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Experiences unite us.



Mental Health:
Creative perspectives.

VOYAGER

Contents

Λ **Editorial⁰¹**

Λ **Observe⁰²**

Λ **Create⁰³**

Λ **Explore⁰⁴**

Λ **What's on⁰⁵**

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V:)

Mental Health: Creative Perspectives.

What do you think?

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Published by Sutton Mental Health Foundation, 2026.
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Support

Age UK Sutton

020 8078 0002

CASS Women's Self-Injury Helpline

0808 800 8088

Citizens Advice Bureau

020 8405 3552

Crimestoppers

0800 555 111

Cranstoun Drug and Alcohol Service

020 8773 9393

Mental Health Crisis Support Line

0800 028 8000

Mind

0300 123 3393

National Domestic Violence Helpline

0808 2000 247

NHS Helpline

111

No Panic (Sutton and Merton)

07562 520 954

OCD Action

0300 636 5478

Off The Record (Youth Counselling)

0800 980 7475

Police (Non-Emergency)

101

Rethink (Advice Service)

080 801 0525

SANE Line (4 pm-10 pm)

0300 304 7000

Samaritans

116 123

Springfield Advocacy Service

0300 7900 559

Springfield Hospital

0203 513 5000

Stop Hate UK Crime Helpline

0800 138 1625

Sutton Carer's Centre

020 8296 5611

Sutton Crisis Cafe

0800 012 9082

Sutton Mental Health Foundation

020 8770 0172

Sutton Night Watch (Homeless support)

020 8669 9920

Sutton Council

020 8770 5000

Sutton Talking Therapies

020 3513 4044

Sutton Women's Centre

020 8661 1991

Transform Sutton (Domestic Violence)

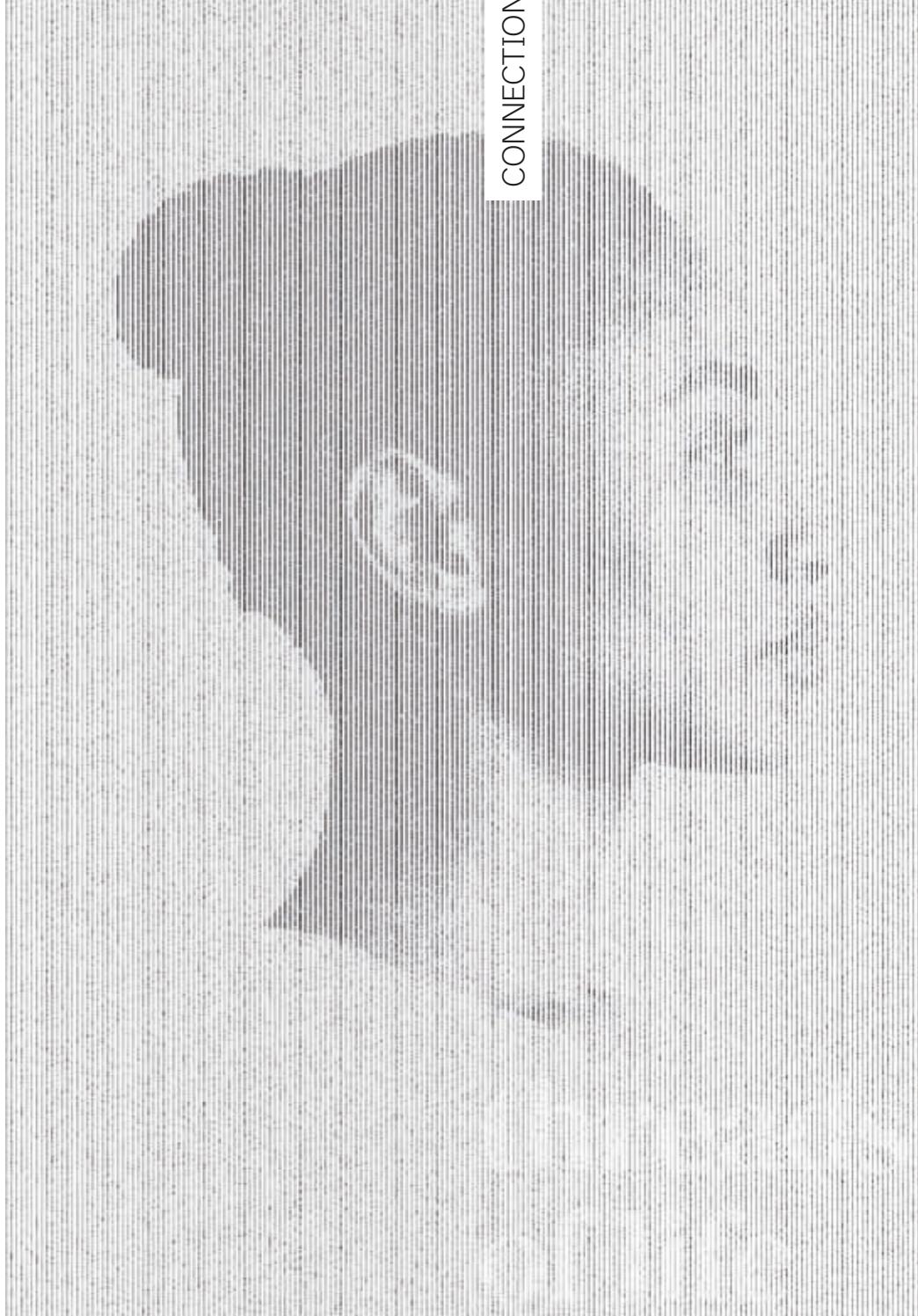
020 8092 7569

Victim Support

0808 1689 111

Volunteer Centre Sutton

020 8661 5900



CONNECTION

Editorial



Tis the season

◀ Editorial Team

As the last bell rings and the last note chimes, we look back at what we've had, what we've lost, and what we've gained.

“Everybody's story is similar yet so unique and individual.”

Everybody's story is similar yet so unique and individual. This is a time for joy, but it's also a time to remember. Where we've come, where we're at. Who we've lost and who we've gained. 2025 makes some feel old, and others feel young.

Regardless, the feeling is what makes us connected. It's easy to separate ourselves in a time where we feel connected to our loved ones, but please remember the neighbour, the friend, the person who has nothing. A simple conversation can make somebody's year. Before you become hesitant, to the person in the street or the person with their face down, please remember everybody has a past and future, whether they're in control of it or not.

The world is a nicer place when everybody can see someone as a human, regardless of their race or religion. We are all here for the first time. It's easier to be kind. So this year, all I ask is to take yourself out of your comfort zone and say hello to the stranger. Ask the person who looks lonely if they're okay because your nothing may mean everything.

Observe^{®2}



Genevieve Pragnell

March 1969–August 2025

Obituary

Genevieve was a fun-loving person with a curiosity and openness to trying new things.

She loved the natural world, especially plants, and introduced Sarah to the possibility of working with Kevin at YourSpace Sutton and later to the work of IPS.

She was a talented artist, having taught at secondary level and exhibited at the summertime Carshalton Artists Open Studio, and made tiles which decorate Sutton Women's Centre. We were so proud of her when she gained a place for future study at Master's level in central London.

She was an example in showing "mutuality" and in her ability to be self-reliant and courageous in the face of hardship. As well as being a great colleague, she was a true friend.

We miss her greatly.

Helen Keyes-Evans and Sarah Beattie

Thank you, Genevieve, for being a great support, and I will always be indebted to you.

RIP, love Safia x

When Genevieve came to the Drop In many years before the lockdown, she seemed quite unsure of herself. She gradually became confident by becoming involved in Art and then the Drama Group, where we did a sketch together. She progressed to becoming a Peer Support Worker and provided support on the Ward at Springfield Hospital.

She was quite a sociable person and went on a trip with The Active8 Group to Nonsuch Park.

John Saunders

Genevieve and I did our Peer Support training together about 4 and a half years ago. I got to know her quite well, as we were both shadowing at Springfield Hospital (where she later worked).

Genevieve was a very gentle person with a sweet nature, and she will be missed. We both enjoyed a good sense of humour about silly things. She also painted me a lovely picture of poppies in watercolour, as she was a very gifted artist.

Sarah Jenkins

Community

“We need to rediscover (discover?) the threads that tie us together and the humanity that binds us.”

◀ Fiona Denton

Thoughts

A sense of community is felt when members of a group feel like they belong and feel a sense of ‘mattering’. People are connected by a shared sense of meaning and values. The challenge is to have a common purpose and understanding, but not to adhere to a blind collectivism that ‘others’ those whose thoughts and opinions may differ from the accepted norm. Members need to feel that their opinions and contributions matter to and are considered by the community. Of course, there are communities within communities; social interaction is complex and intersecting.

Our understanding of what constitutes a healthy community depends somewhat on our view of human nature and our own political views. If we believe that people are inherently good, we may feel that we are able to organise without recourse to structures and processes that govern us. However, if we believe that humans are intrinsically sinful, then we would need overruling governments to protect us from this original sin.

We have seen in recent times the polarisation of communities. Typically, we see society not informed by difference but rather fragmented and fractured by opposing ideological, social, and cultural beliefs. We see disagreement turn into existential conflict, whereby people feel threatened and hostile towards difference. Modern day echo chambers and ‘filter bubbles’ reinforce this scaremongering of ‘other’ and reiterate unhelpful messages that ultimately bring about social strife. It seems that never has divide and rule been used so cynically by those in power to generate false news and propaganda.

“We have seen
in recent times
the polarisation
of communities.”

So, what can we do individually and collectively? The personal is the political; what we do has political import. We need to rediscover (discover?) the threads that tie us together and the humanity that binds us. In terms of stop hate action, we look at the difference between being a bystander and an upstander; between doing little and doing something. Let us consider the two concepts below.

In terms of bystanding there is some psychological research that where there are many people involved in witnessing an act of violence or transgression then people will not take action. The theory suggests that people can assume that others will act, and as such, people feel less personal responsibility. There is also some research that people look to collective decisions to decide as to whether to intervene or not. If no one chooses to intervene, then this reinforces the inactivity of the group to respond.

Choosing whether to intervene or not is also clouded in ambiguity. No one wants to seem like they are overacting. However, conversely, increased bystander intervention increases the likelihood of more people intervening (Philpot et al. (2019)).

Firstly, we need to recognise when something is wrong. Challenging ‘the status quo’ can be difficult and exhausting. However, we can act micro-politically by prompting a culture of respect, tolerance, and inclusion. Being an upstanding member of a community is about standing up to discrimination and calling out hatred. Freedom of speech gives the right to express one’s views, but not the right to cause harm and terror. Shared responsibility for creating and sustaining community means being open to new ideas and concepts. Solidarity is about fairness and justice in process and in results. In these challenging times, we need to direct our anger vertically rather than horizontally.

“Solidarity is about
fairness and
justice in process
and in results.”

Quick nervous system hacks for a calmer Christmas & other social gatherings

1.

Physiological Sigh

A fast, science-backed way to ease anxiety:

1. Take a deep breath in.
(as if smelling something wonderful)
2. Add a short “top-up” breath.
3. Slowly exhale.

Repeat a few times and notice your heart rate drop. Perfect for queues, crowded shops, or before a family conversation.

2.

Hand Breathing

Great for quieting racing thoughts:

1. Spread one hand out.
2. Trace up each finger as you breathe in, down as you breathe out.

This rhythmic movement helps you focus on the present and calm your breath.

SWLSTG Recovery College

Mental Health

The festive season is meant to be joyful, but let's be honest – it can also feel intense. Between shopping, social events, family expectations, and work deadlines, stress can creep in fast. When you're short on time or can't step away, these quick, discreet techniques can help you reset your nervous system and feel more grounded.

Why These Hacks Work

Stress activates the body's “fight or flight” mode (sympathetic nervous system), leaving us tense and reactive. These simple techniques help switch you back to “rest and digest” mode (parasympathetic nervous system), so you can feel calmer and more present – without anyone noticing. These hacks are quick, discreet, and perfect for moments when you can't escape the social & family chaos. Try one next time stress sneaks in – your nervous system will thank you!

For those with a little more time, why not explore the Recovery College Online Hub: <https://swlstg.nhs.uk/elearning-hub>. Here you'll find loads of meditation and relaxation videos you can try out.

3.

Grounding

When your mind feels scattered:

1. Hold a smooth stone or fidget toy.
2. Or notice the sensation of your feet on the floor.

These small actions anchor you in the moment and slow your breathing. Ideal for busy environments.

4.

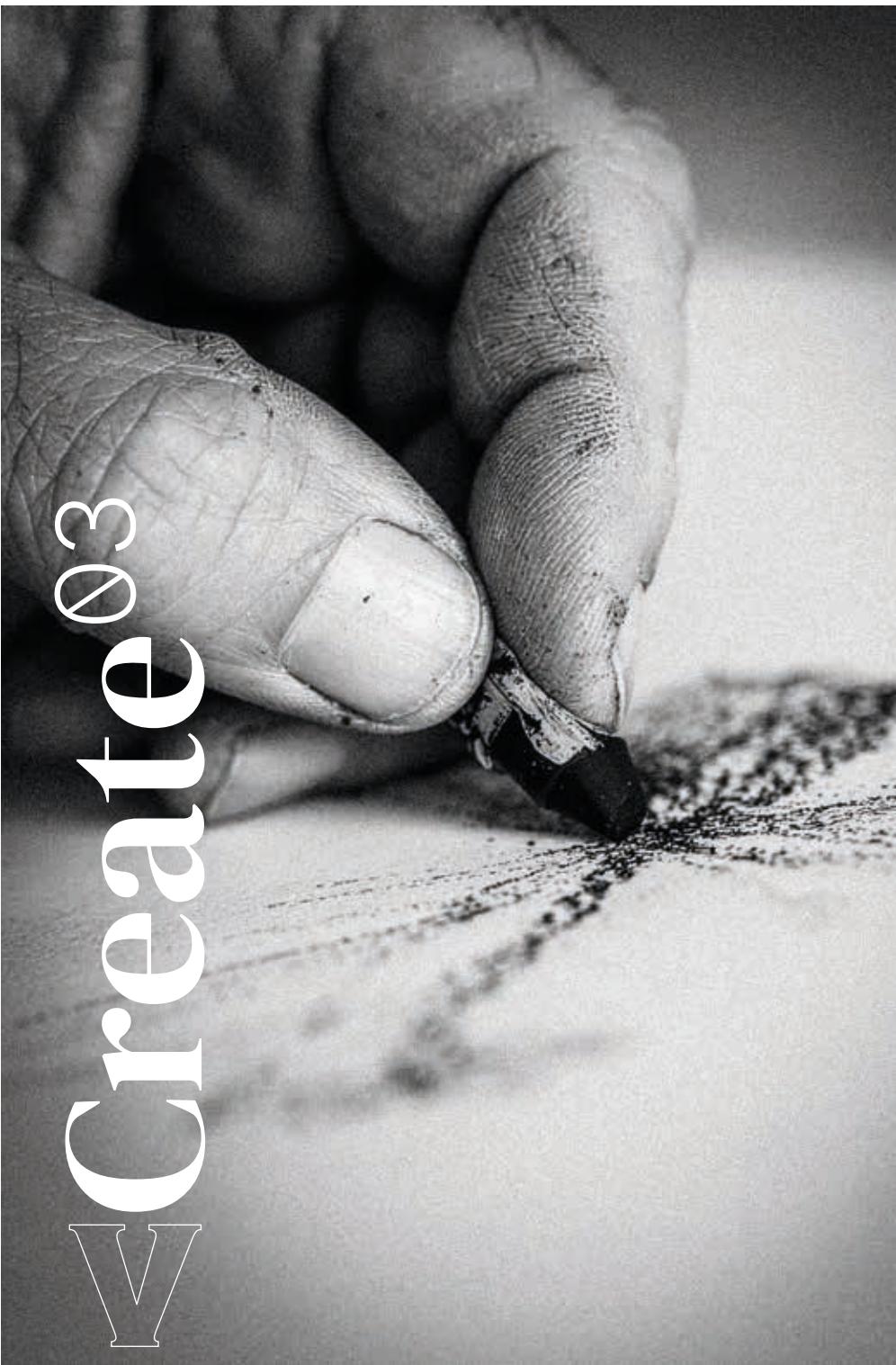
Vagus Nerve Reset

Your vagus nerve helps regulate calm. Stimulate it with:

1. Gentle strokes from jaw to collarbone.
2. Or massage the outer ear (cyma concha) in slow circles.

These techniques can trigger relaxation quickly – great before a stressful meeting or family gathering.

VOYAGER



Abel Kesteven

Artist Spotlight



Contact

abelkesteven.co.uk



Title:

The care home

Medium:

Pastel Drawing

Artist:

Abel Kesteven



I work in care homes delivering therapeutic art sessions to adults with learning disabilities and a range of degenerative health conditions including dementia.

I almost always work from life as I enjoy the challenge of trying to catch the fleeting moments and interactions between people. I have this piece and many others on my website abelkesteven.co.uk.

Angie M

Artist Spotlight

Abstract expressions. It's the same world, same reaction, who cares?



Title:

Abstract expressions

Medium:

Acrylic

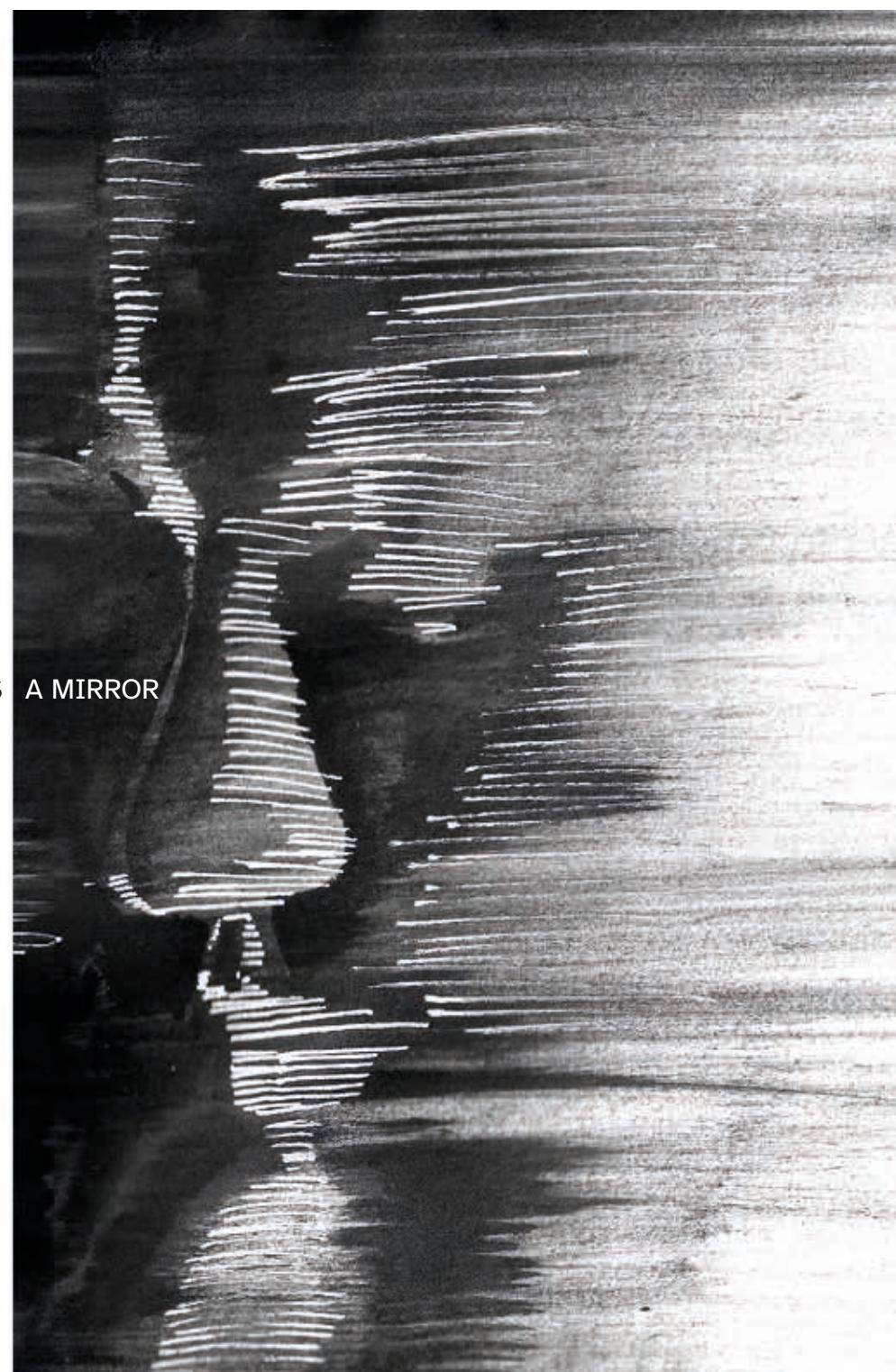
Artist:

Angie M





CHRISTMAS IS A MIRROR



Christmas Threads

◀ Lady Maxine Thomas

Poetry

The season comes humming,
a soft bell in the dark,
and suddenly the whole world smells
of cinnamon, fir needles,
and memories we thought we'd packed away
with last year's tinsel.

Christmas is a mirror
and some of us look in and see warmth,
a table full of laughter,
names spoken with love,
hands reaching across the gravy boat
to steady each other.

But some of us...
some of us look in and see the cracks:
the chair where someone no longer sits,
the argument no one won,
the silence that grew roots
under the rug.

There are families stitched tight
like the hem of an old church dress,
and there are families unravelled,
threads pulled loose by grief,
pride,
misunderstanding,
or the kind of pain
nobody ever learned to name.

Christmas doesn't hide the broken places
it dusts them with fairy lights
so we can see them clearly.
Sometimes that hurts.
Sometimes it heals.

And still...
every year,
the season whispers:
Try again.
Try softer.
Try differently.

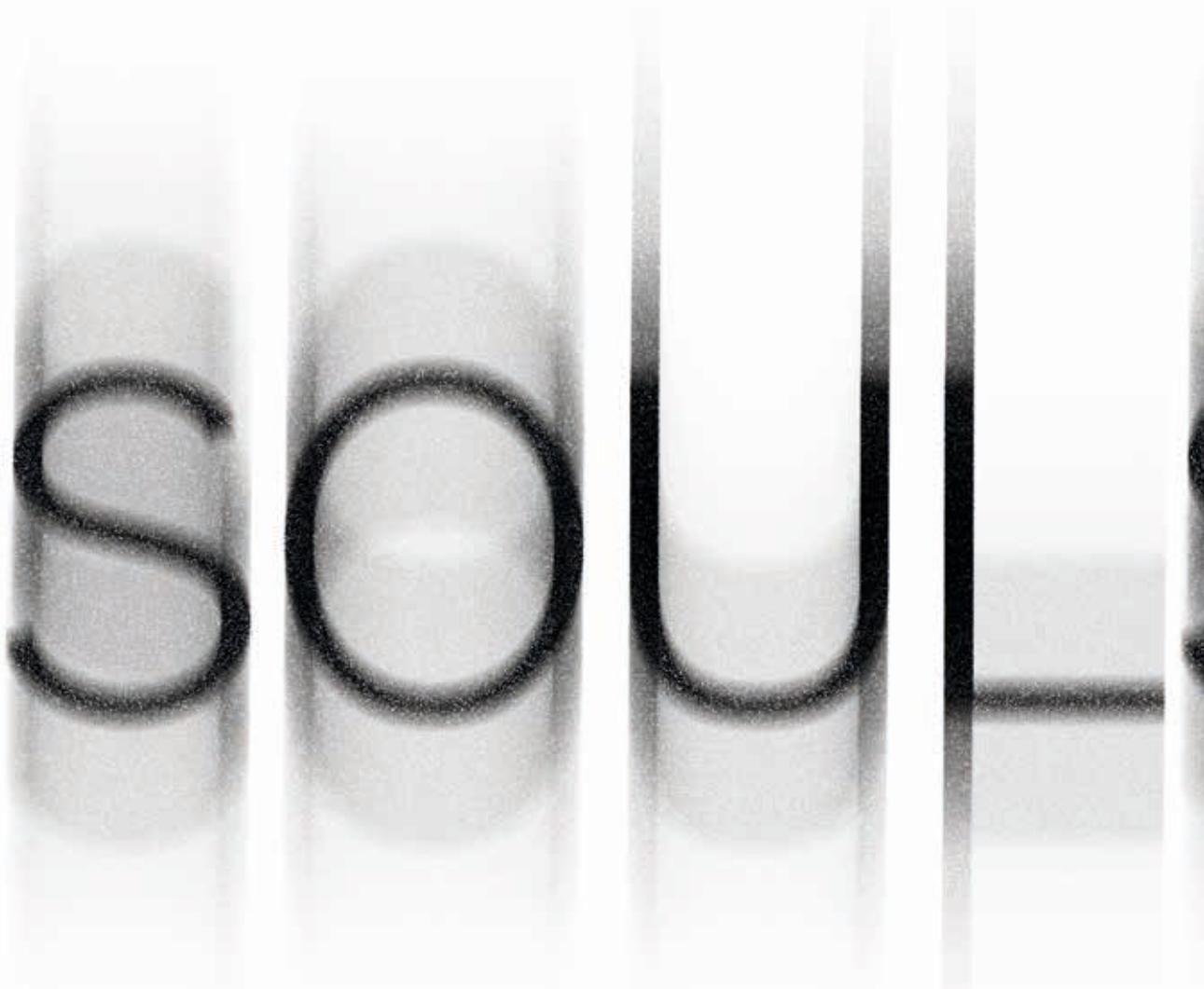
Because even in families
where words have become sharp as icicles,
there's still room
for a small, trembling gesture
a text message sent after months of quiet,
a card slipped through a letterbox,
a smile over a video call
that breaks the freeze.

And then there are the new connections
unexpected, tender,
arriving like carol singers
at the door of your heart.
People who stay.
People who see.
People who become the chosen family
you didn't know you were allowed to create.

So this Christmas,
we honour the whole tapestry
the bright threads,
the frayed ones,
the knots,
the mended seams,
and the brand-new colours
waiting for their turn to shine.

Because connection isn't perfect
it's brave.
It's messy.
It's human.
And sometimes
the greatest gift of all
is the one simple truth:
We can weave again.





Alchemy

◀ J S Martin

Poetry

Amidst a world of confusion
We strive to reach the stars,
Whilst confined by mortality
Emanating incandescent.

Surpassing mere boundaries
For somehow aren't we all one?
We accept life's a challenge
As our souls do overcome.

The future seems implausible
As we wander unbeknownst;
Like an alchemists' explorations,
Our magic conjures gold.

Feelings and emotion
Bequeath hearts discontent;

Although we're not immaculate,
Love proves triumphant!

EUPD

▼ Lady Maxine Thomas

Poetry

I am a storm with no warning,
a wildfire burning too bright.
Loving too hard, breaking too fast,
craving closeness, then pushing away.

I am the echo of footsteps leaving,
even when no one's walked away.
A hollow ache, a restless fear—
please don't go, but don't stay too near.

I wear a hundred faces,
shifting like sand in the tide.
Who am I today?
Who will I be when the sun sets?

Emotions hit like crashing waves,
pulling me under before I can breathe.
Joy turns to sorrow in the blink of an eye,
laughter to rage with no in-between.

I am the scars I trace like constellations,
stories written in silence and pain.
I break, I fall, I scream at the sky—
but still, I rise again.

For in this fire, there is fight.
In the chaos, a fragile light.
I am not my wounds, nor my past.
I am here, and I will last





◀ Tina Gillam
Creative writing

Some memories don't speak in words; they echo in the darkest corners of the mind. Sabotaging, damaging, and ultimately stripping away the version of us that existed before trauma. But what if there was a way to rewire the brain? Not to forget, but to break the cycle of pain.



EMDR is a type of therapy that does just that. It doesn't erase what has happened or even ask us to forget; it invites us to relive and reprocess that which has caused us harm. Through bilateral stimulation, usually simple eye movements, it slowly starts to untangle the emotional chaos that keeps us bound in the past.

To start with, protective walls surrounded me. Why would I choose to recount the very images that were causing such distress? But I kept showing up. Nothing about it was easy, and some days I left the session feeling stitched together with a thread so fine it could snap at any moment. Still I went back. Still I kept following the rhythm, left, right, left, right, week after week.

I didn't notice the shift at first. It crept in like mist: gentle, quiet, and almost forgettable. Then one day my therapist asked about the phantom smell that had haunted every waking hour.

My mind insisted it was real even when the air was clear and free of the curling smoke that had filled my lungs the night of the fire. I searched for it like a name I'd forgotten, but it was gone...just gone. Confusion followed as sure as the stars give way to morning. How?

To begin with, I didn't trust the absence. Was it playing tricks? Hiding in the shadows, ready to pounce? But it never came. Slowly, realisation dawned. This wasn't a borrowed truth; it was my life. Sometimes healing doesn't just roar in; it arrives in the hush of a delicate feather falling from the sky.

To this day it still feels a little bit like alchemy. Subtle and nurturing like a whisper, yet oh so very real. A silken thread woven into a tapestry. To try and understand would be an injustice. To feel it, though; that is enough.

EMDR:
(Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing)

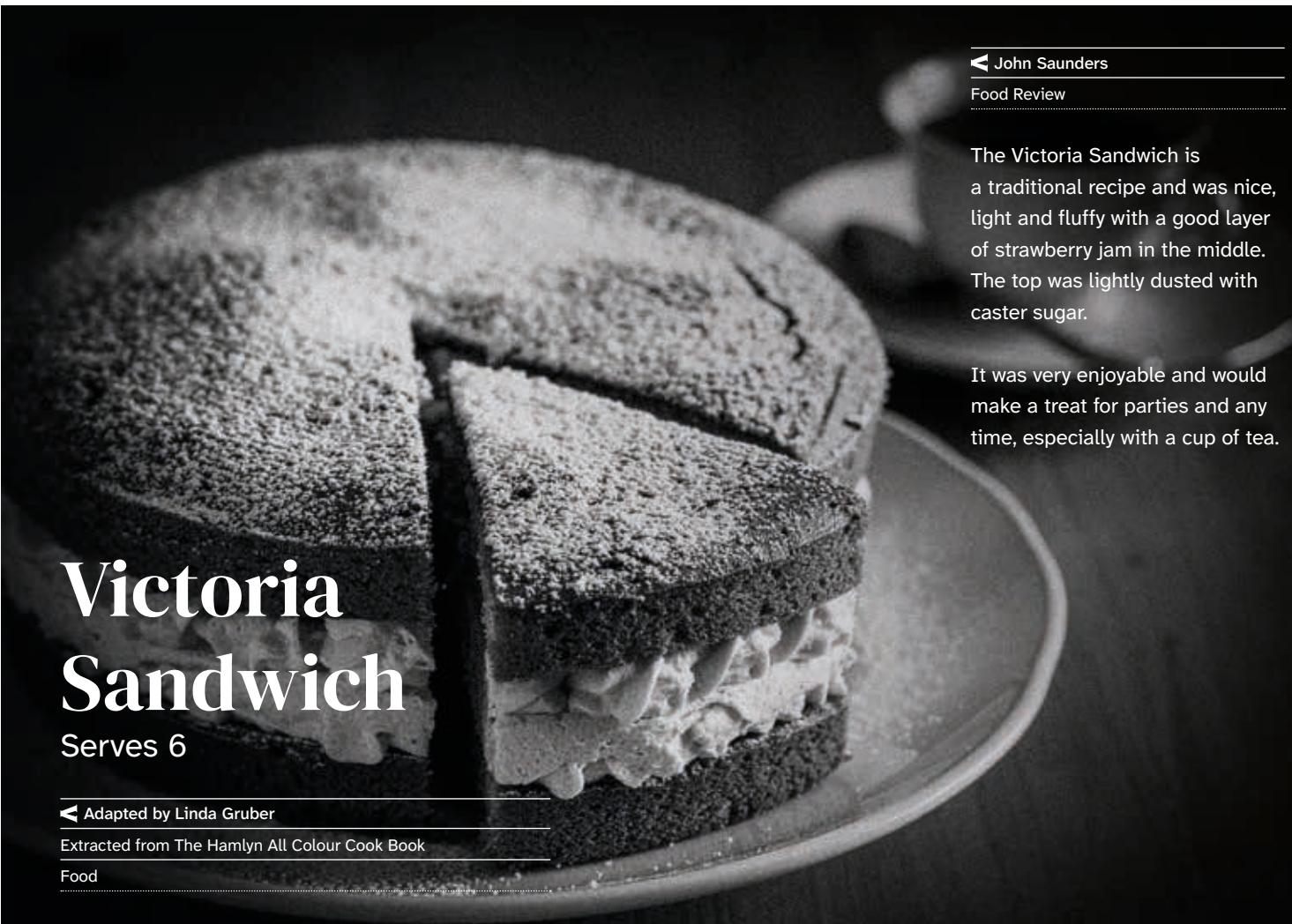
Victoria Sandwich

Serves 6

Adapted by Linda Gruber

Extracted from The Hamlyn All Colour Cook Book

Food



Ingredients
113g margarine
113g caster sugar
2 large eggs lightly beaten
113g self raising flour sieved
For the filling and top
2 tablespoons strawberry Jam
2-3 level teaspoons caster sugar
Little margarine for greasing tins

Kitchen Utensils
Knife
2 six or seven inch sandwich tins
Wooden spoon
Large mixing bowl
Small mixing bowl
Tablespoon
Greaseproof paper
Metal spoon
Electric mixer
Wire tray or a plate
Sieve

John Saunders

Food Review

The Victoria Sandwich is a traditional recipe and was nice, light and fluffy with a good layer of strawberry jam in the middle. The top was lightly dusted with caster sugar.

It was very enjoyable and would make a treat for parties and any time, especially with a cup of tea.

To make

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit, gas mark 4.
2. Grease and line with greased proof paper two six to seven sandwich tins. Cream margarine and caster sugar with a wooden spoon or electric mixer in a large mixing bowl until pale and creamy. Then beat in the eggs gradually with a wooden spoon – if it curdles, add a little amount of the flour. Fold in the rest of the flour with a metal spoon. Then divide the mixture equally between the two tins.
3. Bake in the preheated oven for about twenty minutes. When the cake is cooked, the cake should be pale golden and shrinking away from the edges of the tins, and when lightly pressed with a finger should spring back into shape.
4. Leave the cake to cool in the tin for about five minutes before turning it out to cool on a wire tray or plate. This allows it to shrink and, therefore, be easier to remove from the tin. When completely cold, sandwich together the cake with the strawberry jam and dust the top with caster sugar.

Connection

▲ A Friend

Photography

Cities like London have a vibrant, multicoloured soul. People from all over the world travel every day through a restless city made of finance, culture, tourism and green spaces.

When living in South London, I used to go for walks at the nearby Park; 'People are more friendly in parks', said my friend Giselle during one of our walks. I was struck by such a simple but so deeply true statement!

Why do we leave behind our frustration with the chaos of human life when entering a park? Was it the encounter with nature, whose silence is not of mere passivity but, in fact, a mere receptor in our busy city life? A receptor binding with our soul's regeneration, which stimulates and restores a way to find serenity when moving near trees, flowers and plants.

A profound bond which is constantly broken, a connection that we need to preserve, a forgotten need between the natural environment and living beings. I looked at Giselle, and I mentally thanked her for reminding me that in parks, we are not losing our humanity, but rather fulfilling it, embracing some aspects of plant life and allowing us to build a more sustainable society while walking our dogs.

Here I showed Giselle the Achillea millefolium, known as Yarrow, one of my favourite herbs!

Scientists have given us evidence that Yarrow was used by the Neanderthals over 50,000 years ago. It has a 'cure-all' reputation, and it is frequently called 'the herbalist herb' because it can be used for almost anything (Barker 2001).

It is a great wound healer (internal and external). It is anti-microbial, anti-inflammatory, and it encourages hormonal balance and can soothe and stimulate digestion. It is also helpful for acute lung injury (Yasar et all 2024). Yarrow supports mental tranquillity by reducing anxiety.

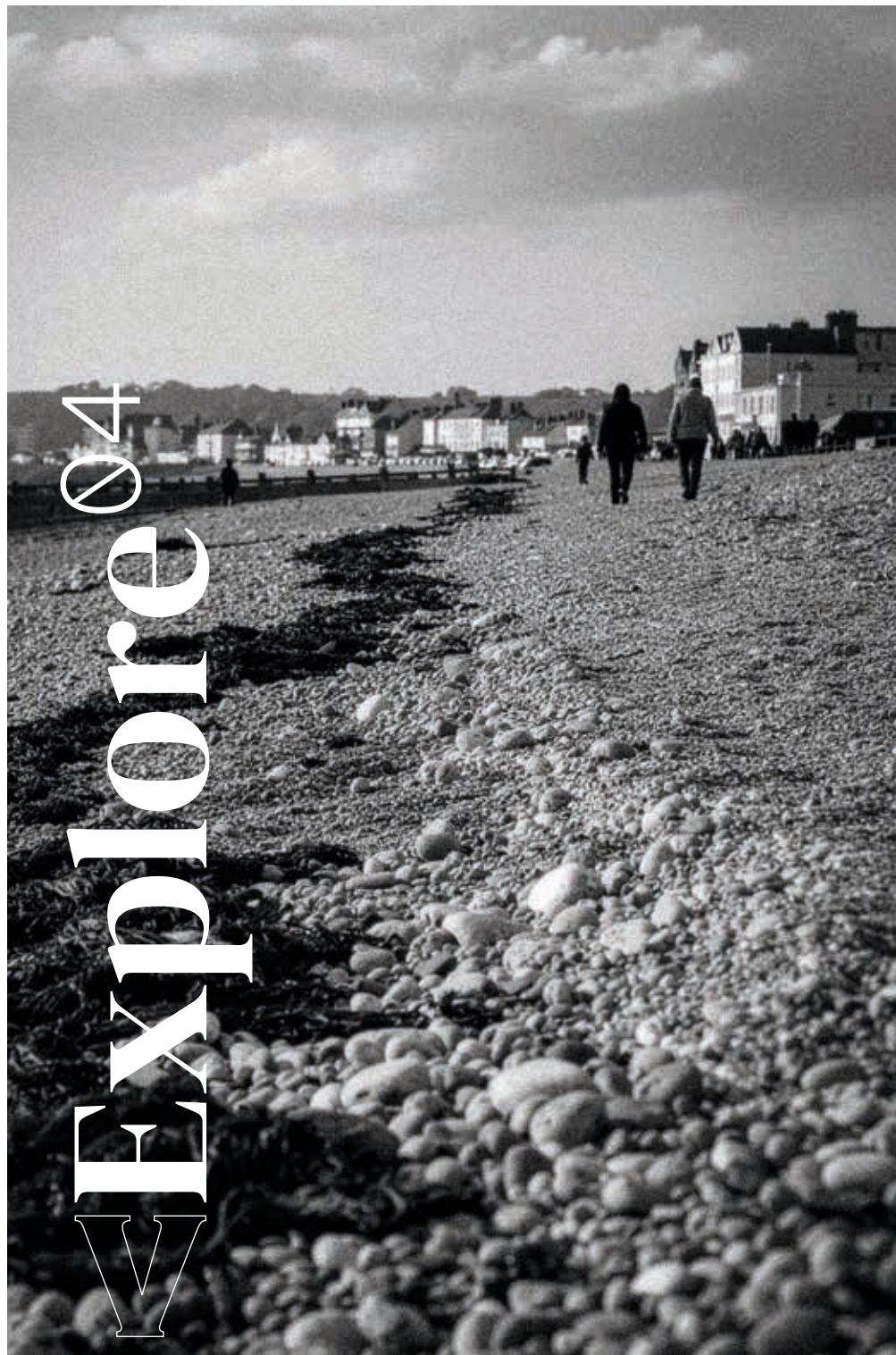
Energetically, Yarrow supports an embittered soul and helps to build gentle boundaries. Yarrow is an edible herb and can be used in many ways.

You can drink it as a tea or use it for your water bath by adding an infusion of its leaves and flowers, and enjoy its calming properties.

London parks are amazing! We do need to temporarily abandon our clocks and reconnect with the alternative dimension of nature. It helps us to rethink the rhythm of life, and it promotes a healthier physical and mental health.







Explore⁰⁴

Coach trip to Whitstable

◀ Linda Gruber

Trips

I recently went on a coach trip to Whitstable through a coach company which arranges day trips and holidays. Janet from the Citizens Advice Bureau happened to mention Whitstable to me, and she liked it there, and it happened to be that I was going to go there. My friend of many years accompanied me on the coach, and we mostly like the same things, though we are very different in personality. The weather forecast was good, and it did not take long to get there.

When we reached our destination, we were not disappointed in the area. It was Father's Day, so there were quite a lot of families with young children enjoying themselves and collecting crabs. It had a very peaceful atmosphere, and we found a lovely restaurant called The Lobster Shack near the harbour where we could sit outside or inside. We chose to sit outside so we could see the sea and nice surroundings, and we both opted for fish and chips, especially as it was a fish restaurant, and we both enjoyed the tasty food.

After a while, we looked around the harbour area, and we noticed there were half-hour boat trips taking place at regular intervals. Although there were no two spaces left on each trip taking place, my friend and I decided to go our separate ways, so I went on the first boat trip, and my friend went on the second.

We arranged to meet up at the boat ticket office after my boat trip had finished, and it worked out well.

My friend looked around the town.

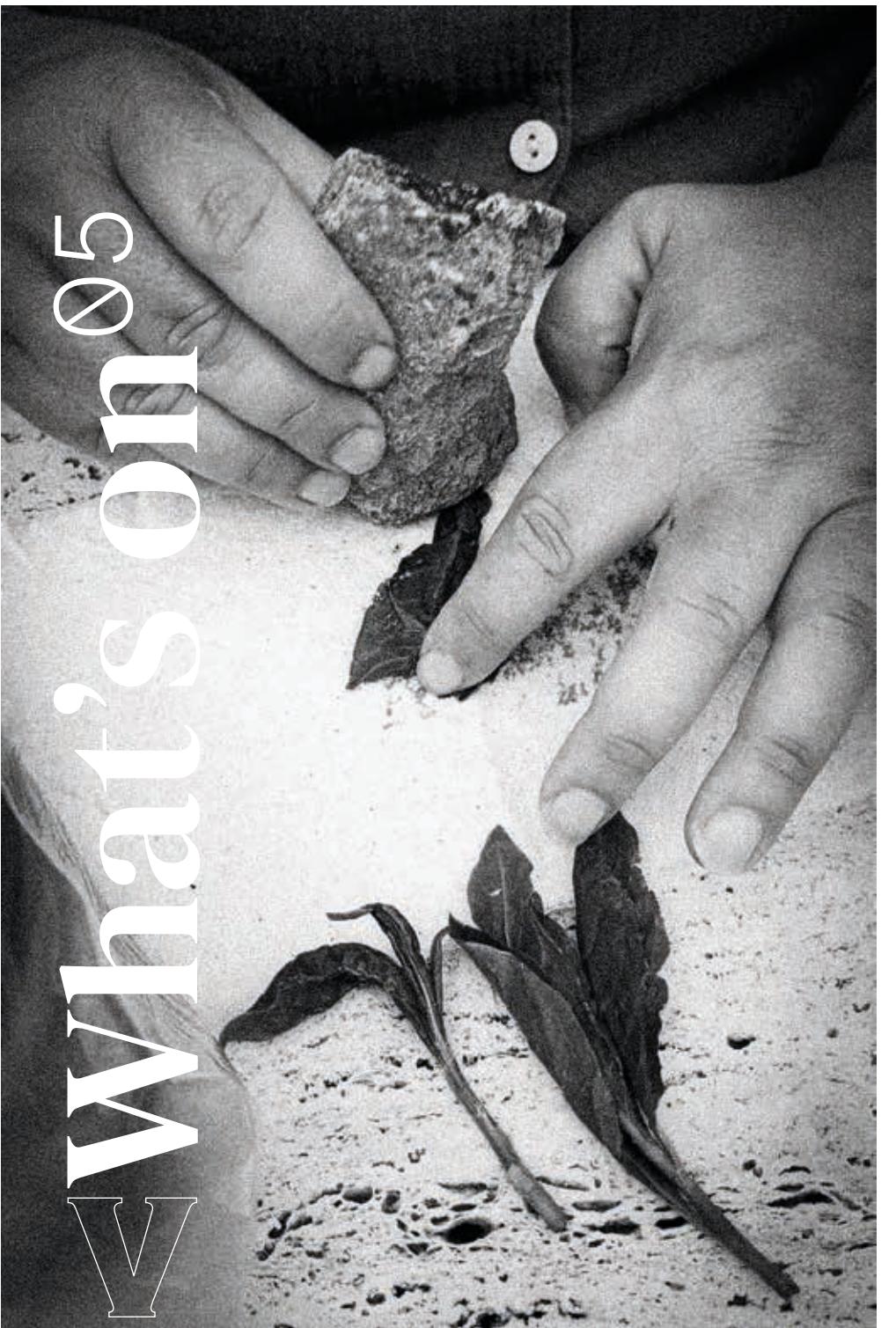
The tour guide on the boat was very good, and she talked to all her passengers and was very knowledgeable about the area. It was very relaxing, and I had a good seat on the boat, which was originally a lifeboat years ago.

There is a market surrounding the harbour, and there are lots of different things to buy. The town is very pretty and interesting, and it was within walking distance of the ticket office. There were mainly independent shops, and I found a nice ice cream parlour called Morelli's Gelato, so I decided to treat myself and have one inside the parlour. I noticed they had a shop in London and New York. The staff were friendly, and it was very popular. Then it was time for me to walk back to the harbour and meet my friend. She said she too enjoyed her boat trip.

It was a good day for both of us, especially for my friend, who is her parents' carer and works full-time and looks after her granddaughter one day a week, so she is a very busy girl.

I would recommend a visit to Whitstable, and there is more to see, which we did not have time to look at.

VOYAGER 05



Sutton Community Dye Bed exhibition

02.02.26–
20.06.26



Project Information

Whitehall Historic House
1 Malden Rd
Cheam
SM3 8QD

events.sutton.gov.uk

Free Entry



◀ Fiona Denton

Projects

This exhibition charts the progress of The Sutton Community Dye Bed project. Here we aim to create an inclusive space to talk about our mental health, in gathering round the dye bed on the roof of ORU Sutton.

Here we grow plants in order to dye fabric and create beautiful pieces of art and textiles. We also run monthly stitch and dye sessions at Whitehall, and Cheam Library, working in collaboration with Sutton Cultural Services.

Our focus is on "being with" rather than being goal orientated. We promote inclusive dialogue and open communication, ensuring we all feel respected and empowered to contribute equitably. Above all, the space we have all created is safe and consensual; people choose whether they want to attend. We all have diverse communication skills and needs, and we prioritise caring for each other over setting goals or achieving targets.

The Exhibition at Whitehall showcases the successes of the project, and our recent book, "the spirit of the seed" which will be available to buy. For further information please contact fiona.denton@smhf.org.uk.

