



Written versions of all stories created for Once Upon A Time in Luton.

## Introduction

Hello and welcome to Once Upon A Time in Luton!

My name is Emma Waterford and my name is Bernadette Russell, and we have been working with Luton Primary School:

*“Team Seal Year Four Luton Primary School”*

and Kingfisher Primary School:

*“Hello, we are Owl Class Year Five from Kingfisher Primary School”*

And last but not least these lovely people:

*“Welcome to the Victory Care home”*

So, join us and our guide Feather’s the crow, as he follows the route on the magical map, flying through Luton and beyond, visiting the streets and green spaces, and discovering 12 incredible stories on the way!

Between stories you can travel in your own way- in real life or in your imagination!

When you hear Feather’s the crow like this:

*Crow cawing*

you know it is time to move on to the next stop.

Our first story is about the library. We hope you enjoy it....

# Story 1 - Storyland!

**Created by staff and visitors of Luton Library**

Here we are outside the library. This place, they say, is full of magic... and if you don't believe that - just ask someone who works here, like this nice lady:

*"Hi, my names Rachel and I work at Luton Library, and there's definitely magic here in our library, through the books and in the people"*

Here is just one of the stories about the magic of Luton library.

Once there lived a pigeon called Fancy, who got her feet all tangled up. Poor Fancy, it hurt a lot and she didn't know what to do. She heard from all the other birds that the people in the library were kind and that they would definitely find a way to help her. So, Fancy waited outside the library window, near the desk where the library assistants Jess and Mandy worked, hoping they would notice her. After a while they did notice her, and they got some sunflower seeds for her to eat, and a man to come and untangle her feet from the strings that had wrapped around them.

Fancy felt better very soon. She visited the library every day after, and there was always a little pile of seeds left for her to eat by the window.

She watched as people came to get help with forms or computers, and they'd get a cup of tea and a biscuit too. She watched as toddlers came and did something called Shake and Boogie, and there was a Lego club and knit and natter, and Fancy saw how people's eyes lit up and how they smiled as they read the books. There was definitely magic here, in the people and in the books, she thought to herself.

Time passed, and everything was good. But then... Giggle Gob, a very small and very mischievous Goblin turned up. No one knew where he came from, but you know, they do say that every library has a goblin. As soon as he arrived, he started moving the books about, and hiding them, and putting them in the wrong places. He tipped over teacups, crumbled biscuits into the carpet, left lids off felt tip pens so they dried out, made the lights flicker, made tea go cold by blowing on it, he scribbled on very important pieces of paper and even froze the computer when you were in the middle of something extremely important!

He would do it as soon as the library assistant backs were turned.

The library assistants shouted: GIGGLE GOB! We know you are in here! Please leave us in peace! We just want to keep the books in the right places and have a nice cup of tea! Is that too much to ask? They could hear Giggle Gob giggling away but they could not see him. It was very annoying.

Fancy the Pigeon found out about Giggle Gob and she decided to help her library friends to pay them back for the good deed they had done her. She had an idea.

“Giggle Gob” Fancy whispered one morning when Giggle Gob had been particularly naughty and used a biscuit as a bookmark, “Would you like to go on an adventure?”

Giggle Gob snuck out from his hiding place behind a hardback of the History of Medway and asked, “what kind of adventure?” Fancy said: “you can fly on my back, and we can be explorers! We can soar in the clouds, swoop around rainbows, and see Luton, Medway and even the whole wide world from above! What do you think?”

Giggle Gob was gobsmacked. He nodded with great enthusiasm. Fancy knew that all goblins love an adventure, and that Giggle Gobs had been naughty mainly because he was a bit bored and restless. She also knew that all pigeons have an amazing sense of direction and can always find their way home, so that together they would make a very good team.

So she said “Ok then Giggle Gob. You can fly with me as long as you promise to stop causing mischief.” Giggle Gob said “I promise.”

So, it was decided. Giggle Gob made a saddle for himself out of an old teabag and tied it with a piece of wool that the knitting group had left and off they went.

They say they are still flying about now, and if you look up, maybe you'll see them. Sometimes they come back to visit the library to tell everyone all about what they have seen. And because Giggle Gob was busy on his adventures, all the books stayed exactly where they were supposed to be, and everyone was very happy. Peace was restored to the library.

Now you've heard the story – I wonder - if you could fly like Fancy and Giggle Gobs, where would you visit? What would flying feel like? What would you see?

*Oo, time to travel to the next stop, Feathers is calling... follow the map and we'll see you there.*



Thanks Feathers! Oh, that hill is steeper than it looks! Let's stop and listen to the next story.

## **Story 2 - Kings and Queens**

**Created by Owl Class, Year Five from Kingfisher Primary School**

Long ago, before Ferraris, Play Stations or KSI, King Jimmy Bob Aquarius Jupiter Smith ruled Luton. He was a mean King and he was feared by all the people in the land. He lived alone in a great castle on Beacon Hill, its high walls looming over the village. He was so cruel that he had banned laughter, and dancing, and plants and flowers, making the land quiet, miserable and bare.

King Jimmy would spend his days lounging on a sofa, eating doughnuts and admiring his reflection in a mirror. "I am rich and powerful" he would say, wiping sugar off his chin, "and I have a mighty fine pair of legs."

Believe it or not, King Jimmy had a family, but he had banned them from living in the castle, "you are too kind to live here!" he had yelled.

So Queen Darcy Gemma Brug Jupiter Smith, Prince Koi Oscar Borton Jupiter Smith and Princess Jenna Emma Emily Jupiter Smith all lived in a draughty barn outside the castle's gates. In the morning, as the sun rose, a nightingale would wake them with its beautiful song.

The King had forced them to become his servants, and every day they had to be up early to chop the wood for his fires, sweep the long empty corridors and make grand feasts that only the King would eat! They

would run between the kitchen and grand hall over and over again delivering food to the king until they were out of breath and exhausted.

Unlike King Jimmy, the Queen, Prince Koi and Princess Jenna worked hard and were very kind. They were truthful and honest and would help anyone they could. Every night, as the King yelled “now get out”, they would gather up left over food and firewood, smuggle them out of the castle and deliver them to people in need.

“Here, have my cloak” Queen Darcy would say, “and place these logs on your fire”. She would make soup on the stoves whilst the Prince and Princess would play games with the children. They were all well-loved in the village.

One morning, the Queen woke to find the sun high in the sky. “Koi, Darcy,” she cried, her worried voice waking them, “we have overslept, we must get to the castle at once”.

“Calm yourself”, came the nightgales song, “and stay a while, for I have news to share”.

Flying in through the barn doors, the nightingale explained that the King had died the night before choking on a doughnut, and having banned everyone from the castle, no one had been there to save him. “I know this news is hard to hear. When you are ready, there are people outside who wish to see you.”

Walking out hand in hand the family gasped, all the villagers had gathered to support them. “You have been so kind to us” they said, “now we are here for you”.

Things changed for Luton that day. The Queen flung open the castle gates, crying “This castle is as much yours as it is mine, let us make it all our homes”. The high castle walls were dismantled and the stones used to make houses for every single person in the village. The curtains became clothes and sleeping bags, and the Queen made promises of kindness to all of Luton.

A green house was built and together Prince Koi and Princess Jenna planted seeds. They planted fruit trees, apples, pears, cherries, even oranges and bananas! The bees buzzed in the air with thanks.

Queen Darcy baked cakes and slowly people remembered they could smile, they began to chuckle and before long the whole village was laughing once more! “We shall have a weekly party” Queen Darcy cried, “to celebrate everyone in this village and the power of working together.”

So they did, every Saturday! On Village View people would gather and there was music, dancing, football, jesters, pancakes, fruit juice and chips, and it is said that someone even invented burgers!

Take a deep breath in through your nose, hmm is that baking you can smell? Maybe Queen Darcy is still out there somewhere, making cakes and being kind. What act of kindness can you do today? It could be for your neighbour, your friend or your community.

*Oh here's Feathers to guide us to our next location, don't worry it's only a short walk up to the top of Beacon Hill. Let's go!*



Can you see the public footpath sign that points to the steps? Great – you are in the right place for a story!

## **Story 3 - The 100 Steps**

**Created by Team Seal, Year Four from Luton Primary School**

The mist hung low on the ground that morning, but Illy was determined. He raced up Beacon Road and reached his destination, the 100 Steps. Last week a local boy, Luke, had found a magic potion here, a blue liquid with a large label on it saying “join us”. Luke had been feeling lonely the last few days and thought this may be a way to make friends, so he twisted open the potion bottle and drank.

Within seconds his surroundings started to change, colours faded into black and white and he found himself being lifted up into the air.

“You fell into my trap” cackled a voice, “By drinking this potion you have released me, the evil Spirit of Luton, only true friendship can break my powers.”

Terrified, Luke found himself trapped in the Spirits lair, a mountain at the top of the 100 steps, behind a great wooden door and a sign that said DO NOT ENTER.

Immediately the wind picked up and wild clouds had begun to swirl above Luton “The spirit” people cried, “the Luton Spirit has returned, run!”

Over the next few days brave adults tried to rescue Luke but the stairs were too steep and one by one they turned back. Illy couldn't wait any longer, someone had to help Luke before it was too late. In the distance a volcano erupted, that hadn't been there yesterday, and it wouldn't be long before the lava reached Luton. The spirit was determined that everything in Luton would be destroyed!

Illy ran up the first ten steps. "That was ok" he thought, "my legs are a bit shaky, but I can do this", higher and higher he went, running up fifteen, twenty, twenty five, thirty steps. Now he understood why the adults had returned, the higher he went the more his legs hurt. He rested on a bench and tried to come up with a plan.

Flap flap flap. Illy looked up, what was that? Flap flap flap. Birds were flying towards him, from every angle and in their feet they carried gifts. Gifts to help him on his way, energy bars, water, even magic rocket shoes. Illy grinned, the birds were right, he could do this! He munched through the bars, gulped down the water and put the rocket trainers on his feet. Off he went again, this time taking the steps at double speed thanks to his new shoes. Forty steps, fifty, sixty, seventy...he reached another bench. The air had got smoky and he needed to catch his breath.

Looking out across Luton he gasped at what he saw, two suns were now in the sky and flames were bursting through the roads. Illy needed to ground himself and calm his nerves, he breathed in for 4 counts, held that breath for 4 counts, breathed out for 4 counts and held that breath for 4 counts. Calmer and with his determination restored, he turned to face the final steps.

The mountain now towered above him, he had reached the spirits lair. But Illy had come this far, he wasn't going to stop now. Gathering all his remaining strength he climbed on, eighty steps, ninety steps and finally 100 steps. He pushed open the mountain's door and there was Luke, scared and surprised.

"You've come to rescue me" he gasped, "I didn't think anyone would realise I was gone!"

"Of course" Illy replied, "you are our friend Luke and you always will be". At that moment a shriek filled the air.

"Noooooooooooo" the Luton Spirit cried, "true Friendship! I am fading," and with a hiss, a crackle and a pop the spirit disappeared.

In that instant the landscape changed, beautiful waterfalls put out the fires, colour returned to Luton and the streams of lava became fairy lights.

"Want to play Minecraft round mine?" asked Illy, "Yes please" said Luke. And off they went.

Sometimes, when life gets complicated, we all need to take a breath. Let's all do Illy's square breathing:

So breathe in for 4, 1,2,3,4, hold for 1, 2, 3, 4, breathe out for 1, 2, 3, 4 and hold for 1, 2, 3, 4. Repeat this exercise two or three times and notice how it makes you feel.

*Oh, we're coming feathers! Take your time to climb the stairs, remember to breathe and make sure to enjoy the views! See you at the top!*



Congratulations, you have made it to the top of the 100 steps. You succeeded on your journey! Give yourself a pat on the back as you catch your breath and look around.

## **Story 4 - Ash Tree Lane**

**Created by Residents and staff of Victory Care Home**

Before the tarmac and before the cars this busy road was formed, a road that connects the past to the present. This road is Ash Tree Lane.

The Ash Tree, *Fraxinus excelsior* meaning ever upward, is known as the tree of life. With branches reaching to the sky and roots anchoring down, Ash trees are thought to heal and protect. In days gone by, sap would be fed to newborn babies, and weak infants would be passed through a cleft split into the trunk. Three times they would be passed through, from East to West. The cleft would then be bound and as the tree healed, so would the child.

The Ash Trees were the guardians of this lane, and it is said that they collected the stories told by humans, animals and insects as they passed by.

Listen. What can you hear?

Can you hear the trees?

Do they whisper their stories to you on the wind?

As car engines fade, muffled sounds become clear. Horses hooves clip clop past, the occasional trot and rumble of a carriage being drawn. Milk slopping in pails as it's carried from farms to houses, and chatter from the hops carts off to the fields. The Ash Trees collected these sounds, the stories of the day to day. As the trees grew, so did their knowledge,

the stories recorded in the rings of their trunk, emotions settling in the grooves of the bark. Look closely at a tree and you may spot a story of your own.

But where are the Ash trees now?

The wood of an Ash is strong and sturdy, as guardians are, and though they may not grow on the lane, their knowledge lives on. Ash wood is used to make tools, chairs, boats, it is trusted to carry and support. And while a chopped tree may no longer grow, it still carries its knowledge, woven into its new form.

Have you ever had a question and when you sit down to think about it the answer reveals itself to you? Chances are you were on a chair made of Ash.

The wood has become a silent observer sharing its knowledge with others. When used as firewood, Ash branches release stories in swirls of smoke into the sky. Maybe you have seen some?

*“But Ash logs smooth and grey,  
Burn them green or old,  
Buy up all that come your way,  
They’re worth their weight in gold”*

Ash Tree Lane is a place of connection. Beneath our feet, fungal networks connect every tree and every root, sending messages and nutrients to those in need. Forming communities of care, their networks are enriched by the relationships they hold, as yours will be with your friends and neighbours, your roots. And though the Ash tree numbers have dwindled, their community still stands. Before they died back or were cut down, they shared their knowledge with the other plants.

Through their underground communities they passed the guardianship to the other trees, to the shrubs, even to wild flowers and grass. Now all these plants listen for stories, and wishes you make for yourself, for others and even for the whole world. They have found their purpose, and they hope you do too.

Maybe we all need to be a bit more tree.

Wherever you may be, stood on a pavement or sat in a chair, close your eyes. If you are able to, place your feet on the ground and spread your toes like roots searching for water. Reach your hands into the air as high as they will go, your fingers becoming leaves on branches, absorbing the sun's energy. Take a deep breath in, and relax.

What can you hear?

What do you feel?

What stories do you want to share with the trees?

When you are ready, open your eyes.

*Here's Feathers to guide you to your next story. Look to your left, look to your right, and when it is safe to, cross over Ash Tree Lane.*



## Story 5 - The Sloe Forest

**Created by Owl Class, Year Five from Kingfisher Primary School**

Now you've followed the map to Darland Banks, you'll find beautiful chalky grassland, home to plants such as Oxeye Daisies, and creatures such as roman snails, magpies, wasp spiders, slow worms, and many more...

If you turn right, you'll enter a place whose secret name is The Sloe Forest, where many, many strange things have happened, and we are going to tell you just one of them.

The Sloe Forest has a narrow path right down the centre of it, on either side of the path grow Blackthorn Trees, with needle-sharp thorns, and dark purple berries called sloe. Blackthorn is home to many butterflies, and the sloe berries make delicious jams and drinks, but the blackthorn is famous for other things too. You see, they are said to be gateways to a mysterious land called the Otherworld ...

This story begins in The Sloe Forest, in autumn when the blackthorn trees are heavy with sloe berries and the ground is full of mushrooms.

One day in November, four children were walking home, they decided to take the long route through The Sloe Forest. They were chatting and laughing away, when they heard the sound of strange and beautiful music...

They hurriedly followed the sound of the strange music, noticing that the light got greener and greener as they walked, and after a while they heard a voice coming from the trees:

*“Slow down slow down my human friends*

*Don’t be in such a hurry*

*Walk slowly through this magic place*

*There is no need to scurry”*

The children slowed down. They couldn’t see where the voice was coming from. Then they heard it again:

*“My friends if you are hungry now*

*The mushrooms are quite yummy*

*Don’t hesitate, they are quite safe*

*And they will fill your tummies!”*

The four children looked around and saw some huge mushrooms, and after some discussion about whether it was a good idea or not, they each picked one and took a small bite... they were starving! ... and they couldn’t believe it- the mushrooms were actually tiny pizzas! Delicious! So, they gobbled them down very quickly. As soon as they had finished eating, a giant Slow Worm appeared before them... and he spoke.

“Hello! I’m glad you took my advice and slowed down and ate some mushroom pizzas. Delicious, aren’t they? Anyway, the first thing you need to know about me if we are going to be friends is that I am a lizard, not a worm or a snake. You’ll notice I am not particularly slow. Also, I

sometimes shed my tail if I feel like it. And I know where the door is to get into the Otherworld.”

“Wow! Can you show us where the door is?” the children asked, they were so excited at the thought of an adventure. The Slow Worm said “You’ll be able to see the doorway if you squeeze your eyes together until things look a bit blurry”

So, the children squeezed their eyes. The Slow Worm asked them “Can you see it?” The children squeezed their eyes a bit more. He asked again “Now can you see it?” The children squeezed their eyes even more. He asked one more time, “Now?”

“Yes!” the children all said at once.

Then they followed the Slow Worm through the door, which wasn’t easy as he moved super quickly and in a very chaotic manner, but soon they came to an ancient land full of strange things like talking horses, giant cats, and a pigeon with a goblin on her back, and characters out of books like Rapunzel and Dobby and a very wise man from Ancient Egypt. It was a land where everything you have ever dreamed of was and it was really exciting, but after a while all the children felt homesick. The only food was mushroom pizzas, and the only drink was sloe berry cordial, and they all longed for something else like chips and hot chocolate. They felt like they had been there for a year by now. The Slow Worm had noticed that the children were a bit fed up and he spoke

“Come on, cheer up, I’ll show you the way home now. It is very interesting and exciting here, but we do find that everyone misses home after a while. But if you want to visit again all you have to do is squash a

sloe berry, shout out “SHE’S A FAIRY” and then a fairy will appear. The door to the Otherworld never ever stays in the same place, but the fairy will help you find it.”

So, the children found themselves back on the path of the Sloe Forest. Even though they felt like they had been away for ages, hardly any time had passed at all. They went home and told everyone of their adventures, and the story got passed from person to person until everyone knew- which is why we’re telling you the story now. You might want to go there yourself one day, you could squash a sloe berry and shout “She’s a fairy” and see what happens...

Now you’ve heard this story- do you think you’d like to visit the Otherworld? What might you see there? What might you do there? Close your eyes for a moment and let your imagination wander....

*Oh, that’s Feathers letting us know we should travel on to the next story... see you there...*



## Story 6 - The Company of Birds

**Created by Residents and staff of Victory Care Home**

Here you are by the bench that looks out over the trees and fields of Darland Banks. You can relax whilst we tell you the first story from Victory Care Home.

This story is about Victory's very own Chris Packham, also known as "Bird Man John."

One morning the residents were all chatting in the lounge about how much they love wildlife. They keep the feeders full of seeds and nuts for the birds, and the squirrels eat there too. They see jackdaws and magpies feeding as well as crows and songbirds. They talk about how each year the care home releases 20 butterflies into the garden. How one time there were two chrysalis that they named Charles and Camilla, and Charles the butterfly hatched during the new King's coronation!

One resident told everyone about how she believes her dog who passed away, came back to visit her as a pigeon. How the pigeon flew in the room through the door that her dog always used to come in through!

They talk about a parrot owned by a local resident who let it fly freely around Luton Rec. It flew away one time and was found in a tree in the grounds of Victory – and how they had to coax it down with food from the kitchen. How the parrot still sometimes comes back to visit them.

Then the conversation turned to how wonderful it would be to be able to fly.

Christina remembered her dreams of flying over castles, from a high bank in medieval times, when she saw a field with hundreds of Canadian geese waiting to migrate.

This inspires everyone - they talk about where they would fly if they could- back home to South Africa, or to Fife or Castle Douglas in Scotland to see family, or to Exeter in Devon - full of wildlife of all kinds, to South Wales - full of happy childhood memories, or to Australia to visit a brother.

Bird Man John joins them, he doesn't often join in their conversations, but they are talking about birds, his favourite subject. John tells them that he has heard and seen nightingales here - and someone remembers that they say the nightingale is precious because its song is the most beautiful song you could ever hear and that it is the nightingale that sings the sunup in the morning.

Birdman John tells them about how this place is a massive bird migration superhighway used by millions of birds travelling between the Arctic and Africa.

And he says, in the winter, the redwings come here from Scandinavia to feast on sloe berries, although less so now as climate change has made it milder, so they sometimes stay north.

The other residents are inspired by the birds and their long journeys and talk about how courageous the little birds are.

Bird Man John leaves them to walk to the bench at number 6 on our map. He knows it is a good place to have a stop if you are on a long

walk and there is quite a view. You can see hundreds of thousands of birds from up there.

Meanwhile back at Victory Care Home, the residents talk about how they'd love to join John in Darland Banks but how not everyone can walk so far or up such steep paths. They can't fly like the birds either... but they can sing! And that is when the idea for forming a choir comes about- - and they find a song about birds and begin to practise. They even decide on a name for their choir:

*"We are the Victory Nightingales"*

...they say with pride, after they've had a few rehearsals and are ready to sing to the staff and visitors. John isn't there, he's on his bench with his binoculars, but never mind they say, they can sing it to him again another day.

So, the Victory Nightingales begin to sing:

*"Little bird on my window,  
Won't you sing me a song?  
As you fly over meadows  
Won't you bring me along?  
There are beautiful flowers  
To be seen from up high,  
Won't you please take me with you,  
Little bird as you fly.*

*Little bird on my window  
May your song never end,  
I will tell you a secret,  
You're my very best friend."*

There is something about that song. Maybe because it is sung with such joy and fun in it, the song carries on the wind out of the Victory Care Home, drifts over rooftops and roads, follows the 100 Steps and the steep path up to Darland Banks where it reaches the ears of Birdman John. He smiles.

And it seems like maybe the birds hear it too, because there are flocks of birds dancing in spirals in a perfect blue sky, as if in celebration.

And the strange thing is, that night, every one of the residents dreamt of flying, and in their dreams, they travelled back to South Africa, and Scotland and Devon and all those other places, flying far and fast, just like the migrating birds, and everyone woke up feeling especially hungry, and asked for extra toast at breakfast.

This all happened a little while ago, but the residents are still singing and telling each other stories to this day.

As for Bird Man John, he can still be seen out on Darland Banks and elsewhere, happy in the company of birds.

And now you know, if you didn't already, that Luton is full of birds. And people who take care of them.

So that's the end of this story, but we'd love to ask you to think about this: if you could fly- where would you go? And if you look up right now- what do you see?

*In Victory Care Home Christine told us “When a crow flies away you should whisper a kindness to him.” So, let's say something kind to our friend Feathers... and then follow him to the next stop...*



Look to your left and you may see some horses in the field. This story is about them.

## **Story 7 - Wise Horses**

**Created by Owl Class, Year Five from Kingfisher Primary School**

The sound of footsteps filled the house, Jessie was pacing again. She was full of energy and, as always, her head was full of questions. The thing about questions though, she found, was that she didn't always have the answers.

She sighed, the person she really wanted to ask was Grandpa, but he had died last year. She really missed him. When she was younger, they would make magical wonderlands together, pillow planets where you could jump everywhere, log cabins draped with snow duvets, theme parks with futuristic rides and even fall into other worlds through fairytale books.

"Maybe I'll go and visit Grandma" she said, who only lived a few houses down. She pulled on her trainers and headed round. Jessie had timed it well, her Grandma was just taking some freshly baked biscuits out of the oven. "Oh Jessie" she said, "It is good to see you." Jessie explained that her head was full of questions. "Well, said Grandma, "let's go for a walk and see if we can find some answers. I know exactly where to go". They wrapped up some biscuits and Grandma popped an apple in her bag, "just in case".

They headed up to Darland Banks taking in deep breaths of fresh air as they went. They spotted sloe berries, looked for shapes in the clouds

and said good morning to Feathers as he flew by. They stopped at a crossroad in the path. “How are you feeling now” asked Grandma. “A bit better” said Jessie, “but I still have so many questions!”

“Hmmm. I’m going to share a secret with you Jessie, a secret that helped me as a child and that I have kept until now. Can you see those horses over there?”

“Oh, yes” replied Jessie. She was surprised she hadn’t noticed them until now, there were four of them, one was grey, three were brown and they were all looking at her.

“They are Konik ponies”, said Grandma, “and they help to tend the ground, but these horses do much more than that Jessie, for they are full of answers. They are Luton’s Wise Horses and you can ask them any question.”

“What’, cried Jessie, “you mean they can talk? I can ask them any question and they will know the answer?”

“Well yes”, Grandma chuckled, “but only those who really need the answers can talk to them, they don’t talk to everyone”.

“Oh, wow, so I can ask them anything? Erm like, why do I have to go to school? Will I own a 1000 dogs? Will I eat a banana today?”

“Woah, woah, woah” said Grandma trying to slow her down, “there are some rules. Firstly, they will only answer three questions and secondly these questions have to matter to you, you know, the ones that have been spinning around your head all day. So, have a biscuit and have a

think, and when you are ready we will go and meet the Wise Horses.”  
Jessie sat on the grass, she thought and she pondered, and then she thought some more. The same three questions kept coming back to her.  
“Ok grandma, I think I’m ready.”

The horses cantered over and bowed their heads. The grey horse stepped forward. “Good afternoon Jessie, we have been waiting for you. Tell us, what would you like to know?” Jessie was speechless, she had never heard a horse talk before and her mouth dropped wide open in surprise. “Come on Jesse” encouraged Grandma, nudging her out of her shock, “ask them your questions”.

“H H Hello Wise Horses”, Jessie began, “and thank you for talking to me today. My first question is - can you show me my future?”

“A very common question” replied the horse shaking its mane, “I can neither show you your future or your past, as we live in the moment in tune with everything around us.”

“Hmm” pondered Jessie, “That’s wise, maybe I don’t need to know my future yet, I can just enjoy the now. Thank you. My second question is – will I get my dream job?”

“Dreams change throughout your life” replied the horse, “so keep exploring and never be afraid of trying new things.”

“Oh, yes, of course, thank you Wise Horses. So, my final question is, well it’s” she paused, taking a deep breath in “my final question is – Do people from the past ever come back? I mean, do people who have died ever return? Will Grandpa...

The horse took a step forward. “People from your past, whoever they are, are always with you Jessie. It is not a case of them coming back. You carry them in your head and your heart, in memories that never fade”. The horse nuzzled Jessie's head gently, then with a neigh, stole the apple from Grandma’s bag and galloped off. Question time was over.

Wrapping Jessie in her arms, Grandma hugged her tight. “I love you Jessie” she said, “sometimes answers can be found by simply saying the questions out loud”.

“I love you too Grandma. Thank you for bringing me here, and Wise Horses, thank you too.” Holding hands they turned and walked down the hill, watched silently by the four wise horses in the field.

If you could ask the Wise Horses three questions, what would they be?

*Hello Feathers, we are following, lead the way!*



## Story 8 - The Boundary

Created by Team Seal, Year Four from Luton Primary School

Jack woke with a start “wahooooooooooooo!” he cried “It’s March 5<sup>th</sup>!”

Now, for a lot of people this day was just like any other day, but not for Jack. For Jack, March 5<sup>th</sup> was Dress up Day at school AND Beating the Bounds Day! It was the best day ever!

He sprang out of bed, threw on his favourite Spiderman Costume and raced downstairs. “Dad” he yelled, crumbs of toast flying from his mouth, “where are my trainers?” He would need comfortable shoes for dancing later, plus spiderman was too cool for school shoes. “Wherever you left them” Dad replied, smiling as Jack practised his web slinging. “Although I think another superhero’s put them in the shoe cupboard under the stairs”.

Off to school Jack ran, picking up Baby Shark and Steve from Minecraft on the way, aka his friends Harry and Jude. Everyone loved dress up day, there were bears, fancy sparkly dresses and cool printed tee shirts.

The day passed quickly with double Maths, English and drawing, pasta for lunch and a banana for the mid-afternoon snack. At 3.15, the bell rang. “To the Boundary” Jack cried!

Jack loved Beating the Bounds, it’s an ancient tradition that his dad, grandparents and even great grandparents did. With sticks you tap the edges of a place or green space to celebrate it and to keep it safe. People sing and cheer and dance, this was Jack's favourite part.

Out of the school gates they marched, along Luton Road, up Beacon Hill, through the Sloe Forest and back down to where Darland Banks meets Ash Tree Lane.

Taking a moment, Jack and his friends stopped. A crowd had gathered, children and adults, families all here to celebrate Luton. A horn blew and the crowd fell silent. Holding his Dad's hand tightly, Jack closed his eyes and listened. He listened to the trees, to the birds singing and his heart beating in his chest. He thought of all the things he loved about Luton, the kindness of the people living there, the ordinary and the extraordinary stories in the streets.

The horn blew again and a cheer went up. "To Luton" the crowd cried and chaos ensued. "You stand here!" "Do you have my bells?" "That's my hanky!" "Nice costume!" "Come and stand next to me."

Before long, two lines of people formed and, turning, to face each other, they bowed deeply. A singer at the front cleared their throat.

*"Come hither come all as one,  
Come hither dance under the sun,  
Let us beat the bounds of these fine grounds  
Let us all dance together as one.*

*No boundary will part us,  
No road will divide,  
Together we're stronger  
Let nobody hide*

*The birds fly above and the worms crawl below,*

*United together*

*In Luton we grow.*

*Come hither come all as one,*

*Come hither dance under the sun,*

*Let us beat the bounds of these fine grounds*

*Let us all dance together as one.*

*L is for Luton*

*Unique and so kind*

*The teamwork and talent is easy to find*

*Outstanding nice*

*Neighbours who help those in need*

*Luton's terrific that is guaranteed.*

*Come hither come all as one,*

*Come hither dance under the sun,*

*Let us beat the bounds of these fine grounds*

*Let us all dance together as one."*

As the song continued, new voices joined in until the whole crowd was singing praises of Luton. The dancers skipped and spun, waving hankies, ribbons, bells high into the air. Sticks tapped the ground whilst people cheered, their hearts filled with joy.

“I love doing this Dad” Jack panted, “everyone’s so happy.” “They are,” he replied, “because they have been reminded to look for the good in the world and the hope they have for Luton. Singing and dancing brings the best out in people”.

That night, as Jack laid in bed, his Dad’s words echoed around his room. “I am going to look for the good wherever I go”, he thought, “and sing and dance and celebrate Luton!” And with a smile on his face, he went to sleep.

If you were making a list of everything you love about Luton, what would be on it?

*Hello Feathers, yes you’d be on my list! Before we move to the next story, stop, think and listen and when it is safe to do so, cross over the road. Head down the steps and take the path to your right.*



## Story 9 - Crow Field

Created by staff and visitors of Luton Library

I'm glad to see you crossed that busy road safely and made your way along the path! Now you find yourself somewhere a bit quieter- next to the car park and what looks on first sight like a perfectly ordinary, in fact a little bit scruffy, littered field. But as I think you will realise by now, nothing is ordinary, there is magic and wonder everywhere and this untidy little field is no exception.

You see, this is Crow Field. It's a very important place for crows; this is where they hold their meetings and make their plans. Here is where they share information about good feeding spots. They gossip about kind and unkind humans – which is why if you're wise you should be kind to them as they do recognise human faces, hold grudges and never forget a thing.

But the most exciting thing that happens here is their festivals - which they have once a month as crows love to party. And the biggest celebrations of all occur when there is a crow wedding. Crows from all over Medway flock to come to a wedding.

Of course, you know one crow quite well already, Feathers the Crow. We humans have that saying "as the crow flies" meaning straight as a ruler, the shortest possible path between places, but that's silly, because you know as you have followed Feathers, that what crows actually do is fly the most interesting route, from story to story.

Feathers got his name from a clever little girl called Hazel. You see unlike humans, crows don't get their names as soon as they are born. The tradition for crows is that a name comes to them when they are ready, so they might be flapping about for a few months without one, and Feathers was lucky, because Hazel spotted him one day in her garden and whispered shyly "Feathers" and he heard her and instantly knew that was the right name for him. His feathers were especially shiny and beautiful, blue, green, purple, and gold, not just black like some people think. He was proud that Hazel had noticed. Feathers flew off happy with his new name.

Feathers job in the Crow Nation was messenger. One day, Feathers had a mission to go and ask the Elder Crows if a pair of young crows had their permission to marry. Crows mate for life, so it is a serious matter to choose a mate, and the elders are greatly respected as having wonderful insight.

The two elders were called Bran and Morrigan. They themselves had been paired for life and now were ancient in crow years. They returned to Crow Field every evening at twilight. The other crows left them snacks and gifts such as bottle tops wound with ivy. Bran and Morrigan were visited by many crows for advice on matters from squabbles over food to advice on how to raise their young. They always listened patiently, and were very wise.

Feathers arrived at Crow Field as the sun was going down. There sat Bran and Morrigan, as if they had been expecting him.

"Well Feathers," said Bran "who is it that wishes to marry?"

Feathers wasn't surprised that they already knew what he was going to ask. They were magic like that.

"It is Crowbert and Midnight, your majesties," Feathers bowed low as he cawed.

"Tell us about them" cawed Morrigan.

"Well, they've been doing a lot of synchronized flying. And preening each other" cawed Feathers.

"That's good" cawed Bran "that means they are serious. Anything else?"

"Crowbert has a very good sense of humour. Last winter I saw him playing with a dog, and sliding down a roof in the snow" cawed Feathers.

"So, they will always be smiling, this is good" laughed Morrigan.

"And Midnight?" cawed Bran "what qualities does she have?"

"Midnight is very clever. I saw her sharpen a forked twig into a hook and use it to scoop worms from holes in wood with it" cawed Feathers.

"So, they will never go hungry, this is also good" cawed Morrigan. Then Bran and Morrigan turned their backs to consider the request and turned back after just a few moments.

Morrigan cawed, "we approve the wedding of Crowbert and Midnight!"

And Bran cawed “the wedding will be tomorrow morning in Crow Field as always.”

Tomorrow! Feathers had a lot to get organised.

Every crow started getting ready for the wedding the following day. They collected red berries and wildflowers to decorate the field and made a feast out of all the scraps of food they could get their beaks on including scavenging old sandwiches and fruit out of the bins.

Feathers did his part too and made sure that Crowbert and Midnight were ready for their big day.

Next morning the wedding in Crow Field began! All the crows from Medway came and they made their music. Crows have quite a taste for what human’s call “thrash metal”, full of screeches and caws- and the party carried on all day. Whenever a human appeared the crows stopped their dancing and stood perfectly still as if to say, “nothing to see here” and did not continue until that human had walked on or driven off. It was a day to remember. The party was heard as far away as the Victory Care Home. Everyone wondered what had got the crows so excited...

I’m happy to report that Crowbert and Midnight have four fledglings already, with bright blue eyes. Bran and Morrigan still give advice every evening in Crow Field, and there are still festivals every month. So, I hope that you will now think of crows a bit differently.

Next time you see some crows - I ask you to take a moment to watch them. Ask yourself what they might be talking about or doing?

Sometimes the things we see every day and might take for granted really are the most amazing.

*Ah, there is Feathers again, calling us to follow him to the next stop. See you there...*



## Story 10 - The Giantess

**Created by Team Seal, Year Four from Luton Primary School**

Now you've arrived at this spot- take a look around. On your left you might see a boarded-up building... and on your right some twisted and broken railings and a tree stump... looks mysterious, doesn't it? Maybe Feathers led us here because it is well known that crows love to solve mysteries... and this is where one begins...

A long time ago there was a Giantess who lived in Nelson Terrace, Luton, her name was Caitlin and she was very friendly. She had long pale-yellow hair, like spaghetti. She also had a long tail. She loved flowers, nature and reindeer. She liked playing football, hopscotch, and tag with the local kids.

One year Caitlin went on holiday to Paris, France. Unfortunately, when she was there, she got so excited at a tea party she broke all the cups and teapots because they were too dainty for her big giantess hands. She then got so scared with everyone being so angry with her that she ran away from the tea party and accidentally stepped on the Eiffel Tower and squashed it. Everyone back home in Luton heard about it because it was on the news.

When she got home, the people decided they just couldn't trust her anymore. They didn't want their homes or teacups destroyed. They decided to lock her up and, in the struggle, to get her into the building- and it took everyone in Luton to manage that- she bent the railings and broke the tree; she didn't mean to do that either but that was the last

straw that made everyone believe they had done the right thing by locking her away.

Inside the building was a lab with all the best scientists of Luton working away to reduce Caitlin the Giantess to regular human size.

Unfortunately, none of their experiments worked, so after a while the scientists all left. Caitlin stayed exactly the same size but as years passed the rumours about her grew and grew.

People said that she had broken down the Queen's door in a rage at a Royal Garden Party. People said she was so strong and big she could throw people up to the sun where they would get burnt to a frazzle. People said she would knock down houses in her effort to try and make friends with people, rather than coming through the front door as normal.

Poor Caitlin stayed locked in the building. Everyone pretty much forgot about her.

But then trouble came to Luton. A big argument broke out in the market. It started with two people arguing about who should be Prime Minister, but before long literally everyone was fighting. As the fight grew and grew, a bin caught on fire, and then the fire spread and people were running around trying to put it out! The fire service was doing their best to extinguish it, but after a very hot summer there just wasn't enough water around to put it out.

The smell of the smoke reached the building where Caitlin was imprisoned. But she was asleep. The people of Luton knew they needed her help- so they gathered together an orchestra to play outside the

building to wake her up. The orchestra played jazz, her favourite kind of music, and it worked! She woke up!

She agreed that she would do everything she could to help Luton recover from the fire and the fight. But first she must get out!

Caitlin had a spoon she had been eating her breakfast with, so she began to dig a hole at the bottom of the wall. She soon realised it would take 5 years to dig herself out that way.

Then she saw a gap in the wall and pushed the wall apart with her fingers- but even she wasn't strong enough to make a big enough gap to squeeze through.

She tried all kinds of things like punching the walls, trying to blow the door down, shouting so much that the vibrations broke the walls but none of it worked!

What could she do? The fire in Luton was spreading and the fight continued!

Then a boy passed her a piece of paper through a crack in the wall. It contained a passcode for the door, he'd got it from his dad who had been one of the scientists, and it worked! She was out!

"Thanks," Caitlin said, "let's get this fire out."

She stomped down to the sea, then she took a big breath in and then blew the seawater up up up in the air into Luton and put the fire out!

But there was still the fighting to stop.

The first thing she did was pick up each person fighting and separating them from each other. Then she told them to take a deep breath. She explained that some emotions get so big, like sadness or happiness, anger or excitement, or feeling scared or brave, that they can make us do daft things, like break teacups or fight. She told them she knew what that was like only too well, because that's how she ended up breaking the Eiffel Tower. Then she gave everyone ice creams, milkshakes and burgers, which she got from a local supermarket.

After that, Caitlin helped repair the damaged houses, and cleaned the roads, and then she walked up to Darland Banks, snuggled down on the ground and disappeared. They say she is still sleeping there now under the hills and sometimes, if you listen carefully, you can hear her snoring. And they say that she will wake up again to help if ever Luton is in trouble.

Have you ever felt an emotion so strongly it made you feel big like a giant? What made you feel like that? What happened?

*Ah, here is Feathers, to guide us to our next stop- see you there!*



## Story 11 - Victory Tales

**Created by Residents and staff of Victory Care Home**

In front of you stands Victory Care Home, a neat and tidy building with a car park at the front and trees standing guard over its precious residents.

Look a little closer and you will see the sparkle in the cat's eyes, the birds singing on the windowsill and maybe notice a sense of mischief in the air for..

*“this place is full of stories too, some of them might surprise you.”*

Alfie the cat was sitting by the Victory Care Home entrance. He was a beautiful long haired tabby with grey and brown fur. He was elegant and noble and it was time for him to make his weekly patrol of Victory. Victory wasn't his home, “nobody calls me a pet” he meowed, but every few days he would sneak in through an open window or run through the double doors. He saw himself as a security cat and liked to check in on the residents as often as possible. It was purely for their sake and nothing to do with the treats he would be showered with.

Alfie was wild, he was adventurous, and that's why he liked to visit Victory. Within these walls lived singers, dancers, knitters, bakers, you name it, this place had it.

Before long the entrance opened and in he darted. A large family had arrived. Swirling around their ankles, he found himself carried on a tidal wave of visitors all off to see a loved one.

As the visitors turned left Alfie looked to his right. He could hear music coming from the lounge, “that sounds like my cup of tea” he thought. Padding in he saw the residents foxtrotting their way across the carpet, as they had done on countless nights at the Welling Embassy. Waltzing though former glories dancing the ballrooms of Canada, America and Australia. These feet danced tales from around the world, moving so fast that they seemed to levitate, to hover in the air with joy.

In the corner a flexible resident kicked her legs high, her toes almost touching the ceiling. Alfie joined in, stretching out his long legs, he couldn't quite create the same pose, but was rewarded with a head scratch and tummy rub for trying.

Alfie trotted on, Victory was full of stories he needed to find. Down the maze of corridors he went, weaving his way through friends and tales for another time.

Spotting an open window, he leapt outside into the garden. He inspected the vegetables, potatoes check, tomatoes check, peas looking good.

Returning to the lounge, Alfie's patrol continued. This time he followed his nose. He was getting hints of sponge cake and chocolate gateau, great cakes for grand occasions, Old Spice and Eau de Cologne, cedar wood and Scotts pine; the smell of pie and mash, Fish and chips on the front and a far-flung spice market in exotic climes. Scents that told their own tales. Aromas of family trips to Chatham, West Ham, Dalston, Dartford, Port Elizabeth, Shillong, Farmbrough, to the Isle of Wight, to all sorts of different places and paces of life.

Alfie had reached the last corridor on his patrol. Ahead of him, a resident was filling her pockets with books before going out - this would stop her being blown over by the wind outside! Life experience stops her being knocked off course nowadays. She chuckles as she thinks of her younger self, always worrying. How she wishes she could tell her to be determined, to stop pleasing people and follow her own path. Placing one more book in her coat, she heads off to the library.

His patrol complete, Alfie stopped outside the activities office. Purring loudly he was rewarded for his day's work with treats, then let out of the front door. He'll be back next week to check everyone is ok, and to hear more stories, for there is always something new to learn at Victory Care Home.

If you could give your younger self advice, what would it be?

*Lead the way feathers!*



## Story 12 - Rooted

Created by staff and visitors of Luton Library

Did you enjoy your visit to Victory Café Home in the company of the very wise cat Alfie? .... Well, here we are, Feathers has brought us full circle all the way back to where we started at Luton Library, they say that pigeons have a good homing instinct... We'd say crows are pretty good too, wouldn't you?

We hope you have been entertained by all the stories about this area. Funny isn't it, how we often think that where we live doesn't have anything special about it, but of course all places are special, full of personal stories, of history, of imagination. It's amazing to think that all the while we are going about our busy lives, there is singing and dancing and cups of tea and biscuits and painted nails being enjoyed at Victory Care Home. There is "bon après- midi!" being called out in Kingfisher Primary School by Owl Class in Year 5 as they practise their French. There are children from Team Seal in Year Four at Luton Primary School waving hankies and jingling bells as they practise their Morris Dancing. There's people popping to the shops and back again, and getting on the bus and getting off again, and there's arguments, and filling in forms, and going to the doctors, and laughing at jokes , and misunderstandings, and neighbours looking after each other, and there's traffic and streetlights, and zebra crossings and car alarms, and puddles and potholes, and foxes and dogs and cats, and flowers blooming and leaves falling, and rain and sun and wind and snow, all of it going on right where we are.

And there's other stranger things here too as we've heard, the stories gathered by local people including the tale of young crows getting married and enjoying thrash metal, and a Queen who baked delicious cakes and hosted a weekly party for everyone, and a boy who found a magic potion and discovered the power of friendship, and the wisdom of grandmas and the Wise Horses of Darland Banks, and giantesses sleeping after stopping fights and putting out fires, and slow worms showing children magical ancient lands, and pigeons keeping goblins out of mischief.

Many have made their home in Luton, to add their own stories to those already here. They put down roots like the trees did on Ash Tree Lane, and like the Blackthorn do now on Darland Banks.

Here is someone who has done just that- it's Natasha with Hazel, the little girl who gave our guide Feathers the crow his name. Natasha says

*“So I feel really rooted here because over time I've got to know a lot of the people that live here, and also doing community work here, I've lived in two different homes in Luton in a really close area to each other, for over ten years now so that's been really wonderful to know the make up of Luton and what it means to live here and it does make me feel really rooted”*

The library assistants say that they feel rooted too, they say people come there regular as clockwork and it makes for a cosy atmosphere. The people get to know each other. The library assistants do nice displays often, something personal, this makes the library feel like home to those who come here. Being at home is feeling rooted.

In the corner of the library there are local history books, where you can find out more about the area, but you can find out more by talking to people too, by listening and by sharing stories with each other and that's what happens on the street, in the shops, here in the library, in the schools, in the care home. And if you've enjoyed these stories, know there is always more to find out about Luton, as Natasha says:

*"If I was writing a guide book for visitors coming to Luton I would tell them to definitely check out all the really cool food shops here and the amazing street art that's been made through arches local and the blue plaques that now are appearing in peoples windows to find out about the history of the area and also to encourage people to look at the architecture, like look up and look at the old buildings on Luton Road and there's also these little pockets of woodland hidden way, there's loads to see here, there's a really good chip shop called Frydays, they do gluten free now which is amazing, so yeah, I really enjoy it"*

So thanks for following Feathers the Crow on this walk around the area. Make sure you come back and visit. Tell us your stories about Luton too.

And just before we go- one last question for you to consider: what makes somewhere feel like home to you ? What does it take for you to feel rooted?

Well, there goes Feathers, off to find the other crows and settle down for the night. Hope you have a good evening too, and see you again soon.

*“Thankyou for joining us”*

*“We hope you enjoyed our stories”*

*“Bye!”*

