among the partisans in the Jugoslavia, from where he was brought back to England. He had the Purple Heart and two campaign stars. It was while stationed at Litchfield that he met 18 year old Nancy Heath and after a whirlwind courtship they were married at Saint Mary's Church, Atherstone on December the 14th, 1944.

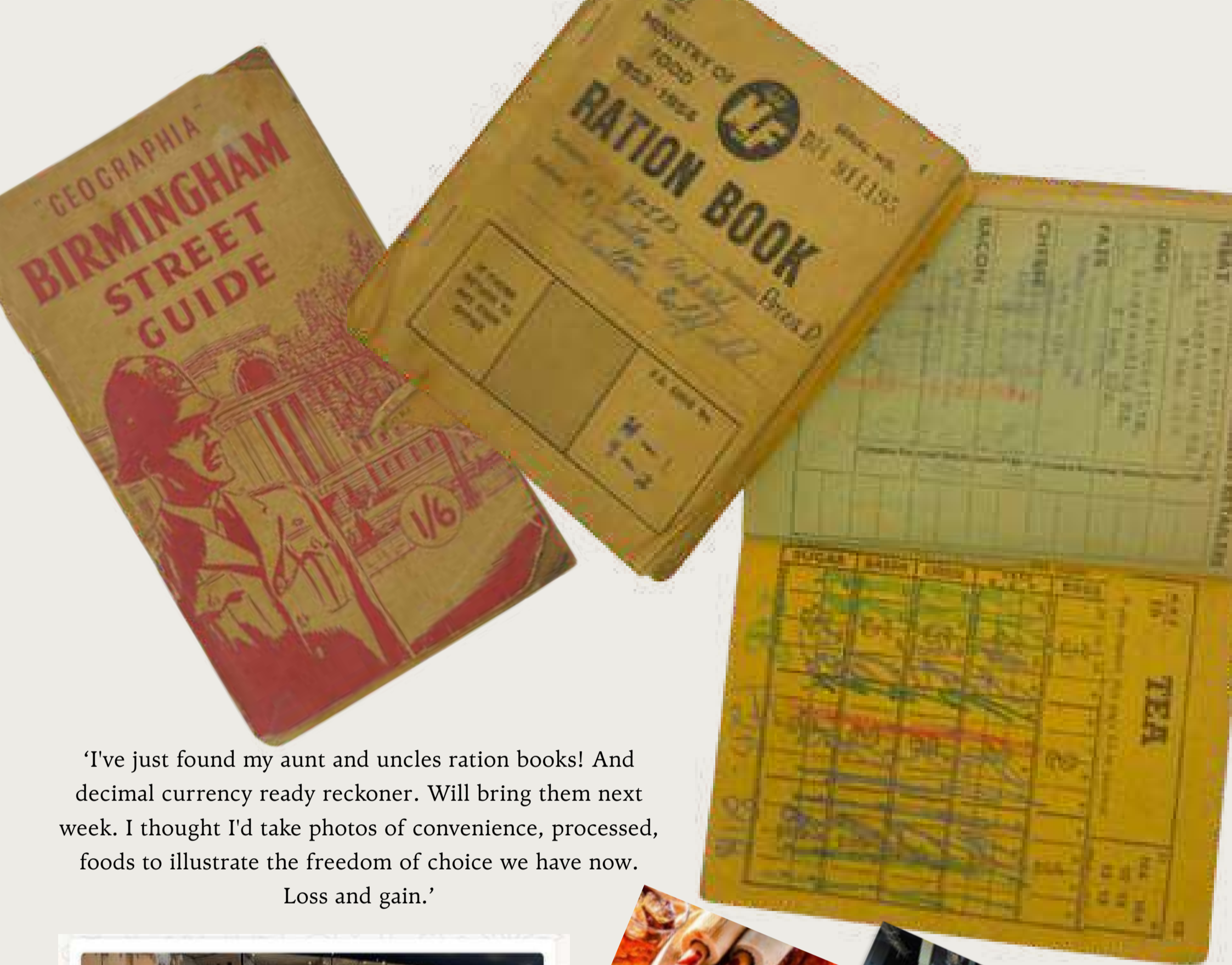
Paratrooper Kuhn returned to the States in February after making all the arrangements for his young bride to join him there. His wife expected to join him just before VE Day, but at the last moment the passage was cancelled. “This was a great blow to the young couple”, Miss Heath, the girl's mother, told an “Atherstone” News reporter.

“On the other side of the Atlantic, Robert got busy himself. Although a radio engineer in a private life, he joined the American Merchant Navy in order to get back to this country. The ship he joined was bound for England and although it stayed for two days outside Dover, it did not dock and went to Antwerp. He jumped the ship here and made his way to the nearest airport. As the plane was about to leave for England, he ran onto the airfield waving a bunch of papers. The ruse worked and he boarded the plane”

Mrs Heath said on arrival in England on July 27 her son-in-law was court martialled, but when the court heard his story they were very lenient with him. At the time he was staying in London and almost daily he hitchhiked to Atherstone, a distance of 100 miles, to see his wife having to report back the same night. Her daughter was still waiting at Atherstone for official permission to get to America. She had her passports and all the necessary papers filled in.

“Just over a week to go, my daughter received a telegram from him asking her to go to Cardiff, which she did. She told me that a boat was leaving from there with American soldiers and French brides. I warned her before that she left. Nothing to do but rush and I must confess I am not surprised to hear what has happened. They were both so determined not to be parted and they are both determined young people”

Mr. and Mrs. Heath have a second daughter, also married to an American soldier now stationed in Germany.



'I've just found my aunt and uncles ration books! And decimal currency ready reckoner. Will bring them next week. I thought I'd take photos of convenience, processed, foods to illustrate the freedom of choice we have now.

Loss and gain.'



I saw this lovely display of healthy fresh food yesterday and thought how fortunate we are to have such freedom of choice and what a contrast to the ration books of my relatives. I'm looking for examples of ultra processed food now 😊

16:00



In 2025 food allergies mean that many of us no longer have the freedom to eat 'ordinary' food (like a cheese sandwich). Food allergies have been attributed to chemical sprays on crops. Gluten, nuts, soya and dairy intolerances are on the increase. Any food grown without these chemicals (which used to be the norm) is now called organic and is very costly.

Edited 22:10

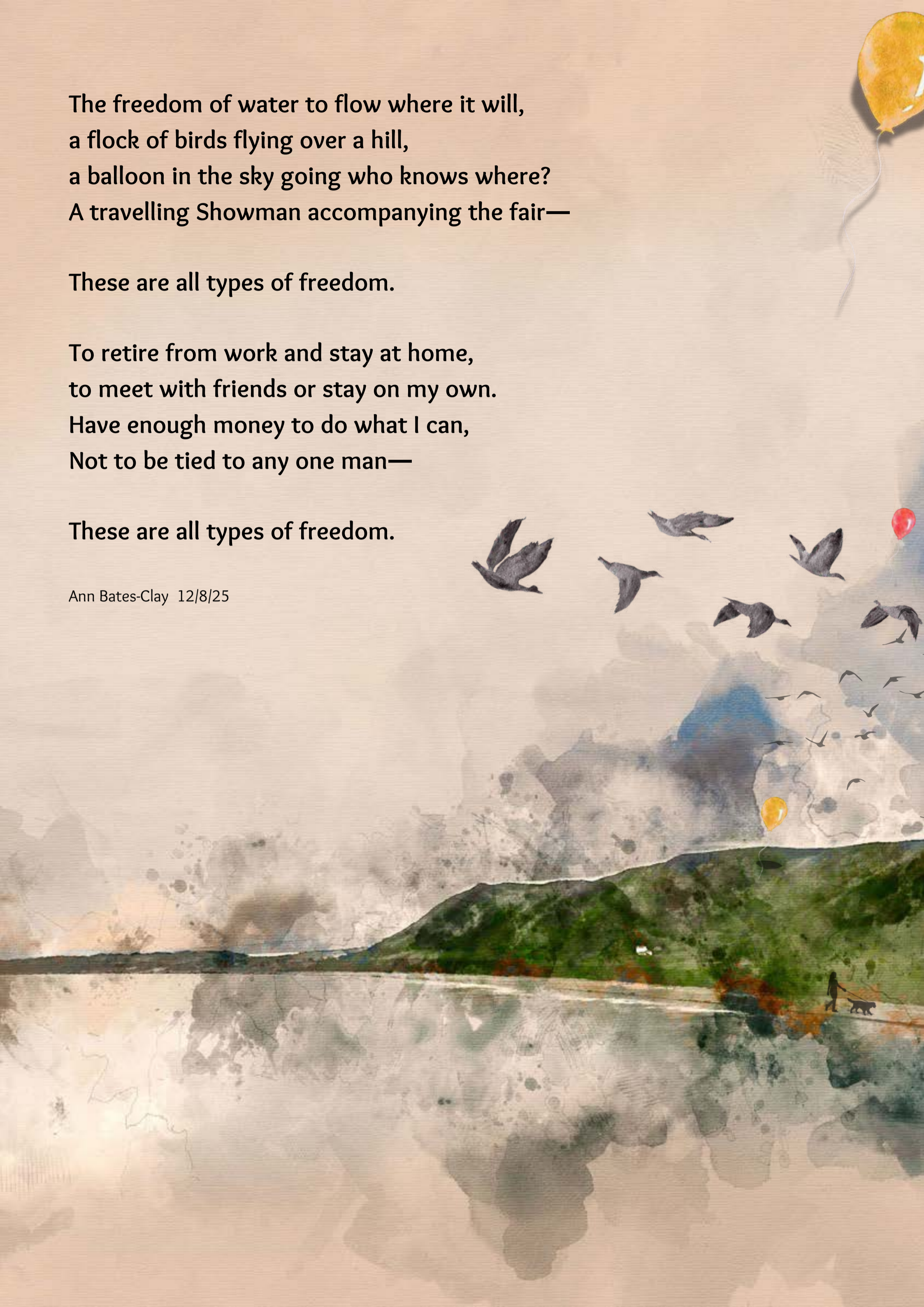
The freedom of water to flow where it will,  
a flock of birds flying over a hill,  
a balloon in the sky going who knows where?  
A travelling Showman accompanying the fair—

These are all types of freedom.

To retire from work and stay at home,  
to meet with friends or stay on my own.  
Have enough money to do what I can,  
Not to be tied to any one man—

These are all types of freedom.

Ann Bates-Clay 12/8/25



## Freedom of Information

Freedom to read,  
to watch,  
to hear —

newspapers, TV, magazines,  
a thousand voices calling.

But are we free,  
or simply bombarded?

Adverts, propaganda,  
fake news on glowing screens.

Is this freedom of voice,  
or a cage for the mind?

Opinions twisted,  
choices narrowed,  
humanity distracted.

We buy what they show us,  
need what they sell us,  
hypnotised by the thought:  
everyone else has it,  
so I must too.

Yes — we have freedom to choose.

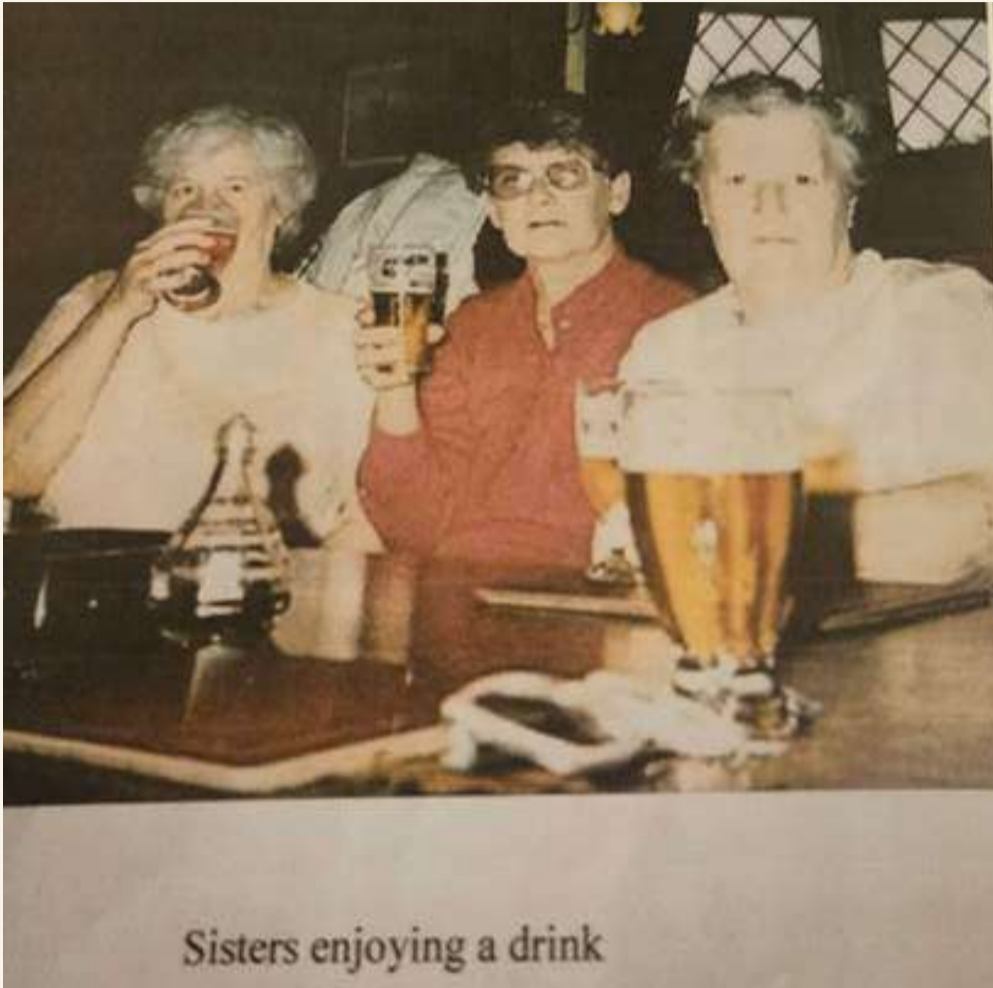
But choice without discernment  
is no freedom at all.

True freedom lives  
in intelligence,  
in questioning  
and

being allowed question.



# Women: Freedom in Work, Public Life, and the Home



Wartime factory work contributed to a profound shift in how society viewed women's roles. It challenged traditional gender norms and opened the door to future advancements in women's rights and opportunities. From the Canary Girls who worked with TNT and ammunition — their fingers stained yellow by chemicals — to women taking on roles in farming, communications, and industry, the war years proved women's resilience and capability. Those who served in factories became an inspiration for future generations, paving the way for women to enter fields once considered the preserve of men.

It was not until 2002, however, that the Equal Status Act was passed, formally banning gender discrimination. For the first time, women were legally entitled to the same access as men to public

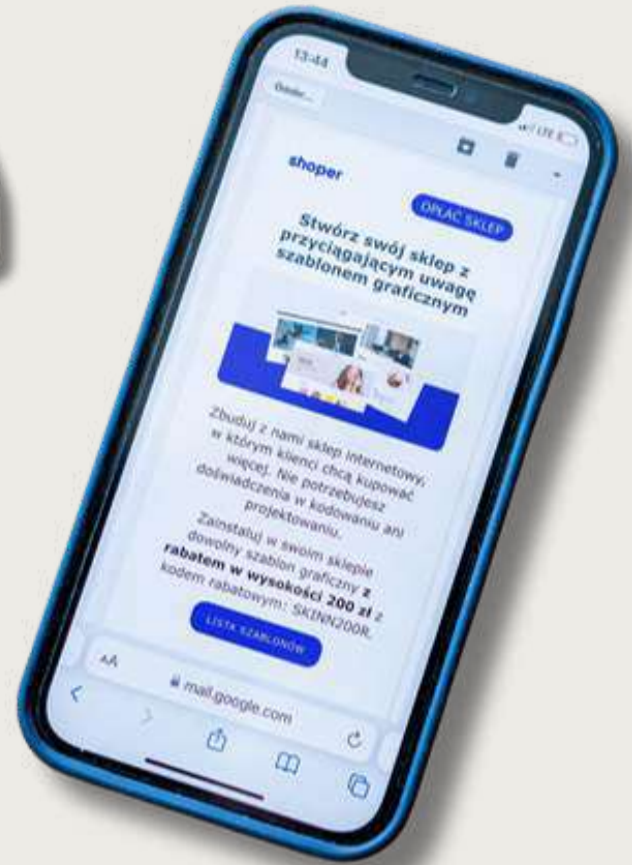
spaces such as pubs, spaces where they had long been excluded. This act marked a milestone in women's freedom, but it also highlighted how long the struggle for equality had taken.

Change continued into the 21st century. In 2018, the British military finally granted women full equality in service, allowing them to serve in combat roles alongside their male colleagues. After more than a century of women's contributions to the armed forces, they were at last given the freedom to stand as equals in every capacity.

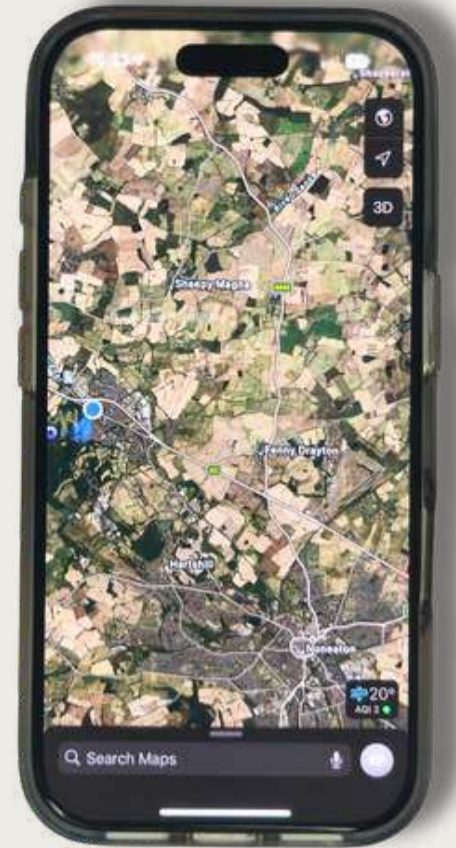
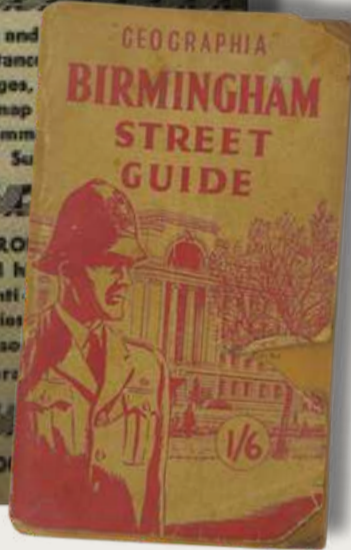
Freedom in the workplace and public life was matched by freedom within the home. Advances in domestic technology radically reshaped women's lives. Before the washing machine and tumble dryer became commonplace, laundry was a backbreaking, all-day task. Water had to be boiled in a copper, clothes scrubbed until hands were red and raw, and then hung on the line to dry — often for days if the weather was poor. Monday became the traditional “wash day,” dictating a woman's schedule and leaving little time for anything else. Gradually, household inventions began to break these domestic chains. Washing machines, tumble dryers, modern cookers, and later microwaves and appliances saved hours of labour. Clothes dried faster, hands were spared, and women gained precious time to rest, work, or pursue other interests. These shifts in technology granted a new form of freedom — freedom from endless household drudgery.

Alongside these changes came new freedoms over women's own bodies. The introduction of contraceptives, particularly the pill, revolutionised women's lives. For the first time, women could choose to have relationships without the fear of pregnancy. They could decide for themselves if and when to become mothers. It was a moment of true independence: the freedom to take control of their futures.





Objects symbolising freedom from their own lives—set against memories of their mothers’ and grandmothers’ post-war experiences—were brought in as living archives. These artefacts sparked conversations about how many innovations were directed towards women, reshaping their daily lives by loosening the domestic chains of the home and offering new forms of freedom. Yet, it was also recognised that some such such changes like fast fashion carried consequences of their own. Over the following pages are a collection of poems and reflections capturing the complexities, contradictions, and continuities of these items and the changes both positive and some with negative impacts, here and elsewhere..



Fridge and meat safe! The advent of the fridge meant freedom from having to shop every day- generating more time especially for women.

19:26



2

# From Wash Day to the Washing Machine : Reflection



Once, freedom was measured in hours stolen back from the laundry. Monday was always wash day. Water boiled on the stove, soap rubbed into fabrics until women's hands were red and raw. Washing lines sagged under damp sheets, waiting days for the sun to dry them. There was no time for hot dinners, no time for yourself.

With the arrival of the washing machine, and later the tumble dryer, came a new kind of freedom. Clothes dried faster, hands stayed softer, women could cook, work, rest, or simply breathe. Technology carried away some of the weight.

## Echoes of Freedom

Freedom echoes down the years,  
ancestral hang-ons,  
systems, societies,  
a collective weight  
pressing us to assimilate.

Yet through the ages  
voices rise:

No. I do not conform.  
I will not perpetuate  
that stereotype,  
that rule.

And in the refusal —  
more freedom.  
Freedom to talk,  
to write,  
to feel,  
to protest,  
or simply to be.

Even in chains of circumstance,  
the mind can remain free.  
Freedom is joy,  
discussion,  
decisions owned,  
choices made.

And freedom grows with age:  
when opinions of others fade,  
when comfort with yourself takes root.

No work to bind you,  
time as your own,  
deciding where to go,  
who to see,  
and how to be.  
It is your time.  
You are free.

Yet freedom is never simple. Today, our machines give us more time — but also trap us in consumer culture. We upgrade endlessly, we buy fast fashion, and we create mountains of waste.

The freedom of one woman's hands comes at the cost of another's, working long hours in a factory on the other side of the world. Freedom shifts, but it is never free.

## Freedom Through Life

Freedom changes with age,  
energy,  
and circumstance.

It is never fixed.

As a child, tied to your mother's apron.  
As a teenager, exploring streets and fields.  
As an adult, driving, working, choosing.  
In older age, free time, if health allows.

The last days, may reverse for some,  
-stuck in one spot  
-freedom physically gone  
but ...

you can be free in your mind,  
that changes not.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, is walking away from the camera on a dirt path. The path is surrounded by tall grass and leads towards a bright, hazy horizon. The overall tone is warm and contemplative.

## Freedom's Inheritance.

We walk a road we did not lay,  
freedom paved by other hands.

We inherit it—good or bad—  
sometimes a gift, sometimes a weight.

The path of freedom spirals,  
never straight—  
curving through time,  
altered by the choices we make.

There is freedom that belongs to one,  
and freedom we must share.

Tolerance is its quiet keeper.

Without it we are doomed to spiral back -  
back to  
roads that should be blocked from re-walking.

We read without limits now—  
books, papers, stories unbound.

The page is an open gate.

Freedom to think, to write, to be.

But choice is never free of cost:  
irresponsibility steals liberty,  
responsibility restores it.

Technology broke the chains of chores,  
gave women back their hours,  
their hands,  
their voices.

And cloth became our banner:  
skirts, trousers, colours, cuts—  
our bodies our own to dress,  
our selves our own to express.

But.

True freedom wears no trappings,  
cares nothing for chains of fashion  
or cages of status.

Freedom is not finished.

It bends, it circles,  
it changes shape with every age.

On this road,  
we keep walking—  
our steps joined,  
our voices echoing  
towards the horizon.

and

WE will pave a road that we will not walk,  
WE lay the next part with our hands, and voices,  
for the next to inherit what we leave....

## Fast Fashion

Once, we saved fabrics,  
stitched with love,  
shortened and widened,  
made-do and mended.  
Now, cheap dresses fly  
from sweatshop to high street,  
worn once, then thrown.

Our freedom to choose,  
to buy, to wear,  
is stolen from others —  
children bent over machines,  
green fields buried under  
our piles of waste.  
Freedom for us.  
however not for them.

## Covid 19

Medicine gave us longer lives,  
But suddenly locked down, no freedom to move,  
for some time and space was a blessing not a cage  
but for many  
no freedom to see loved ones ,  
loss of connection and community  
needles pressed upon unwilling arms  
remind us:  
freedom can heal,  
or freedom can vanish.

## Writing Your Own Script

You can follow the script society hands you,  
living as expected.  
Or you can write your own —  
line by line,  
mistake by mistake.  
Freedom is authorship of your own story.

## Maslow's Ladder

Food, water, safety first.  
Then love, belonging,  
then respect, achievement.  
Only when these are met  
can you reach the top rung:  
freedom of thought,  
freedom of being,  
freedom to create.  
Freedom is privilege.  
If you are stuck at the bottom,  
how free are you?

## A Freedom Reflection

Once you have freedom, you are reluctant to give it up.  
When you have none, you are desperate for it.  
You don't know you're free until you're not.  
Freedom is fragile.  
Freedom is complex.  
Freedom is worth the fight.



FREEDOM

## Borders

Passports, visas, documents, tariffs.  
The privileged pass through with ease,  
boarding planes, crossing oceans.  
Others remain stranded,  
freedom stripped by poverty,  
their journeys trapped at borders,  
the ability to move on prevented  
but  
their return dangerous,  
their freedom unreachable.  
Only the privileged are free to roam.

# Freedom and Control- Surveillance Society

We are the most watched country in the world.

CCTV.

ANPR

Cookies online - that you must accept,

Deep Fakes

Intelligent propaganda

AI deciding what is “true.”

Freedom online is an illusion.

The internet remembers everything.

We are recognised,

tracked,

stored,

and sold.

1984 was supposed to be a warning.

Sometimes It feels more like a manual.

## The Mobile

Once, you could walk away.

The landline stayed at home.

Now, the phone follows you.

It beeps, intrudes, interrupts thought.

Yes, it gives safety and connection.

But sometimes

freedom

is choosing

to switch it off.

## Cookies and Chains

Click “accept” to continue.

Click “agree” to proceed.

Chains disguised as choices,  
freedom packaged in pop-ups.

Every click a trace,  
every search a footprint.

Freedom, monitored.

Freedom, mined.

[CLICK HERE](#)



# Marriage and Freedom

Once, marriage was duty,  
a woman's fate decided  
by fathers, fortunes,  
contracts written in silence.  
No choice, no voice,  
just vows that bound tighter  
than iron chains.  
Now, choice belongs to us.  
To marry for love,  
to walk away,  
to live alone,  
to find another path.  
Divorce unlocked the door,  
gave women the right  
to free themselves,  
to choose again,  
to breathe.  
And yet—  
for some, marriage still cages,  
expectations pressing down  
until freedom feels lost.  
For others, it is wings:  
a partnership,  
a home,  
a love that makes them whole.  
This too is freedom—  
to say yes,  
to say no,  
to stay,  
to leave,  
to define love for ourselves.  
But beyond our borders,  
and sometimes on our own doorstep,  
women still fight for that right.  
Freedom in marriage is not won everywhere.  
It is fragile.  
It is precious.  
It is ours to guard.





## Love is Freedom

Once, love was whispered,  
hidden in shadows,  
a secret coded glance  
across a crowded room.  
Laws turned love into crime,  
silence into survival,  
freedom denied.  
But freedom echoes down the years:  
decriminalisation,  
equal marriage,  
voices rising in protest,  
rainbows on our streets.  
Freedom to walk hand in hand,  
to speak love's name aloud,  
to exist without apology.  
And yet —  
freedom remains fragile.  
Hatred mutters,  
rights are questioned,  
a reminder that freedom,  
once won,  
must always be defended.  
Because freedom is not conformity.  
It is the courage  
to love openly,  
to live truthfully,  
to be wholly yourself.  
Love is freedom.  
And freedom is love.

# A few final thoughts and ponderings from our sessions which inspired this Zine ...

'There is personal freedom and Collective freedom'

'Freedom brings responsibility , irresponsibility removed freedom'

'We have freedom we were not responsible for'

'I see diminishing equality within our streets, which ultimately diminishes freedom.'

'The path of freedom is spiral; it is never linear'.

'You can be overwhelmed by the lack of freedom , or the vastness of it.'

'Self responsibility and authorship of our choices is freedom'

Freedom is writing your own story.

'Freedom Depends on how strong you feel on a certain day.'

'We only have now, so we have to live in freedom'.

'Freedom. The more you think about it, the more complex it becomes.'

'It's not the same for all. There are different levels of freedom depending on where in the pyramid you sit . Therefore, freedom is a privilege. If you are stuck on the bottom rung, how free are you? The level of collective world freedom is reduced for many by circumstances and by what level of privilege you are born into..'

'We have freedom to read, and read anything, books, news and beyond'

'Tolerance is needed for true freedom'

'Freedom to make mistakes'

'We inherit our freedom, good or bad'

'Our choices change and alter our freedoms.'

'When you are truly free you don't care about the trappings '

'Once you have freedom. You are reluctant to give it up. When you have no freedom, you are desperate for it. You do not know You are free until you are not.'

'Fight for what I believe in roam freely, experience things'

'Unconscious bias removes other people's freedom and stops you being totally free to think for yourself'.

'How free you are? And how free you can be?.'

'The impact of sharing your stories, whether good, whether bad, through joy and through sorrow, brings freedom to you. But also it can bring freedom in others'

'it's freedom from opinions'

'One second, you are free in the moment. And then life hits. And you think, how free am I? With boundaries, with morals. Societal expectations.'

'Is freedom equal chance in life for all, regardless of age, faith, sex, religion, wealth or country? Or is it the generosity of spirit of caring for others and lack of self-interest? Greed is the enemy of freedom '

Freedom of choice.

'Clothing, the freedom to express yourself'.

'You can live by the script expected of you, and follow the script. Or you have the freedom to write the script yourself.'

'Is this the same for all or is it different for everybody in every place?'



## Final thoughts :


### The women who walk the shifting shape of Freedom.

The idea of freedom in our land has never stood still.  
In the shadow of Wars, freedom was imagined as  
a collective act:

a nation rebuilding, a people redefining .

The Welfare State rose in the 40s  
like scaffolding around a broken house,  
promising basic rights, security, care.

Decades turned and the story bent.



Decolonization reshaped our place in the world,  
unfastening empires, reframing identity,  
opening conversations about what it means to belong.  
Freedom, complex as ever, carried both hope and unease.


For women, this post-war era was transformative.

In factories, offices, and fields of duty,  
women stepped into roles once denied—  
Canary Girls with yellow-stained hands,  
clerks and drivers, soldiers and makers—  
and horizons widened.

The Welfare State gave access to health and education,  
a foundation from which independence could rise.

Reproductive rights marked another revolution.

Contraception, decisions on pregnancy:  
tools of choice, of agency, of self-direction.



Household technologies—washing machines, vacuum cleaners, ovens—  
dissolved hours of labour into minutes,  
returning time, returning possibility.  
But freedom was not without paradox...

..The right to work or stay at home,  
to marry or remain single,  
to leave or to endure—  
each choice shadowed by scrutiny,  
each freedom doubled with judgement.

Freedom became more intimate, more individual:  
the right to love, the right to speak,  
the right to live as oneself.  
Gender equality, LGBTQIA rights—  
hard-won steps on a road still unfinished.

Yet even as freedoms widened, shadows lengthened.  
Digital privacy frayed in the glow of screens,  
economic inequality deepened divides,  
Brexit redrew borders both visible and unseen.  
Some asked: are our liberties eroding,  
is belonging itself under siege?

To be free was also to be watched,  
to carry the burden of expectation.  
And so freedom has always been both gift and weight.  
It changes its form—public, private, political, personal—  
spiralling rather than marching straight.

It is a conversation across generations,  
a dialogue between law and life,  
between the stories of the nation  
and the everyday choices of women's lives.

This book holds those voices,  
their lived reflections, their remembered moments.

Here, freedom is not abstract—  
it is felt in hands raw from washing,  
in pills tucked into handbags,  
in passports stamped and unstamped,  
in screens glowing late at night.

It is a road, winding and unfinished,  
and these are the women who walk it.



## What's next ?

Our celebration event has been photographed by Jo Gane, and this work will be shown across the UK. The Our Freedom 80 Then and Now Web page says that :

‘We are delighted to announce Our Freedom: Then and Now will culminate in a national photography exhibition launching in early 2026 and inviting audiences to see their own freedoms reflected in others.

Delivered in partnership with Open Eye Gallery, the exhibition will spotlight the powerful stories emerging from the Our Freedom programme, captured through the lens of 22 photographers working at the heart of the communities involved. Each artist is part of the Socially Engaged Photography Network and over the coming months, they will be embedded in the local places taking part in the Our Freedom projects.

Spanning towns, cities, libraries, and arts centres, Our Freedom: Then and Now is engaging thousands of participants across the UK in conversations about what freedom looks like – past, present, and future. This forthcoming exhibition will be a powerful reflection of that dialogue: diverse, grounded, and deeply human.

Opening in London and then touring nationally, the exhibition (which will also be available digitally through the Our Freedom website) will elevate the visibility of community-driven visual storytelling across the country and celebrate the creative energy that has fuelled the wider programme.’



Joy Barrows



Lynda Papworth



Awen Simpson



Lynn Tarina Brough



Ann Bates-Clay



Heide Goody

How do you see freedom ? Add your thoughts below :

WHAT IS FREEDOM– PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FREE ?

HOW DO YOU SEE FREEDOM?

HOW HAS FREEDOM CHANGED ?

ARE WE FREE ?

These were just a few of the questions pondered during this project...

Delve inside and explore these questions with us.

What is freedom to you ?

Content collated from the items, archives, ponderings,  
photos, resources, art and thoughts of :

Ann Bates-Clay

Awen Simpson

Heide Goody

Joy Barrows

Lynda Papworth

Lynn Tarina Brough

Stephanie Wade

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With special thanks to Atherstone Library, and those that  
fought for our Freedom, in the past and present.