

THE *rhythm* OF CHESHIRE

LYNN PEGLER explains how she is celebrating the country in poetry and pictures

Cheshire is an amazing county, we all know that. However, I didn't realise just how special it was until I started exploring, digging deep below the surface to research my latest poetry collection: *Around Cheshire in 100 Poems and Pictures*.

I've taken a circuitous route to get here. My writing journey began just over the border in Lancashire, with a few poems published in a school magazine as a teenager at Blackpool Girls' Grammar School.

Fast forward a few decades via jobs in journalism and PR around the North West, a play at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and performing with the Poet Laureate at Manchester's Royal Exchange. Now I'm a long-term resident here, serving as one of Cheshire's Deputy Lieutenants.

It all started with a New Year's resolution in early 2024 to focus on a book to launch at the Weaver Words Literature Festival in Frodsham in May 2025. I'm the festival manager and I decided it would be the perfect place to showcase a new collection and, importantly, it gave me a deadline.

Although I've written and performed three plays over the past few years, it has been nine years since my last poetry collection, *Salford Quays Unlocked. Voices of Manchester of Docks* was published. 'Time to get a move on, girl,' said my inner voice.

As a former newspaper journalist, I like the structure of deadlines. I mapped out potential areas of interest across the county to visit for beautiful photographs and unusual angles for poems and character monologues.

I wanted to take readers on a visual and literary journey of discovery, exploring familiar places, such as Anderton Boat Lift, Hack Green Secret Nuclear Bunker and Oulton Park racetrack from a fresh perspective.

I used my journalistic eye to create a collection of poetic reportage of the county's people and places, jumping inside the heads of a Quarry Bank mill worker, a Chester Roman soldier tour guide, a grumpy teenage visitor to Delamere Forest and an exasperated Cheshire Oaks shopper.

I discovered how much salt is the key to many of the county's claims to fame, from tasty cheese and Roman occupation to the development of the chemical industry and the accidental invention of polythene.

What struck home is how nothing worthwhile is ever achieved without a dream – a clever idea followed by the determination to turn that light bulb moment into reality. Luck often plays a major part too and nowhere is that more true than the incredible story behind Jodrell Bank Radio Telescope, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Its success is largely down to the drive and genius of Manchester University physicist Bernard Lovell. In December 1945, he steered an ex-Army radar trailer into a remote field near Holmes Chapel to escape interference from Manchester's electric trams. He wanted to research whether radar, developed during the Second World War, could be used to study cosmic rays in Earth's outer atmosphere. Instead, he discovered the origin of meteors. He then attempted to erect the world's largest dish telescope but ran out of money. He was only saved by the Cold War and the launch of Sputnik 1 by the Soviet Union. It turned out Lovell's telescope was the only instrument outside Russia capable of tracking intercontinental ballistic missiles. Funding miraculously appeared to complete the job. And the rest is history.

I love that story, and it inspired *Lucky Stars*, which appears as one of 36 poems and monologues in the book, illustrated by dozens of photographs, and two maps by Ali Draws from Runcorn and a 17th-century cartographer.

I have also included a poem I was asked to write to accompany the Norley Wildflower Memorial Walk, to mark the centenary of the First World War. *Voices of the Norley Fallen* commemorates the 12 local soldiers killed or injured in the war; the experience moved me deeply. My own children had been pupils at Norley Primary School – it's only down to good fortune that it's not their generation paying the terrible price of war.



Lynn Pegler in the gardens at Norton Priory, one of the locations she visits in her new book, *Cheshire in 100 Poems and Pictures*.

Photo: Kirsty Thompson

Lynn Pegler's poem, *Voices of the Norley Fallen*, commemorates the 12 local soldiers killed or injured in the First World War. The final stanza is carved into a stone in Norley Churchyard

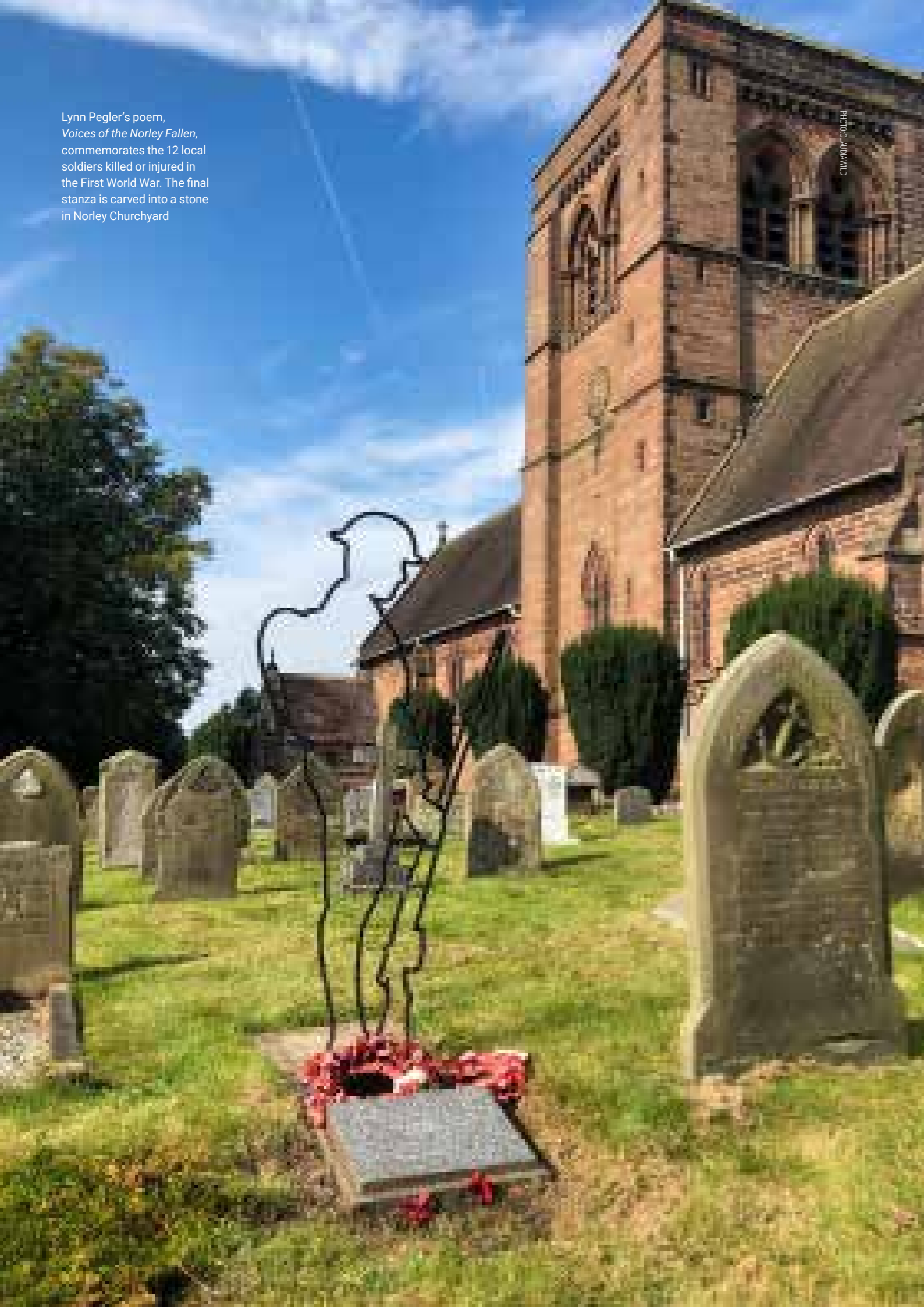


PHOTO: JAMES WIND

The final stanza of my poem is now carved into a stone in Norley Churchyard, and it is wonderful to think of my words being preserved for posterity.

Literature, history and geography have been lifelong passions. My first job was based in Kendal on the *Westmorland Gazette*. After this, I became a press officer for the British Army at their North West District headquarters in Preston. I got the chance to do some amazing assignments, including the Gulf War, West Germany, Gibraltar, Northern Ireland, Berlin (just as the wall came down) and a trip to Jamaica, where I was the only woman working with 145 men from the Cheshire Regiment and other specialist units.

After a few years based in Manchester and Liverpool for the Government's NW Central Office of Information, I arrived in Northwich in 2000 to take up a role with British Waterways as a communications manager looking after the region's canals and a host of waterway restorations.

Despite writing for a living, I had always hankered to try my hand at poetry, and plays, which is another skill entirely. When I went

freelance and launched my PR business, Pegler Communications in 2006, I joined a creative writing class at Ness Gardens with Dr Gladys Mary Coles and loved it.

In 2011, when my eldest son was heading off to university, I decided I needed a diversion, and was lucky to be accepted onto the Creative Writing MA course at Manchester Metropolitan University, learning from Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy.

My final year poetry collection formed the basis of my first published book, *Salford Quays Unlocked* and a script about Manchester's Peterloo Massacre inspired an award-winning play, *Peterloo*, which I later staged with Kingsley Players.

It's funny how one thing leads to another – and I am rubbish at saying 'no'. John Gorman (of Scaffold fame) was in the audience at the Weaver Words Festival when I launched the Salford Quays book. On the back of the monologues, he invited me to write a one-hour drama/performance about an author for a new Write Now Festival at Liverpool's St George's Hall Concert Room. I chose Rudyard Kipling (based on the fact that his poem, *If*, was voted the nation's

favourite poem). This led to a new play, *If Only...*, which I performed with actor Matt Jones at several venues, including the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and Portsmouth.

This was followed by a play about children's author Lewis Carroll and his relationship with the real Alice, and so here we are back in Cheshire, with the Cheshire Cat.

My poem, *We're All Mad Here*, about crazy innovations that have taken place here, opens the new collection. And it ends with another passion, the county's waterways, *Ring of Bright Water*, celebrating the 97-mile boating route encircling the county, the Cheshire Canal Ring. ●

***Around Cheshire in 100 Poems and Pictures* is published by Blurb and is available online and at selected book and gift shops.**

Lynn Pegler will perform extracts from the collection at a special evening event at Norton Priory in Runcorn, on Thursday, July 31, as part of the museum's Summer of Stories.

Book tickets at nortonpriory.org/events, peglercommunications.co.uk

'I wanted to take readers on a visual and literary journey of discovery'



A map of Cheshire by Ali Draws (alidraws.studio), one of the illustrations in *Around Cheshire in 100 Poems and Pictures* by Lynn Pegler



PHOTO: KRISTY THOMPSON

Lynn Pegler's poetry in Around Cheshire in 100 Poems and Pictures reflects the diversity of life in the county... here are two of the pieces

VOICES OF THE NORLEY FALLEN

Our ghosts walk the Norley lanes,
Flaxmere, Hatchmere, down Hamblets Hollow,
woods echo with our boyhood games,
young lovers who were never loved,
our children who were never born.

Balls bowled in carefree fun,
barely flipped and touched the darkening clouds,
before flying to our hands as bombs and guns.
Not heroes, no, not really brave, we marched away
with trembling hearts to play our part.

Just cruel chance etched our list of names,
chose widows, orphans, grieving kin
and marked our card for the loser's game.
Our bones lie scattered by the winds of war,
our place now marked by plaques and stones.

Remember your sons, your Samuel, your John,
Alfred, Jesse, Arthur, your Edward and Sam,
Christopher, Heber, Roly, Wilfred and Tom.
A century of dawns warmed Cheshire's clay
but missed our corps and left us cold.

Yes, mourn our loss as you stroll the lanes
and smell the poppies red with blood.
Give thanks for your lives, the peace
we brought and fight each day
with warrior words for war to cease.



PHOTO: DWAC

'The Real Housewives of Cheshire married farmers, not footballers. For 2,000 years, they made tasty, salty cheese!' Lynn Pegler's new book of poetry and pictures pays homage to the Real Housewives of the county and their skills

THE REAL HOUSEWIVES OF CHESHIRE

A pouting princess is perfectly pointless
for scalding, stirring, binding and grinding.

No 'Hey Babe', high five, glitz or glamour
about milking, milling, moulding and pasting.

Designer dresses dripping with diamonds –
ditched in favour of calico pinnies.

Needles, lotions, fillers useless in the mission
for 'silky textures' and 'full firm bodies'.

Search in vain for TV cameras hidden in plain sight
to record stirring, scalding and cutting of curd.

The Real Housewives of Cheshire
married farmers, not footballers.
For 2,000 years, they made tasty, salty cheese!

Poems and places in AROUND CHESHIRE IN 100 POEMS & PICTURES

The Cheshire Cat Grin	Voices of the Norley Fallen	1644: Brave Nantwich Town	Chester Zoo Welcomes
Cheshire's Map Maker	Ringing the Changes, Crowton	Hack Green Bunker	Snow Leopards
River Weaver	Knutsford – Reflections	The Real Housewives of Cheshire	Playing Pantoum Politics
The Three Wyches	Lucky Stars (Jodrell Bank)	A Tale of Two Castles –	Pantoum Packed in a Shopping Bag
Northwich – That Sinking Feeling	Power Play at Quarry Bank Mill	Beeston and Peckforton	Found – A Ballad at Norton Priory
Polythene – A Clever Idea?	Alderley Edge Casts a Spell	Dodging Traffic at Oulton Park	Mersey Gateway
Lark Descending	'Best TV Moment' at Lyme Park	Beaver Encounter in	Cinquain: Powering Change
Nature Triumphs on the Salt	Macclesfield's Heirloom	Delamere Forest	Breath of Fresh Air Blows
Flashes	Little Moreton Hall – the Higglely	Reluctant Teenager	Through Widnes
Cheshire's Cathedral of Canals,	Piggledy House	Climbs Old Pale	Warrington Powerhouse
Anderton Boat Lift	Trainspotting in Crewe	Walking Chester Walls	Ring of Bright Water ●