

# List your favourite ingredients to cook with

Written by Sean Roy Parker  
@fermental\_health

Edited by Priya Jay  
@internetprayer

Design by Lu Fraser  
@wetbog.jpg

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Thank you to all the staff, volunteers and visitors at Erith Food Bank  
for your patience, conversation and open hearts.

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ON YOUR  
OWN TOME

Artist as Witness to Mutual Aid  
Disguised as Social Care



**T**his publication marks the culmination of an 18-month project commissioned by Three Rivers Bexley as part of Back To Basics, a programme of three concurrent artist-led research projects exploring basic public services in Erith. It was devised and produced by Scott Burrell and Chiara Famengo, and funded by Arts Council England through their Creative People and Places programme. The other commissioned artists were Beverley Bennett, who spent time with Bexley Accessible Transport Scheme, and Rosa Johan-Uddoh and Louis Brown who were stationed inside Sherwood House, an independent living scheme run by Orbit Housing.

The premise of my project was to visit the Erith Food Bank and produce a collaborative project with the staff, volunteers and service users. The food bank, run by charity Trussell Trust, was held weekly on Wednesdays and Saturdays at Queens Road Baptist Church in Erith, south east London. This publication is the physical outcome of this time as Artist-in-Residence, and there were numerous undocumented outcomes, too.

This is a short guide to help you peer inside the food bank and see how I interacted with the people and place. It contains a blend of contextual passages, multimedia materials gathered on my monthly visits, a sequence of poems, interviews and bootlegged ephemera from various cultural websites, community libraries and radical archives based across the UK that help paint a picture of how swathes of citizens have been and are still being failed by a poorly designed social welfare system.

Food is inherently Political and pervades every aspect of our daily lives. For this reason, Food is also an invisible agent that requires naming to bring into focus. This art project about food happens to have taken place in a marginal place like Erith — a town historically stuck between Kent and London and left to decline. The wealth and resource deprivation of a location and its people is often felt most starkly in a food bank, and in other places where a complex level of interpersonal 'care' appears.

Based on relationships and interactions shared at the food bank over twelve months, plus my own personal and professional experience as an Artist working in public-facing projects with marginalised groups across the country, this project has unfolded as a writing challenge for myself to describe the role of The Artist as a

Witness to Mutual Aid disguised as Social Care. Cambridge Dictionary defines 'Witness' as a person who sees an event happening, especially a crime or an accident. This is clarifying for me.

Professionally, I've been wrestling with this industry apparatus for many years, as a self-employed artist who needs to attend to my own administration, planning, promotion, travel, materials, delivery and audience management, all while trying to hold on to the parts of my practice that I love and keep institutional influence at arm's length.

I wanted to keep the project very slow and open, so that I could observe the inner workings of the organisation and react to some of the challenges that occur in running a project that needs to function incredibly sensitively to people's needs. Once a month on a Saturday morning, I sat in the room above the food bank during its opening times, with people waiting to collect their packages and spoke with them about what was going on in their lives.

The following factors, brought to light by a short survey I wrote, meant that the most suitable engagement with service users has been the provision of small luxuries and moments of connection:

- their short visits of 10-15 minutes maximum
- not wanting to expect people to change their plans for me
- individual freedom of choice and a strictly opt-in policy
- a lack of facilities, comfort and heating in the room
- volunteers are busy and already present on their own volition
- accepting that art alone cannot positively impact material conditions of people under stress

Digesting this initial feedback from service users, I bypassed traditional tactics that artists are regularly expected to perform by funders, such as requesting dedicated time and emotional labour for free in the form of interviews, group activities, workshops, collaborative artworks. This publication maps out the frustrations of trying to be present in the food bank; to sit in amongst the ambience,

interpersonal dynamics and systems; to place myself within the project in an authentic way; recognising my position as untrained support; realising the value of dedicated community workers.

I set up some drawing activities with unrealistic expectations of how visitors would interact. I had little take-up of the drawing, with most invitations being met by staunch rejections by people citing they "can't draw". On the occasions I tried to encourage or persuade, I got shut down, politely, and came to realise the inferred assumption of art workshops held in public spaces that the audience is always willing to participate. Later on, I hired a therapist to give free hand massages, and bought hot breakfast rolls from a local cafe to hand out. In this way, it was important to add as much warmth as I could anonymously to avoid disrupting the atmosphere.

Towards the end of the project, the food bank was shut down, explained as a breakdown in communication with the church, more likely a smokescreen to avoid accountability for heartless economic reasons. It was a painful reminder of the precarity of social care in a society that watches helplessly as its governing structures prioritise profit over people. It became a clear end-point to this process of being artist-as-witness.

All writing is based on my observations and reflections from the sessions, and takes inspiration from writers, journalists, historians whom I have been reading across the 18 months of engagement and have been listed towards the end of this publication. Food banks are extremely complicated spaces full of complexities and contradictions, and this text by no means offers any solutions. Critical relationships to food and land and class in the United Kingdom are extremely undernourished, so I hope this can provide some mineral for wider conversation.

Meera Shakti Osborne and Lizzie Graham have provided me with exceptional support and guidance throughout this project. The work has been interpreted and wonderfully designed by illustrator Lu Fraser, based in Reykjavik, Iceland, and embettered immeasurably by the critical eye of writer / editor Priya Jay, based in India.

\*These three terms will appear throughout the publication and are used interchangeably as they often were by staff and volunteers inside the food bank.

# BIG SOCIETY STILL LOOMS

"THE PROBLEM TODAY IS THAT A CULTURE OF RESPONSIBILITY IS TOO OFTEN ABSENT IN OUR COUNTRY, AND WE NEED TO RESTORE IT..."

"FOR THAT PERSON INTENT ON RIPPING OFF THE SYSTEM, WE ARE SAYING - WE WILL NOT LET YOU LIVE OFF THE HARD WORK OF OTHERS. TOUGH SANCTIONS. TOUGHER LIMITS..."

"...AND THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE WE'RE DOING TO MAKE GIVING MORE OF A SOCIAL NORM. AND WHEN I SAY WE - I MEAN LITERALLY WE - THE CABINET. WE'RE ALL GIVING AT LEAST A DAY A YEAR VOLUNTEERING."

T

hese words by former Conservative Leader and Prime Minister David Cameron's speech in May 2011 pleading with citizens to perform Big Society after catalysing the dismantling of the welfare state under the Government-implemented 'Austerity Measures'. A headline of £6 billion of cuts to public funding was announced six months later by Chancellor George Osborne, hitting the poorest councils and civilians with devastating effects.

This disembowelment of basic services did not in fact balance the books but reinforced the stratification of class in that those experiencing hardship at the hands of the state were, and still are being, punished for a position they hold no power over, while oligarchs and top-bracket earners receive tax cuts and impunity. Meanwhile, organising street clean ups with a nationalistic undertone, replacing critical paid staff with trainees or volunteers, and pressuring communities to police themselves, are just a few of the ways which a government has laden civilians with increasingly bizarre and self-deprecating forms of unpaid labour.

Large charities and non-profit organisations responsible for frameworks distributing 'care' in community settings also have a lot to answer for. Many, like the Trussell Trust, responsible for running Erith Food Bank, are still reliant on free labour to function and routinely take advantage of the generosity and kindness of volunteers who carry heavy responsibility towards the safety, well-being and dignity of those accessing the service (sometimes called 'service users', 'visitors', 'clients\*'). According to the Charity Commission, Trussell Trust pays 41 of its 331 employees between £61,000 and £120,000 (totalling at least £2.5million yearly) while enrolling over 4000 volunteers to staff the actual services on the ground.

Once the safety net has been removed from under citizens, they have no-one to rely on but each other, else fall through the cracks of society completely. 'Mutual aid', a term that has resurfaced in recent years, most sharply since the Coronavirus pandemic, is synonymous with being a good neighbour: giving care and attention to family, friends and strangers without expectation of return. This builds a powerful picture of non-transactional relationships rooted in place, requiring a deep communication of interpersonal needs, from which grows a mycorrhizal distribution of resources. Autonomy and self-sufficiency provide community members with the infrastructure to ask for help without fear of judgement so others provide support, love or money when called upon.

With public services shredded, partial responsibility for entertainment and nourishment has been taken on by the art sector and the individuals who take it on themselves to get people together; Artists who reject specific outcomes in favour of giving participants the tools to make their own meaning; Jeremy Deller's battle re-enactments; Pauline Oliveiros' deep listening exercises; or Rirkrit Tiravanija's meals in galleries.

Each is recognised as a "Socially-Engaged Artist". This relatively new term used prolifically by the artworld today sits shakily on the shoulders of "Relational Aesthetics", a term coined by Nicholas Bourriard in the 1990s, and the "Social Turn", emerging from Claire Bishop's writing about mid 2000s community art projects. Frequently hired by galleries or museums to run public workshops on a one-off basis, and in response to an exhibition or predetermined theme, a cynical observer might argue their primary function is to do cheap outreach work to marginalised audiences that looks good in photographs for funders.

Moreover, in the UK, after almost a decade and a half of austerity, artists with 'socially-engaged practices' who are less famous than the above are also acutely at risk of being instrumentalised as untrained social workers, providing creative relief for groups facing adversity, often without professional support. This can understandably be damaging to their mental health, particularly if they face similar barriers to having their needs met. Artists are also expected to manage situations which can be unsafe, confusing or alienating, all while having to negotiate tolerable working conditions and pay with their employers.

In many settings, this power dynamic creates a clear distinction between the artist and the subjects, which can reinforce unnecessary political hierarchies that already exist. The unhelpful distinction here is whether people are producers of culture or not: if an artist is getting paid for a drawing workshop, and the artworks made by visitors are then shown by the artist in an exhibition, how is credit distributed fairly? Is the Art the idea or the outcome? Who gets to be an Artist anyway?

# ERITH

"It is only as contrasted with the vicissitudes of human history, and the fleeting generations of men, that we can think of the district in which we live as permanent and unchanging..."

Old creations have been erased, and others have been reproduced with more developed features; and these have in their turn been obliterated, and have given way to further modifications in the condition of our planet.<sup>1</sup>"

O Erith, you are caught in  
contemporary tussle between Kent and London  
Who, like warring parents, refuse to put your needs first.  
Earith<sup>2</sup>, how their perpetual friction frays  
the living fibres of your social fabric.

O Eryth<sup>2</sup>, You are a forgotten son but I love you  
I remember your muddy banks but not your smile.

Earheth<sup>2</sup>, perambulated by Kentish Men and Maids,  
As well as Men and Maids of Kent, who found in the woods  
Actual undeniable fact<sup>3</sup> that Long-headed<sup>3</sup> men of the Stone Age lived here:  
Spindle-whorls, bone combs, smelted copper, ground axes, axe hammers, grinding  
stones, knives, scrapers, arrowheads, bone needles, fish hooks, flint knives, bronze  
sepulchral urns, pot-boilers<sup>3</sup> (rocks heated and dropped in water)

Industrialised Erythes<sup>9</sup> –you watering place for Victorian leisure  
–a steamer landing, hotel and pleasure gardens,

A summer resort for city frolickers.

Errieth<sup>9</sup>, what swollen history in your harbour, where  
high tide washes in silt enough to almost bury all the names I know you by.

Erre hythe<sup>6</sup>, you had a Tudor dockyard made in Oaks of Swanscombe Park<sup>3</sup>  
yet did not disclose a kink for flooding their jerry-built<sup>3</sup> jetties.  
keep breathing, Errowe<sup>9</sup>, most ancient parish in the annals,  
from where an unruly mob erupted to join the Peasants' Revolt.

With a god for every to the outcome (which is  
supposed in the outcome to be the  
of the official foot notations) continuing  
order, success, miscellaneous, looking  
Eorðe<sup>8</sup>, earth, apparently at one point you were enameled with anemones,  
carpeted with hyacinth, daffodil, sedge, carrot, celery, scurvy grass, sandwort,  
aster, mullein, speedwell, st john's wort, hound's tongue, verbena, water violet,  
yellow goat's beard, wood sage, ground ivy, chicory, angelica, giant hawkweed<sup>1</sup>

Earhyð, that muddy landing place<sup>4</sup> valued at £20 in the Domesday book,  
due in part to bearing consistently the most exuberant crops of corn.<sup>3</sup>

Aurr hithe<sup>5</sup>, ruled by seventeen successive Kings responsible  
for amalgamating local settlements sharing in their troubles and victories.<sup>3</sup>

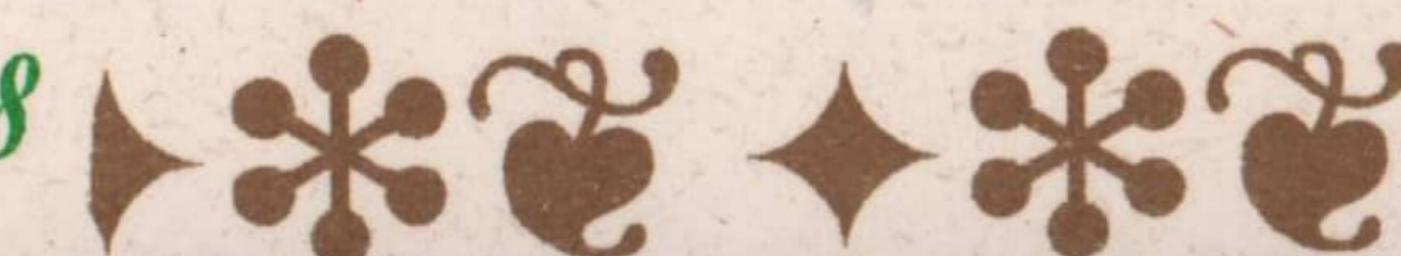
Ærre hyðe, an old haven<sup>6</sup> apparently,  
for Saxon marauders banking up in wet droves

Next to your twin Lesnes the meadow with a promontory.

Erith and Thamesmead is a former London constituency  
Which ceased to exist following the boundary change in 2024.<sup>7</sup>

## Vicissitudes, noun

changes that happen at  
different times during  
the life or development  
of someone or something,  
especially those that result  
in conditions being worse.



1. ERITH - NATURAL, CIVIL, ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, Charles John Smith
2. <https://www.theexchangeerith.com/erith-museum>
3. ERITH THROUGH THE AGES, Robert Henry Robinson
4. <https://arena.yourlondonlibrary.net/web/bexley/-/erith>
5. <https://epns.nottingham.ac.uk/browse/34/Huntingdonshire/Bluntisham+cum+Erith/53282b21b47fc407a900001a-Earth>
6. <https://www.swatarchaeology.co.uk/pdf/2016/63-Hurstwood%20Archeo%20DBA.pdf>
7. <https://members.parliament.uk/constituency/3479/location>
8. <https://parenting.firstcry.com/baby-names/meaning-of-erith/>
9. <https://www.igenea.com/en/surnames/e/erith>

## Description from memory of the building that hosted the food bank

Wedged between the A206 and Erith High Street, Queen Street Baptist Church is a late Gothic / early Victorian building comprising two halls attached by a corridor. The first church, on the right as you look, was erected in 1877 and within twenty years the congregation had outgrown it and a new, larger hall was constructed. The smaller, original building is now used as a school hall and was shared with the food bank for eight years until its closure in May 2025. I visited the building from which the food bank operates once a month since March 2024, and have written a description from memory, since there are no photographs from the project:

I walk through the huge gates of the carpark at 8.30am, some cars are already parked up and the fire exit door is wedged open with a rock. Before I go through the threshold, I look to the other end of the long yard where staff park cars and spot volunteers lifting crates of peppers into a shopping trolley. I wave but they don't see me. Entering the building, there is a steep DIY wooden ramp down into a galley kitchen with padlocked fridges and cupboards. Straight through here, the main corridor, which I think has red lino flooring. To the left is the main entrance and a staircase, to the right, toilets. The inside of the building has not been redecorated for a few decades at least. I can tell because paint is peeling off the radiators and the toilets are like those in big old grammar schools.

Downstairs, the main hall hosts the picking and packing area, to where crates of ambient and fresh foods are brought in from the outdoor storage containers with a trolley and stacked in zones around the hall, not labelled but collectively understood: fresh produce on tables furthest forward, dry store, toiletries,

drinks, snacks, miscellaneous, flanking with a gap for entry to one lockable cupboard in the entrance foyer (which is at the official front entrance), containing surplus dry and canned produce. Busy volunteers are fulfilling orders, rummaging in crates, chatting amongst themselves. Gaps in their conversation while they multitask are filled with the rustling of plastic bags, paper bags, the packaging itself. There are large screens dividing the room and creating privacy for the visitors, who check-in across a trestle table with a volunteer sitting down with a clipboard and smile. Just behind them there is another table laden with miscellaneous foods that might be strange, interesting or abundant and can be taken freely: celeriac, whey protein powder, jars of kimchi, energy bars. They are invited to wait upstairs, and will be called when the bags are packed.

At the top of the creaky stairs is a worn kitchenette with short swing doors pinned open. A volunteer has set up a tray of mugs next to a kettle, a box of teabags, a jar of instant coffee and a jar of sugar. There is milk in the fridge which is turned off, I know from last time. The visitor, or "client" as I hear commonly, is greeted and offered a hot drink and some toast with butter, then told they'll be brought it. Through large double doors to the left, also pinned back, a room full of tables and chairs, with windows all down the right-hand side of the space as I enter. The window sills are tiled red as well, I think, and one has a small painted vase containing dried flowers. I discovered all the windows were painted shut on my first visit.

Bexley Foodbank is currently requesting the following items to be donated:

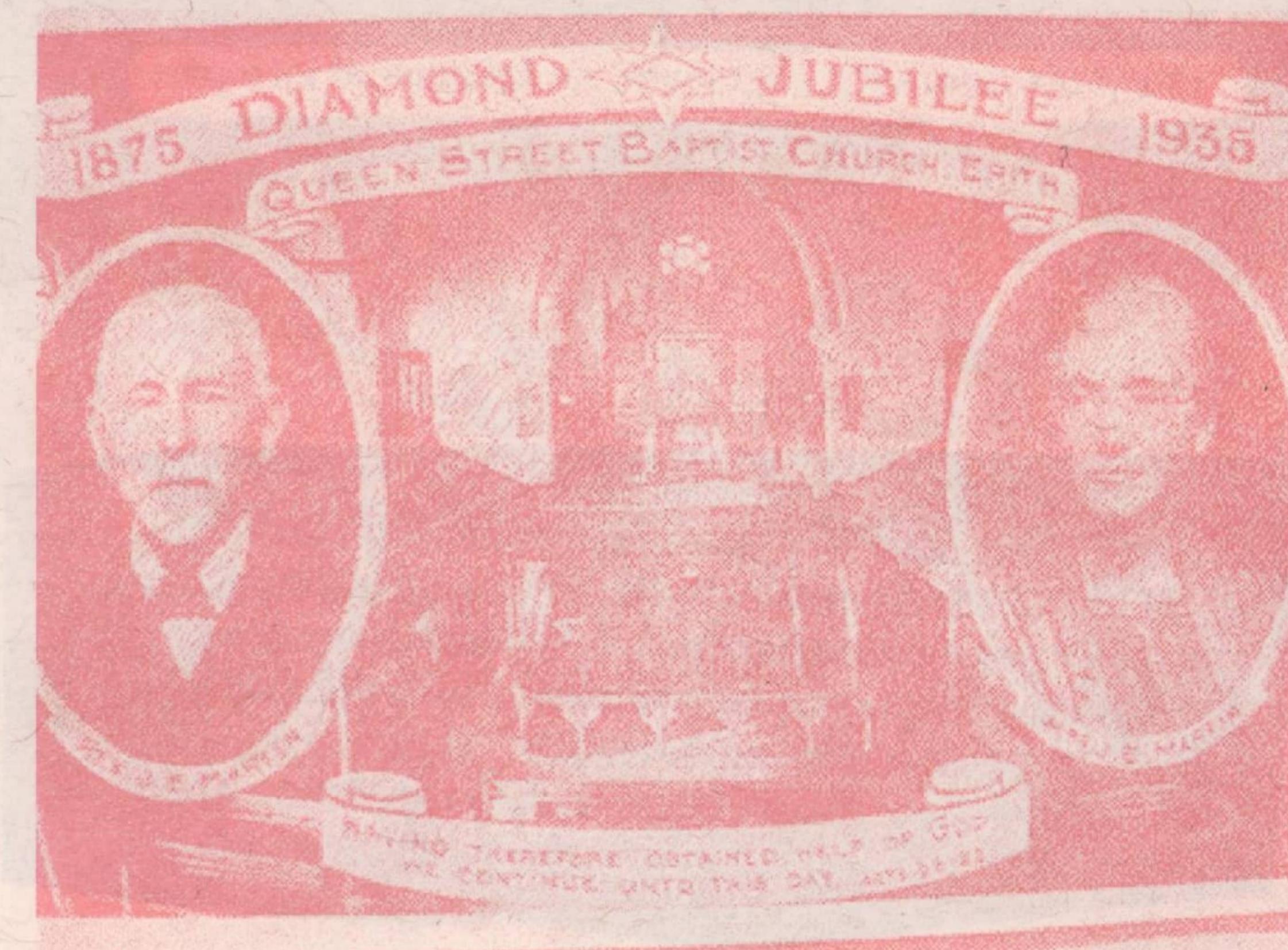
- Meat
- Fish
- Vegetables
- Custard
- Noodles
- Long Life Juice
- Long Life Milk
- Sweets, Crisps, And Biscuits

They don't need any more Pasta, Beans, Pulses, Size 0, 1 And 2 Nappies, Baby Food.

Get an email when items are needed

Email address  Get updates

We'll never use your email address for anything else, and you can unsubscribe at any time.



Behind one of the doors, an empty noticeboard is framed with either paper chain people or posters coloured in by children. I remember some crayon flames too, corrugated card, push pins. The long main wall opposite the windows is bare, with short tables running across its length, displaying crates of books, VHS tapes and a bag of fabric scraps. There are more books underneath the tables in small crates that slide out. One grey metal cabinet is further away from the doors, ajar, and, a metre from it, an unusually tall pool table with rickety legs. There are no balls or cues, but lots of paper and some children's toys covering the dusty green felt.

Most visitors gather here in the first room around tables that have patterned plastic covers, newspapers and plates of biscuits on them. They sit in silence and drink tea or quietly chat, flick through the books, check their phone, stare out the window, while waiting for their number to be called. Cheerful staff and volunteers deliver cups of tea, plates of buttery toast, ask questions and offer advice. Slowly, crosstalk of gossip, school memories and landmarks gone emerges, and when Charlotte enters, she greets everyone by name and with a soft touch on the shoulder or a bawdy joke. Health updates are met with sympathetic head nods, tuts. Beyond the floor-to-ceiling concertina screen, a quieter zone for those needing a lie-down, filled with several dated sofas facing each other.

This is all to say there is a confusing atmosphere in this sacred building—cold, bare, unwelcoming, at odds with its inscribed purpose of a convivial space—which is being actively disobeyed, remonstrated even, by the staff and volunteers of the food bank.

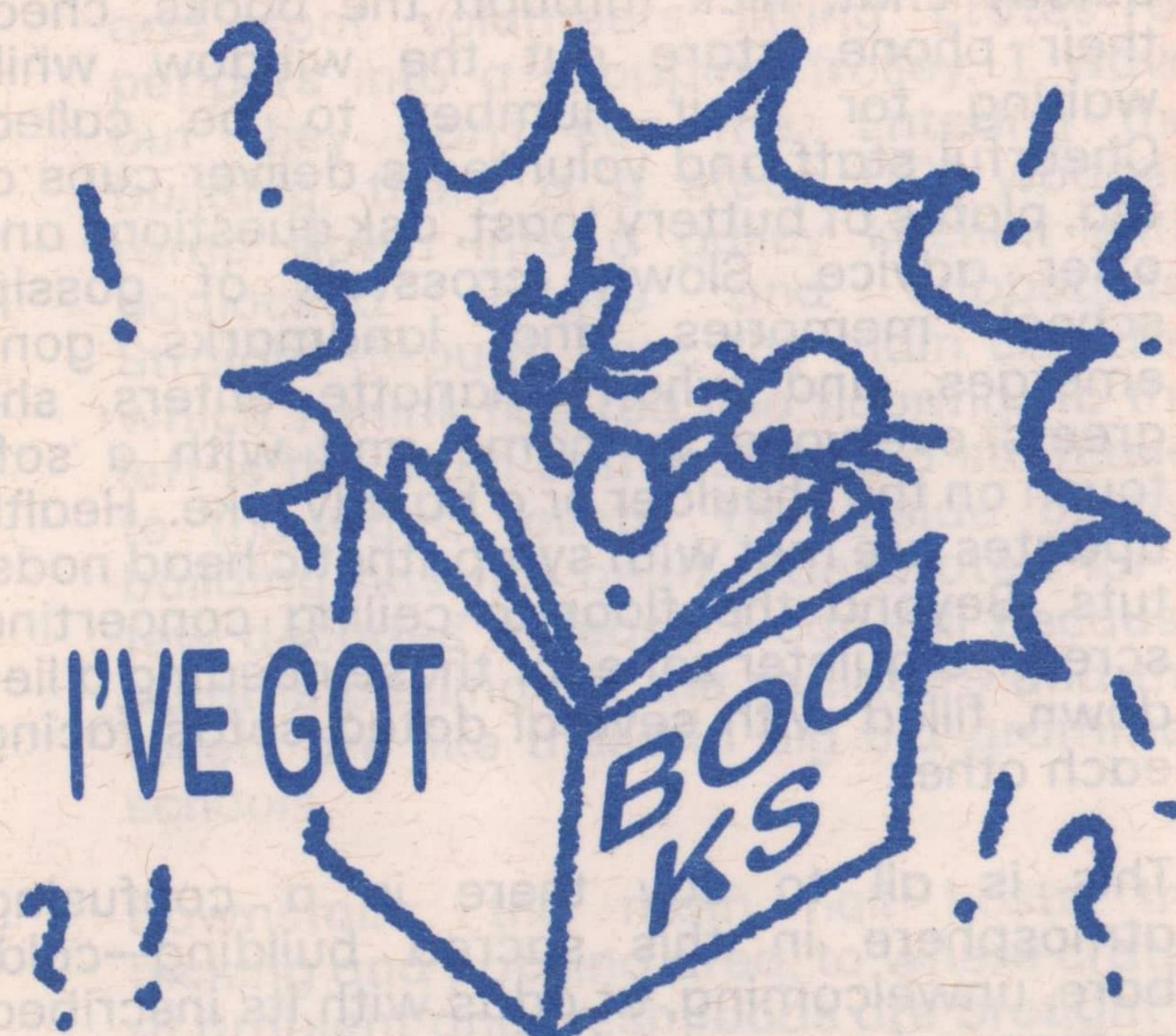
Bird Group  
Every Saturday  
8am  
find us at The Common  
West entrance  
weekly bird count!

Ever wished you  
could play piano?  
drinks, an  
with a co  
cupons a  
the othe  
surplus dr  
interca  
now you can!  
Affordable piano lessons  
with David tel. 386912

TIRED OF THE SILENCE?  
ORGANISE!

meetings every thursday at the community centre

SPEAK UP WITH US!



want some? find my  
pile at crampton park

Call Sue: 223 086

Looking for an allotment friend

I want to share my allotment with someone.  
Help me manage my bountiful harvest!



I have met all the people  
who run this service

12 Gloves from each bulb ready for planting in October

tanto\_anto 17h

"I don't believe in charity. I believe in  
solidarity. Charity is so vertical. It goes  
from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is  
horizontal. It respects the other person. I  
have a lot to learn from other people."  
-Eduardo Galeano

Reply



You emanate the light of a small fire. Upon arriving  
First thing in the morning, You print out forms, attach posters to  
Doors, carry heavy crates and unpack them, put the tables  
Up / out / down / away. You who unknowingly breathe  
Life into the dustiest corners of this old church, are

Warming up the shivering shell with attention. At one point  
Strangers, now colleagues accidentally-on-purpose falling into  
Soft formation, chatty communion and endlessssssss,  
Oft-expressed gratitude. What is it to care for strangers?  
Look, nurses do this all the time, teachers

Too, cleaners, cooks. Sometimes it's a professional formality -  
Or the mismanagement of expectations between parties,  
Stuck between overpromise and under-estimation. Knotted  
Yarn of Your labour. When physical contact, nutrition, connection,  
Safety, are held at arms length, any one of us would

Go mad. I would burst a blood vessel trying to handle my affairs.  
When community infrastructure is decimated, when  
Human needs are ripped at the seams then repackaged as  
Optional add-ons, I cannot speak through the rage. What in  
God's name does it mean that people go without? With our

Monarchy, billionaires and land barons, there is more than  
Enough to go round. From speaking with You when I visit, You  
Fail to see what You do as special. This is Your moral duty,  
I concur, to care for others beyond Your bodily boundaries,  
In spite of all differences. You pull extra time from busy lives,

Stockpile surplus energy saved in rest to reinvest at  
The food bank twice a week then disapparate into worlds.  
Church hall, corridors, kitchen, front yard, car park staircase,  
Hall, kitchenette, waiting room, quiet zone, storage cupboards,  
Steel container, cleaning trolley, toilets; Your love is teeming.

11 November  
11th

# THE WAITING ROOM

"CAPITALIST SOCIETY HAS FAILED TO FAIL WELL"

Alice Theobald,  
Perfection is a Lie  
(An Ode to your Potential)

Eastside Projects,  
Birmingham, June 2025



What else do you have planned today?

stressors  
like not having  
your basic needs  
met hold time still  
while it  
eradicates itself  
from a future  
yet to  
happen

I can't begin to  
imagine how  
ridiculous I look  
sat here  
expected by  
my employers  
to carve art  
from tragedy  
with people  
pushed  
to the edge of  
survival

in my  
smart-casual  
shirt-and-trouser  
wielding a  
paid-for  
perma-smile  
like I've just been  
helicoptered in  
likely looking  
desperate to  
impress  
dammit!  
a freelance retainer  
is a rare  
thing

How would you describe your best friend?

if only I had  
the skills  
to advocate  
for your needs  
in a  
welfare meeting  
the patience  
to help fill in  
your pip forms  
or the  
generosity  
to move your  
belongings  
into temporary  
housing

if only i could  
neuter the  
poison of  
privatisation  
if only i could  
mitigate the  
spiritual drain of  
sterile  
architecture  
queues and  
cobwebs  
which obscure  
the whim of  
capricious  
rulmakers  
getting high off  
dominance

bless this space  
and curse those  
responsible  
for gradually  
disappearing  
third places  
neither  
home or work  
containers of  
unspecified  
population  
where the main  
activity  
is conversing  
the currency  
is listening  
the outcome  
is enacting  
solidarity

even with  
all the  
potential  
for unlocking  
transformational  
knowledge  
art can not  
improve your  
material reality.  
I am not  
a trained  
counsellor  
caseworker  
or social carer  
why am I even  
here?

I don't see the point  
of making art  
when we need  
to talk about  
the football  
the weather  
this  
bacon roll  
which I can tell  
you're enjoying  
your recurring  
hip injury  
that shitty  
parole  
officer

No.  
I refuse to  
skirt round the  
edges of your  
Life  
what an  
empty gesture  
of outreach  
if only I could  
uncrush  
spirits  
until they  
are just dented  
like the lucky  
ones

looking out the  
window at  
cerulean I'm  
pareidolic  
I want to hear  
your story  
if you want  
to tell me  
I will never ask  
to hear  
your story  
only what  
you have planned  
for the

weekend

it is a blessing to  
sometimes  
not know  
what day it is  
all your days  
are  
precious  
I am so glad to see  
you on this  
one

# ART IST IN RES- IDE- NCE

I don't want to be an artist if I can't also be human  
I don't want to be an artist if we're on opposite sides  
of the table

this unwritten stipulation of 'social engagement'  
is an ugly split / parity evasion  
according to the industry  
only one of us is the expert here but I don't  
know how I would deal with  
a fraction of the hardship you have had to endure

What a privilege to let it all  
wash over me while casually sat amongst the babble

headhunted for my skillset  
yet making little effort, no notes  
at the end I just locked my materials in the store  
cupboard  
along with  
baby formula  
hot chocolate  
packet noodles  
minestrone soup  
I locked them away  
Took off with a heft of guilt  
and several browned bananas

if I pulled out my laptop in a food bank  
or scribbled in a leather bound notebook  
if I allowed a photographer to document this project

the shame  
the absolute GALL would make me

make me dissolve

What happened exactly does not matter since  
we were all there anyway barely noticing the  
prevalent crevices of heavy developments.  
I've no intention to press anyone for detail, it's only  
vague outline of actions that move me

in the waiting room  
still-life and drawing station set up across two tables  
with thick paper found in a filing cabinet  
a jumble of fresh produce  
scrumped from the food bank and piled in the middle;

avocados  
cherry tomatoes  
packs of tins of fish

clementines  
on the vine  
cartons of custard

I am shy as custard  
drawing with my eyes into the wall  
tracing corrugated card crenellations  
the childrens' colourful decorations  
decoupling my worth from productivity  
breath. by. breath.

I want to be brave as mustard

"Creative People and Places focuses on parts of the  
country where involvement in creativity and culture is  
significantly below the national average."

Can a social art project be documented without a camera?  
Did it even happen if there are no faces to show  
Arts Council England? because I  
I refuse to use the blunt tools of the institute  
to prove anyone participated

weaponised attendance  
fuck this curated power imbalance  
well-intentioned community art project  
fishing for personal data  
Who wants to know? Well, I ain't telling ya!

an artist advocating for his mental well-being: willingly  
supplanted by dire consequences in the wider community  
Can it be truthful, this type of work?  
This 'social engagement'?

pleasantries cut short  
I leave the food bank trembling and numb  
questioning the success of a three hour sit down  
what are the preconditions of public art?  
I am so fucking disoriented

I sit at the waters' edge for an hour  
watch miniature sparkling ripples on what  
looks like chocolate milk. I am always thinking of food  
always planning my next meal, never going without.  
I am fat with shame.

In the same instance,  
How can it be that  
providing emotional support to someone  
experiencing chronic homelessness

while myself  
experiencing temporary houselessness  
creates a particular density of wreckage?  
This flavour is reserved for precarious artworks (I, now)  
bring me a fathom for I can't  
Hell, bring us a counsellor.

I'm looking for a slow and careful fix  
after phoning around

I find a mobile massage therapist to hire. She brings  
her own chair & incense & relaxation music &  
passion that shimmers off her skin

Does anyone want a massage?

it's an obscure question to hear anywhere, really  
everyone is caught off-guard

a little discursive uncertainty

even the stiffest eventually come round

to the invitation for deep muscular decompression

from a stranger in a pinafore. She with consent

touches visitors' hands and heads

in ways forgotten by most

walks around offering free acupressure

with a side of light touch talking therapy

disguised as a massage

Does anyone want  
to be given intimate attention?

to be given intimate attention?

more phonecalls

eventually connect me with a cafe

who will make me 30 breakfast baps to take up

to the food bank. The first time I go down to collect

my order it is 8:45am and

the place is full of Millwall fans

lining their stomach before a game

the server gives me black coffee while I wait for crusty rolls

filled with egg & bacon

egg & beef sausage

egg & veggie burger

I watch the owner put dozens of sauce sachets in  
with a handful of napkins

I trudge up the hill

fingers turning purple

from bag handles

the next time he insists on driving me up.

vicissitude—there's that word again

God, I can't believe things are this bad

we trusted that we would be taken care of

now it's agonising

strenuous cellular repulsion

things worsened for the subject

who we haven't seen for many months

they are napping peacefully on the beige couch

with a black eye and finger splint

Give me instructions how to:

make you a cup o

you will make  
the KETTLE

to make  
the cup

you will make  
the cup

This Art  
is  
Shit

ish bean  
natur  
rican num  
set corn  
engine  
smore (topiary)  
wberry

I'd eat the same food  
every day  
in your life what would it be?

SONS TOAST

a man sits down beside me  
head cocked with a secret  
silently produces a wedge of paper from  
his leather wallet

from his leather jacket pocket  
unearthing treasures deep from the billfold  
burnished with sentiment

he begins to separate the two sheets  
flattens the creases gently with the padded part of  
his clenched fist

Elvis Presley, both of them. I could tell a mile off!  
what immaculate linework / that shading on the quiff  
"I thought you said you couldn't draw".

a woman, scanning nervously, sits down with  
Her child who begins drawing on one of my zines  
sticking stickers all over it, giggling and sticking

I smile at Mother  
acknowledge her patience with the shape of my eyes  
When her number is called, they leave  
immediately.

I am a novelty that has likely worn off.

I beg clients saunter in here and ignore me

— order a milky tea with sugar  
ask the massage therapist for a head rub  
thumb the local paper and tut

I beg they ignore me

I'm writing to you from my studio desk  
in an old mill in a Derbyshire town  
long after the events in question  
confabulations skew the real. History is

just a popular narrative

I took oath to protect anonymity

respect each's own dignity

if they want to sit with me, then

I'll framework something for us other than lack  
art project so slight and grey it's hardly  
perceived:

no action, pure ambience!

do not announce my project

do not send a photographer

or—and I am adamant—

call it exciting online

this frankly ambiguous post-extractivist attunement  
is diametrically opposed///

The deployment of the  
mythically flexible figure  
of the artist  
as a model for casualised  
labour highlights the  
urgency of restoring and  
expanding the  
collectivised understanding  
of artists as part of the  
labour movement



# Collating historical witness accounts of struggle

"POETRY IS A POLITICAL ACTION  
UNDERTAKEN FOR THE  
SAKE OF INFORMATION"

## June Jordan, June Jordan's Poetry for the People: A Revolutionary Blueprint, via Lola Olufemi



While chewing over these aforementioned realities with much difficulty

I made it a habit to spend hours in public libraries

I enjoyed dating myself in anarchist archives

Approaching the Carnegie gift in Ilkeston

## Safe haven for social movements in Fleet Street

Former Claimant's Union headquarters in Bradford

Esteemed squat in Elephant & Castle

Cultural venue by Liverpool Street

# Central Venues by Liverpool Street

---

# Baroque embellishment in Valencia

Mosaiced tympanum with the figure of Learning set

against a golden sunburst^ in Long Eaton

# Semi-detached house in Nottingham

With a packed lunch and a hot flask for one, entering

## A constellation of portals

## ~ ~ ~

# Into intersectional realities ~ ~ ~ lucid landscapes

Stewarded by the finest filers in the game

## Lauded handlers of printed complexity

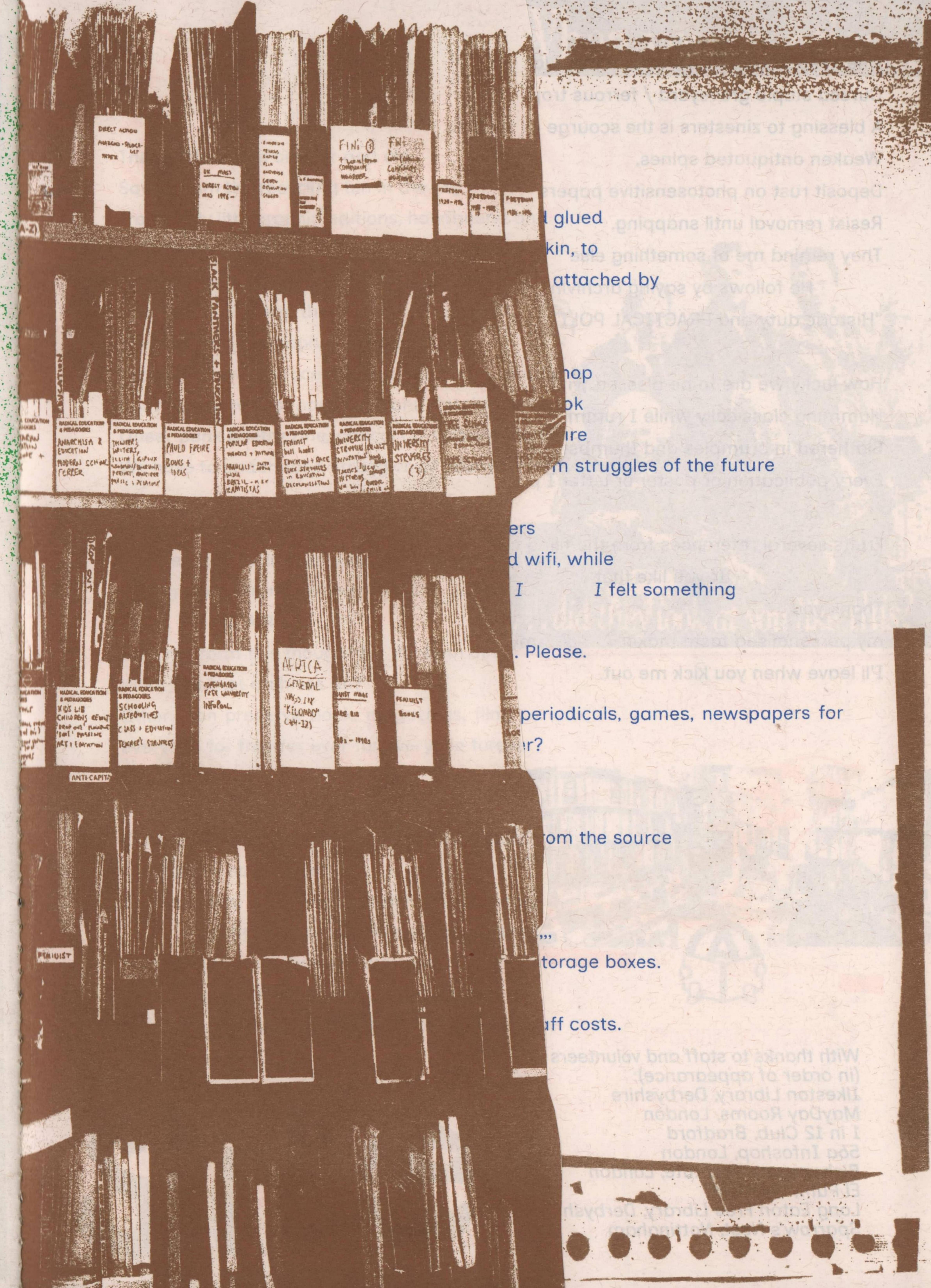
## Custodians of misattribution and miscellany

They let me sprawl out big style among the silent essayists

They let me feed my own textured paper into their photocopiers.

They let me salivate over a recently refurbished microfiche.

They let me curate over a Recovery Traveler collection. They let me copy special collections without a charge.



# Collating his accounts of

"POETRY IS A POLITICAL ACT  
UNDERTAKEN FOR THE  
SAKE OF INFORMATION"

June Jordan, June Jordan's Poetry for the People: A Revolutionary Blueprint, via Lola Oluwemi

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"Mosai

Semi-

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A constellation of portals

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Lauded handlers of print

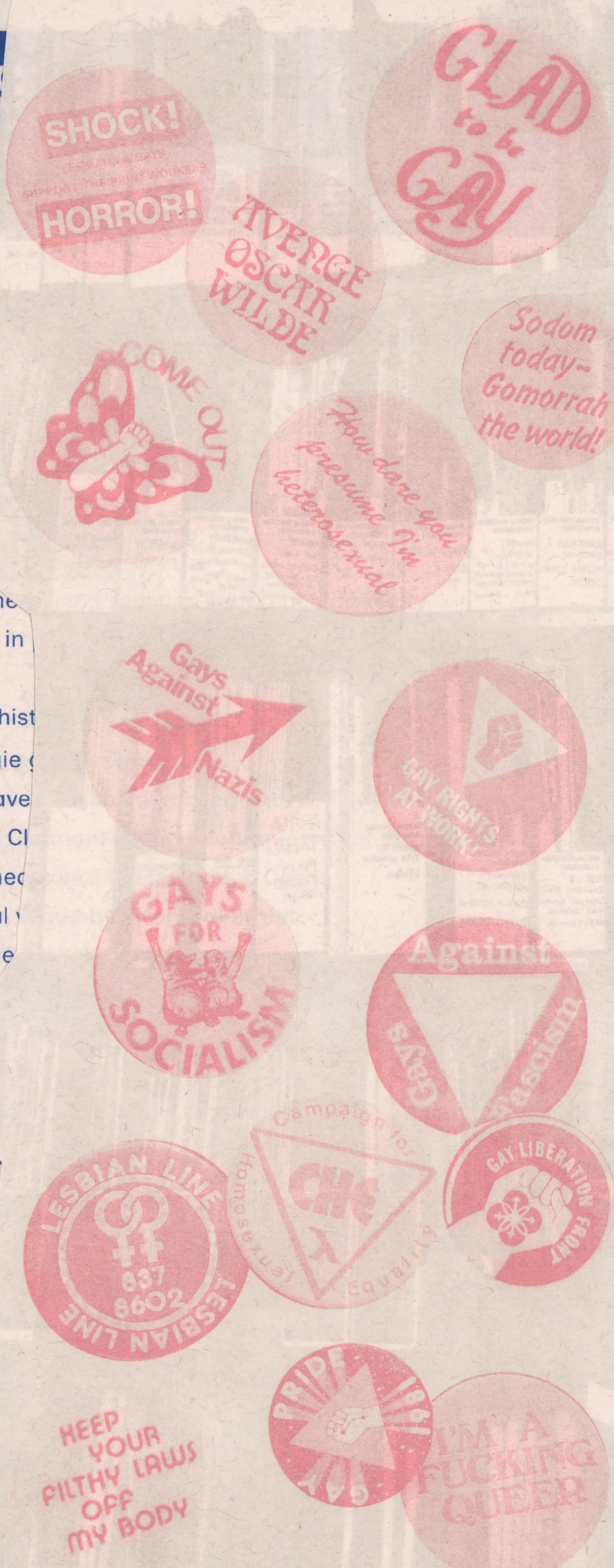
Custodians of m

They let me sprawl out big styl

They let me feed my own textu

They let me salivate over a rec

They let me spy special collect



These collections are hot and old

Saved from the recycling bin in the sky

From early lithographic editions, handbound and glued

With vital waste from animals or resinous milk skin, to

Flops of bootlegged ephemera on pilfered stock, attached by

Confusions of literal threads

Xerox, inkjet, risograph, screen print

Typewriter, word processor, cut and paste, photoshop

Community activist pamphlet, anti-fascist cookbook

Queer punk poetry zine, critical co-housing literature

We have to understand struggles of past to inform struggles of the future

Sure enough, using their tables and computers

And bespoke search engines, their mugs and wifi, while

Pulling words from hallowed texts, I I I felt something

M O L E C U L A R

Help me form this thought for the both of us. Please.

What is it that archives do?

Other than preserve book, magazines, film, periodicals, games, newspapers for everyone for free for ever for everyone forever?

Did I mention these places are free?

Conviviality our contraband, acquired directly from the source

Librarians—no—oracles

I watch them shepherd curiosity toward clarity

prefiguring an abundance of patience,,,

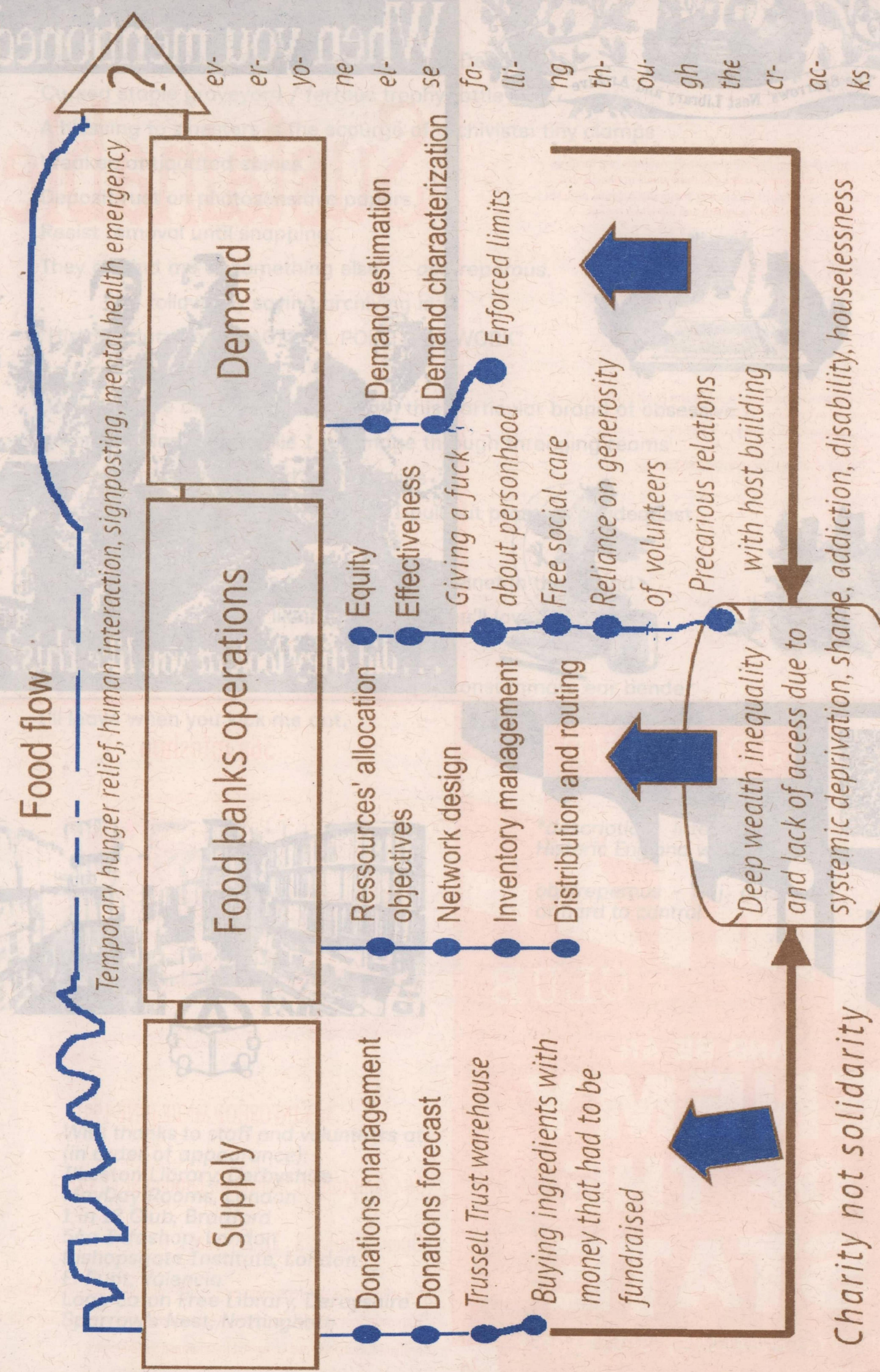
I am told my donation will buy new acid-free storage boxes.

My donation will be used for the electricity bill.

Reproducible merchandise. Building repairs. Staff costs.

Strike





30th Apr 2025

Article

## Ending hunger and hardship could benefit the UK economy and public finances by over £75 billion each year

We are calling on the UK government to take action to alleviate pressure on our already stretched public services and lift millions of people out of hunger and hardship.

Disability | Essentials Guarantee | Housing | Money | Social security | Work | Young people

they used to have he should be a lovely little town it doesn't have own identity

2:38 / 8:25

**Failing to act on hunger and hardship is costing the UK's public finances and economy £75.6bn each year.**

- Failure to tackle hunger and hardship leads to the UK government spending an additional £13.7 billion a year on public services like the NHS, schools and children's social care.
- We are calling on the UK government to urgently rethink planned cuts to support for disabled people, and update Universal Credit so that it protects people from hunger and hardship.

Published today, the [Cost of Hunger and Hardship report](#) includes analysis from economic and public policy experts WPI Economics on how much failing to tackle hunger and hardship costs the UK's economy and public finances. Informed by interviews with people with lived experience, the report explores how facing hunger and hardship is linked to worse health, employment outcomes and housing security.

The report finds the UK economy loses out on over £38 billion each year due to reduced employment and lower productivity, because of the ways in which hunger and hardship can harm people's chances of gaining and maintaining stable employment. For example, people said how facing hardship led to deteriorating physical and mental health, making it far more difficult to find and stay in work. Others talked about not being able to afford transport or the right clothes to attend a job interview, or not having access to the technology needed to complete job applications.

poverty

28

The public purse also loses out on £18.4 billion in income from taxes (tax revenue) each year and needs to spend an additional £5.3 billion on social security payments as a result. This is due to the scarring effects of severe hardship, which can lead to long-term unemployment and lower wages which can trap people in a cycle of hunger and hardship.

It found that failure to address hunger and hardship leads to £13.7 billion in additional spending each year on public services like the NHS, schools, children's social care, and more.

Schools spend an additional £1.5 billion on measures supporting children in poverty such as free school meals and pupil premium, while the research finds that ending hunger and hardship altogether could boost the economy and lift millions of adults and children out of this situation.\*

Almost half of additional expenditure on public services is on healthcare alone (£6.3 billion), due to how hunger and hardship is linked to worse physical and mental health. Indeed, people who are disabled or living with someone who is are disproportionately more likely to experience hunger and hardship. That's why we are calling on the UK government to rethink its cuts to disability benefits, as cutting support risks pushing more disabled people to food banks.

Helen Barnard, Director of Policy, Research and Impact at Trussell, said:

"Trussell's major new research finds that the right thing to do makes common sense for our economy."

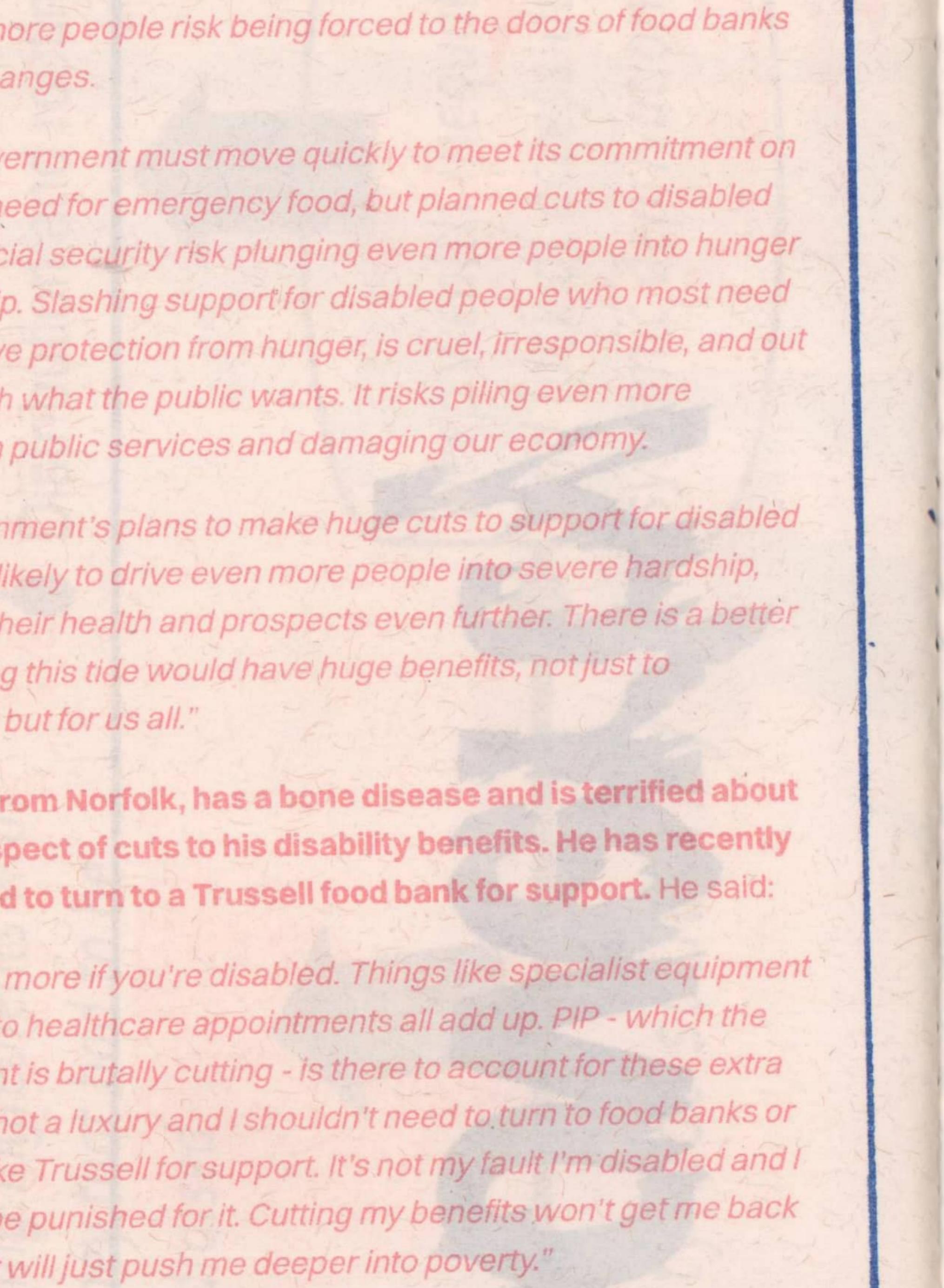
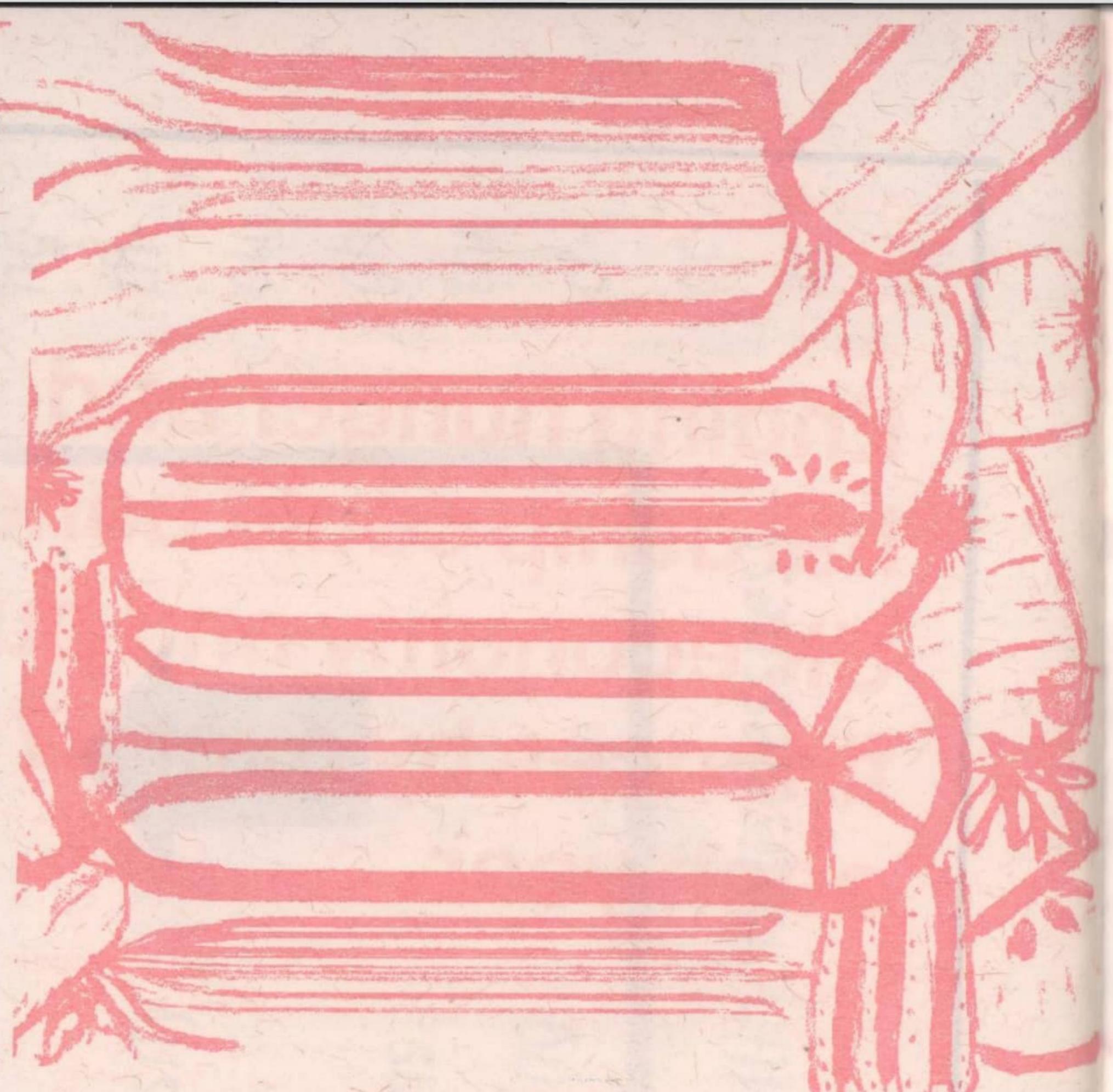
"With a heartbreaking 9.3 million people in the UK experiencing hunger and hardship, including 3 million children, the UK government has a moral and economic responsibility to tackle hunger, as more people risk being forced to the doors of food banks if nothing changes."

"The UK government must move quickly to meet its commitment on ending the need for emergency food, but planned cuts to disabled people's social security risk plunging even more people into hunger and hardship. Slashing support for disabled people who most need our collective protection from hunger, is cruel, irresponsible, and out of touch with what the public wants. It risks piling even more pressure on public services and damaging our economy."

"The government's plans to make huge cuts to support for disabled people are likely to drive even more people into severe hardship, damaging their health and prospects even further. There is a better way. Turning this tide would have huge benefits, not just to individuals, but for us all."

David, 46, from Norfolk, has a bone disease and is terrified about by the prospect of cuts to his disability benefits. He has recently been forced to turn to a Trussell food bank for support. He said:

"Life costs more if you're disabled. Things like specialist equipment and travel to healthcare appointments all add up. PIP - which the government is brutally cutting - is there to account for these extra costs. It is not a luxury and I shouldn't need to turn to food banks or charities like Trussell for support. It's not my fault I'm disabled and I shouldn't be punished for it. Cutting my benefits won't get me back to work - it will just push me deeper into poverty."



Bourbon  
Dairylea

## Announcement, Saturday 12th April 2025

What a sorry state of affairs. This food bank was closed

Unceremoniously. Not even an apology. I was there

When she pulled the rug. This curt manager

With choppy hair delivered the message

No acknowledgement or thanks

For the gargantuan effort

She spilt the beans

Split the milk of the room

Callous management rhetoric

Sidestepping acceptance discrepancy

It was like the roof was ripped off the church

A breeze excessively cold even in this unheated hole

Whipped through, stole the breath from everyone's lungs

## Interview with Charlotte, volunteer at Erith Food Bank

What were your original motivations for joining the staff at Erith Food Bank and what brought you back every week?

I started volunteering seven years ago (at Erith Food Bank) after moving locally and wanting to be more involved in the community. Erith is a deprived area with a systematic lack of investment, so I wanted to feel I was playing my part. I saw a tweet and came along to meet Andrew - by the time my first session was over I knew it was absolutely what I had to do. The volunteers were, and still are, incredible, friendly, diverse, kind and full of empathy.

Over the years I have gotten to know the regular clients and learn to spot signs of issues other than food poverty. I feel it is our responsibility to do as much as possible to help, whether that is a hug, a chat, or simply eye contact and listening.

Wherever possible I and other staff try to help them access other support services in the Borough.

Could you explain the process very simply to me of how people arrive and get onboarded?

Andrew will be better answering this, but essentially the Trussell Trust has a specific set of guidelines we must follow. Firstly, clients call the helpline and receive a voucher code. This recommendation can come from various places: councillors, schools, doctors, job centre. With a code a client is entitled to a food parcel, in total they are eligible for between 6-8 in a 6 month period. It's their choice how you use them (weekly or monthly etc) and after the initial allocation they will be asked to see Irma who will assess the personal situation to see if she can help with access to any other benefits, or support with form filling etc. She can lift sanctions on the allocation to support with monthly vouchers instead.

What did you think was the point of me being at the food bank? Did this opinion change over time?

Three Rivers introduced you to the food bank and I feel that the art became a really effective conduit to conversations. Many of our clients do not speak to many people - they can be living in HMOs and be quite lonely. We really noticed a difference in how people opened up when there was a different focus, the art being present and optional was a welcome distraction. It became an integral part of how we ran the 'cafe' where clients were waiting for their parcels to be made up.

What are your thoughts about how the use of the upstairs room began to function as the project went on?

Since we only started opening the upstairs room during the food bank hours a couple of weeks before you joined us, it really felt organic in its development. When you introduced the idea of hiring a massage therapist, and began bringing breakfast baps, clients and volunteers really benefited from this. Having you upstairs helped develop a friendly and accessible, more human environment. For us we wanted to make the experience of visiting our foodbank more of a community space, we always want to give people the dignity and respect they deserve so the upstairs area certainly provided respite for clients.

continues on next page



# Food For All

We needed public canteens like yesterday. In this communal eatery no one is turned away for lack of funds. This is a worker-owned Co-operative constitutionally committed to the nourishment of its members and patrons, who spend lightly and get paid handsomely. This establishment provides fresh-cooked meals using culturally-appropriate ingredients from all corners of the earth, sourced with care.

Think suburban shopping centre food hall with no security, fast food or fake plants in sight. Think Working Mens' Club funeral wake buffet on the pool table, cold cuts and devilled eggs. Think Indian family wedding catering quality for those ornate sharing platters dripping in oils or solstice picnic sitting on a mile wide blanket where the spread is accidentally harmonious. Think platters of chargrilled local meats and dressed allotment salad leaves at the BBQ or a thousand litres of bean chilli bubbling over the International Scout Jamboree fire.

Who works there?

WE DO

Who eats there?

WE DO

Who pays the wages?

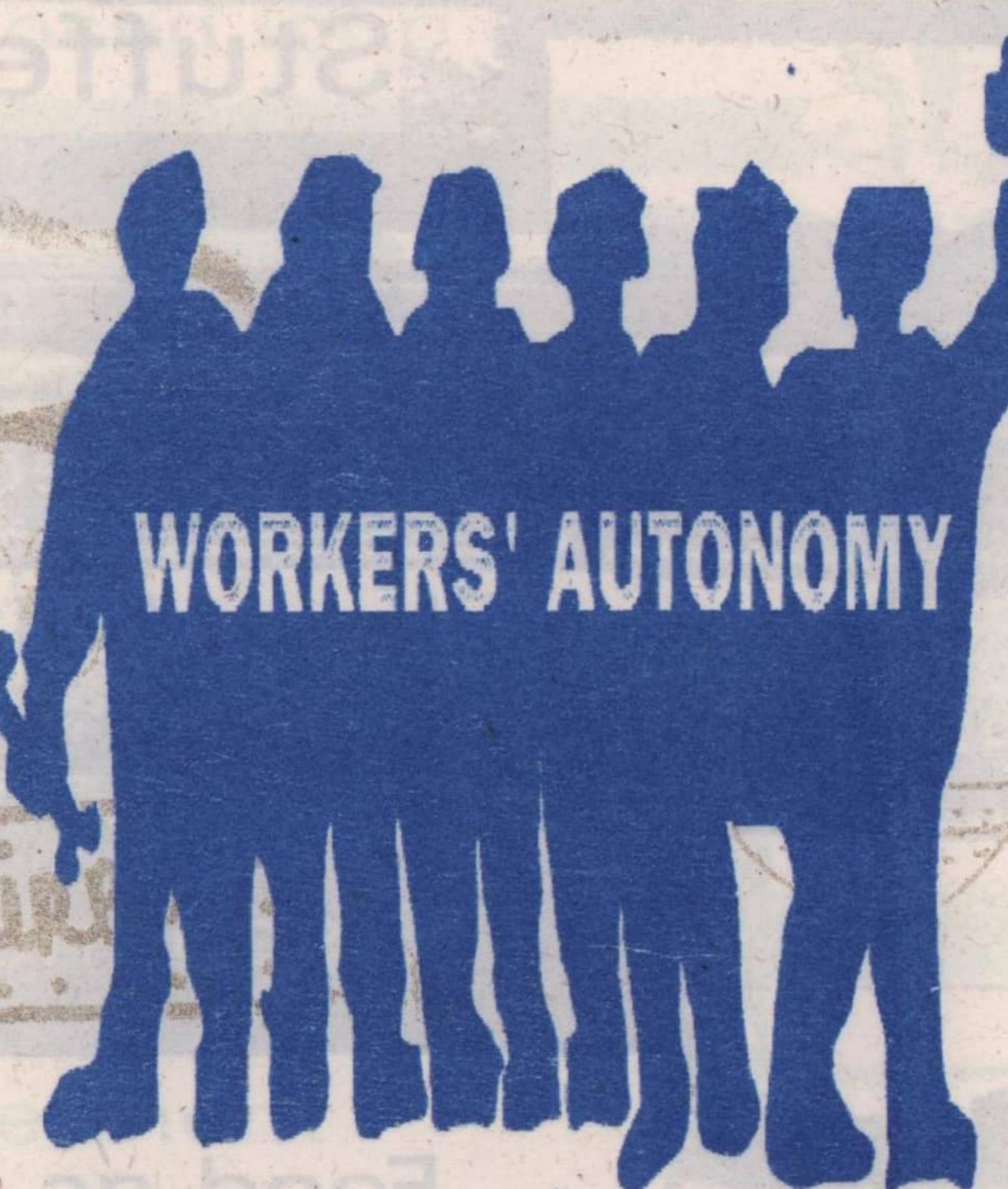
WE DO

We also plant the seeds, till the soil, grow the vegetables, rear the animals & butcher them, save rainwater, improve soil health, turn scraps into compost, make biochar, ferment fertilisers, preserve the surplus, learn new recipes, teach each other knife skills, run a community pantry, cycle deliveries in & out, write the menu, clean the tables, brew coffee, handle the accounts, design the posters, sweep floors, distribute care packages, host events, raise funds for friends, protect our rights, de-escalate and resolve conflict, and cater for every type of celebration you could imagine.

We are our own food system.

"I ate all of the food, there was nothing I disliked and yet there were more things on the short menu that I wanted to try but didn't. If such a place existed in the city, I would go there every day. It is telling that while there are no public canteens in the city (what council could now afford to hang on to such a quantity of land after cuts?), the houses of parliament have ten canteens."

Rebecca May Johnson,  
I Dream of Canteens



## The current state of things:

Locked bins and landfill

Food banks closing

Supermarket oligarchy

Fossil fuel reliance

Unsafe labour chains

Single use plastics

Inequipped kitchen

1/3 of all food  
at home wasted

Elitist white spaces: farmers' markets

Abandoned fields of crops

Basic needs out of reach

Degraded education

Stuffed with preservatives

Dead soil

Enforced Malnourishment

Flown half way round the world

Disconnection with history

Food as a tool of control

## If it's not already it will be soon:

Waste belongs to the commons

No-one goes without

Localised energy systems

Unions protect working  
conditions and pay

Re-use existing containers

Thrift and reduced choice

Easy home composting

Shared kitchens in apartment blocks

Gleaner network and bulk preservation

Eco-socialist government

Toxins are banned substances

National kitchens run by professionals

Sugar barons bankrupt

Community garden closed loop

Culturally appropriate foods

Cultural food heritage research

Regenerative farming practices

Compulsory cooking in schools

Food as a tool of empowerment

Texts read:

- A Thousand Little Machines - Franco 'Bifo' Berardi
- Anarchy & Alcohol - Alcoholics Autonomous
- Disquiet Drive - Hesse K
- Erith - Natural, Civil, Ecclesiastical History - Charles John Smith
- Erith Through The Ages - Robert Henry Robinson
- Green at an Angle - Ben Sanderson & Rachael Allen
- Hello, the Roses - Mei Mei Berssenbrugge
- Mouthful - Celine Mathieu
- Modern Poetry - Diane Seuss
- Mural - Mahmoud Darwish
- Poor Artists - Gabrielle de la Puente & Zarina Muhammad
- Spaghetti Club - Spaghetti Club & Bronze Age
- The Great Good Place - Ray Oldenburgh
- Wave of Blood - Ariana Reines

Writing courses:

- "Economy in Poetry" with Claudine Toutoungi at Arvon (online)
- "Writing back is not the same as fighting back" with Lola Olufemi at Eastside Projects

# BOOK REVIEWS

Concerns

joys and tragedies

Sean Roy Parker is an artist, writer, and landworker whose eco-critical work is generated through nourishing daily relationships with (more-than-)humans in the struggle for food justice and land access. For three years, he was a core member of The Field, an experimental artist-run housing project in an ex-National Coal Board and Steiner School building in Derbyshire. He was a 2023 resident at Wysing Arts Centre and in 2024 received an Axis Fellowship and a Paul Hamlyn Visual Artist Award. He has recently had projects at Piccalilli Gallery (London), Two Queens (Leicester), Primary (Nottingham), and Pols (Valencia, Spain). His debut collection of poetry stewarding was published by Monitor Books (London).



Priya Jay is a writer and facilitator. Her practice is led by questions of literacies, embodiment, sustenance and liberation: through the body, the page, the land and the archive. Her work comes together as printed matter, objects, community meals and grief gatherings. She intermittently shares work through @internetprayer



Lu Fraser is an artist and illustrator. Their work is driven by imaginations of new queer-ecological futures with a strong emphasis on nature and the primordial as a lens for viewing the social. She primarily works with risograph printed illustration, publishing experimental zines and advocacy materials that aim to bring new people into big, yet often inaccessible conversations. They are an active team member of Gallery Kannski in Reykjavík, Iceland, and a member of the collective RE-PEAT. Say hi via @wetbog.jpg on instagram <:^>

