

REWRITING THE BOOK

THE LIBRARY OF BIRMINGHAM

Introducing the 'Faces'...



Matt Windle from Northfield – Former Young Poet Laureate, uses Birmingham Central Library

A keen amateur boxer, 19-year-old Matt doesn't necessarily fit the bill of what you'd expect a former Young Poet Laureate to look like. But when the Northfield resident takes to the stage, all becomes clear. One of Birmingham's leading lights in the performance scene, his unmistakable brand of 'Slam Poetry' is the hallmark of a story where 'the boy done good'.

By day, Matt leads poetry workshops in schools and libraries, using influences such as R&B and Rap music to engage his students and bringing poetry to the level of those he teaches. Often dealing with unruly and under-achieving students, Matt's approach to teaching often results in improved behaviour and greater willingness to engage in learning. By night, Matt trains and competes at Warley Amateur Boxing Club.

Given Matt's background, it's little wonder he knows how to relate to his students. A former pupil at Bournville School, Matt struggled with behavioural issues before being excluded prior to starting Year 10.

After leaving Bournville, Matt attended Wake Green Behaviour Support Centre. It was there that a teacher discovered Matt's raw talent for poetry, and, with encouragement, Matt gained the confidence to enter the Young Poet Laureate competition, run by Birmingham Libraries. Although he didn't win the competition that year, Matt stayed heavily involved with Birmingham Poets, and learned enough to emerge triumphant in the following year's competition.

Notably, since discovering Poetry, Matt has found direction in his life and never been in trouble again.

Matt trained as a plumber in the belief that he would be unable to make a full-time living from Poetry, but has been amazed by the doors his talent has opened. Highlights have included a recent trip to Indonesia where he spent a week working in an international school. Upon returning, Matt found 'thank you' poems from inspired youngsters in his email inbox.

Matt says: "When I go into schools, kids come up to me and say 'Are you the boxer?' I tell them I am a boxer, but I've been invited because I'm a poet. They say something like: 'We thought you'd have glasses and a big book'. Sometimes they say poetry's boring, and when I've done my session I always say: 'Does anyone still think poetry's boring then?' They never do".



Frank Sidney Smith from Kings Heath – Artist, uses Druids Heath and Birmingham Central Libraries

Frank Sidney Smith has crammed an awful lot into his 82 years, and is more than willing to share his stories in a variety of ways that demonstrate his creativity and sheer appetite for life.

Born in a Kent workhouse and evacuated to the Midlands as a child, Frank is known in art circles for his autobiographical paintings and sculptures, charting the highs and lows of his eventful past. Highly detailed and rich in history, the pick of Frank's work was featured in his book 'A Brush With Life', and a 2001 Telegraph article hailed the Kings Heath resident as 'Better than L.S. Lowry'. Frank's works are displayed proudly in Brindleyplace's Number 9 The Gallery, and also in Druids Heath Library, which Frank has come to regard as a home from home.

A regular visitor, Frank is a familiar face at the library, be it to enjoy a cup of tea with friends, attending adult learning classes, and, of course, a spot of reading.

Frank has also been a regular visitor to Birmingham Central Library, and still has sketches of the work in progress as it was being built in the 1970s. Despite painting from what he calls 'a photographic memory', Frank ventures into the library's research facilities 'just to make sure' that things are exactly as he remembered them... according to Frank, they always are!

Frank speaks warmly of Birmingham Libraries, saying: "The library has helped me a great deal because you get research from books, you can borrow them, and it doesn't matter what it is, they will find the research for anybody. I have to thank them, all the tutors, all the helpers, everyone who works in the libraries. You feel at home here, and they always make you welcome"



Wal Warmington – University Learning Skills Advisor, uses Spring Hill Library and Birmingham Central Library

For some reading is a lifelong passion. For others, it's a moment of enlightenment that sets them on the way to being passionate about books. That's certainly the case for Wal Warmington, a University Learning Skills Advisor from Edgbaston.

At a crossroads in his professional life, Wal was provided with a copy of William Boyd's 'Any Human Heart'. It was the first time Wal had taken time to read in a number of years, and the book helped him to discover some clarity with the dilemmas he was facing.

From that point the lapsed reader rediscovered his love of books, and eventually found himself involved in the book club at Spring Hill Library, which meets every couple of weeks.

Wal finds the book club meetings hugely enjoyable as it gives him an opportunity to discuss different feelings and ideas associated with the books in a relaxed way and informal manner. Featuring people from all walks of life, from retired teachers to single mums, Wal particularly enjoys the social benefits of the meetings, which give him the opportunity to meet new people and develop friendships with them.

Wal's involvement in the book group even led to him being selected as a representative member on a panel that appeared on BBC1's 'The One Show' to take part in a feature called The People's Booker Prize where he correctly selected the winning book prior to the official announcement being made.

A married father of three, Wal first arrived in Birmingham from London in 1982 to train as a social worker at West Hill College. He now works as an Academic Skills Tutor at Birmingham City University.

Looking ahead to the arrival of the new library, Wal said: "It feels like it's in the right place with the pedestrianisation of the city, the theatre nearby and all of the amenities in the surrounding area, and I think it's going to be a great success."



Samuel and Nathaniel Chan – Schoolchildren, use Birmingham Central Library

Samuel, 7, and Nathaniel, 10, tend to get through a combined total of five books every week, but they weren't always so enamoured by reading... until a trip to the library changed everything!

After attending private music tutorials held at Birmingham Conservatoire, mum Jenny decided to stop off at the nearby Centre for the Child in Birmingham Central Library, initially borrowing audiobooks to engage the boys in storytelling. Samuel and Nathaniel quickly became intrigued by the different stories and started to develop their love for books.

Samuel's reading habits are influenced by comedy, and he most enjoys Roald Dahl, Horrid Henry or anything that makes him laugh. Nathaniel, on the other hand, enjoys fantasy and adventure stories best, and particularly likes books that feature Dragons!

The boys attend Central Library every Saturday, where they can not only to select their books for the week, but also to partake in activities such as papercraft, handycraft and storytelling groups.

It's a ritual that Samuel has come to enjoy, and he said: "I like coming to the library to read funny books and play the games". Nathaniel echoed his brother's

sentiments, saying: "The Library is a very nice place, it inspires you to read, and there's crafts and storytelling time, too."

He continued: "If you don't read books you can't learn anything and you won't learn new stuff" – and it's hard to argue with that!



Mary Ashman and Dalvinder Cheema – Owners of 'Kiss Me Cupcakes', use Birmingham Central Library

From Drugs Advisor and Smoking Cessation worker to Cupcake queens – it's not the most obvious career move! However, Mary and Dalvinder embarked on this dramatic career change after falling in love with a cupcake shop whilst travelling in Australia.

Having already been considering career changes before their trip Down Under, Mary and Dalvinder returned to Britain armed with a dream, a cake tin and an icing bag, and launched the business in 2007 to limited success. That's when they discovered the Business Insight Section of Central Library, and the rest as they say, is history!

Dalvinder says: "We didn't know anything about cashflows or anything like that. We wouldn't have classed ourselves as businesswomen then, and to have had all that support, marketing, PR, all of that information that we didn't know anything about, has helped build our business to where we are today".

Thanks to the vital business and financial support they received, Kiss Me Cupcakes is now going from strength to strength. Their success was highlighted by a report in the *Guardian* newspaper hailing them as one of the Top 10 cupcake makers in the UK.

With a thriving 'made to order' service for special events and several city centre outlets, the girls have now started offering cupcake cookery lessons to those interesting in achieving a similar result at home. With the business growing all the time, the girls are looking to set up their very own city centre cafe bakery in the not too distant future.

Mary said: "We're very grateful for the support we've received so far from the Business Insight team, and we'll definitely be going again."