# Ian McMillan and Andrew Brooks unveil extraordinary stories in everyday scenes at Portico Library



In an intriguing convergence of poetry and photography, Ian McMillan and Andrew Brooks present their exhibition, "The Songs The Morning Sang," at Manchester's Portico Library. The exhibition, running until 27 September 2025, encapsulates the rich tapestry of everyday life through the lens of early morning strolls. The duo embarked on a year-long creative correspondence that began during the first COVID-19 lockdown, when McMillan began sharing whimsical tweets about his pre-dawn walks. This sparked Brooks to undertake his own photographic journeys, capturing the often-overlooked beauty of his neighbourhood in New Mills.

Their collaboration showcases 25 transformative works, where Brooks' captivating images are paired with McMillan's ultra-short narrative responses. The poet's talent for infusing mundane scenes with enchanting stories has breathed new life into ordinary subjects. A phone box becomes a vessel for a mystery singer, while a fallen whoopee cushion is whimsically imagined as a distant planet. These creations exemplify how the interplay between visual and literary art can elevate commonplace experiences into extraordinary narratives.

The initiative received public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, reflecting a broader commitment to arts that connect communities and foster creativity. The project can be seen as a microcosm of how artistic expression can flourish even amid challenging circumstances, offering a beacon of hope and inspiration when physical boundaries confined many to their homes.

Brooks, known for his talent in capturing the essence of both urban and natural environments, engaged in his daily ritual by setting out at 5 am. Within a two-mile radius of his doorstep, he documented the quietude and strangeness of the world awakening around him. Each image, thoughtfully selected, became a canvas for McMillan's narratives. This call-and-response dynamic highlights the symbiotic relationship between the two artists: Brooks’ visuals prompt McMillan’s imaginative retellings, creating a profound dialogue around the peculiarities of our daily surroundings.

Such collaborations not only amplify the significance of local narratives but also offer readers and viewers a reminder of the stories woven into the fabric of their communities. The exhibition invites onlookers to reconsider their own environments and the unseen stories lurking just beneath the surface of the everyday. By engaging with these common yet often ignored subjects, McMillan and Brooks present participants with an opportunity to explore imagination amid the humdrum of life.

As "The Songs The Morning Sang" continues to resonate with local and national audiences alike, it stands as a testament to the transformative power of art—an exploration that invites everyone to look deeper and discover the extraordinary layered within the ordinary.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://ilovemanchester.com/event/the-songs-the-morning-sang/2025-09-26), [[2]](https://manchesterwire.co.uk/a-new-exhibition-explores-the-magic-of-early-morning-walks-at-the-portico/), [[3]](https://www.manchesterworld.uk/community/the-ordinary-becomes-extraordinary-in-new-portico-library-exhibition-5119006)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://ilovemanchester.com/event/the-songs-the-morning-sang/2025-09-26), [[2]](https://manchesterwire.co.uk/a-new-exhibition-explores-the-magic-of-early-morning-walks-at-the-portico/), [[4]](https://www.derbyshiretimes.co.uk/arts-and-culture/you-think-you-know-new-mills-look-again-5118844)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://ilovemanchester.com/event/the-songs-the-morning-sang/2025-09-26), [[5]](https://www.andrewbrooksartist.com/about), [[6]](https://www.andrewbrooksphotography.com/campaigns/collaborations)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://ilovemanchester.com/event/the-songs-the-morning-sang/2025-09-26), [[2]](https://manchesterwire.co.uk/a-new-exhibition-explores-the-magic-of-early-morning-walks-at-the-portico/), [[4]](https://www.derbyshiretimes.co.uk/arts-and-culture/you-think-you-know-new-mills-look-again-5118844)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://ilovemanchester.com/event/the-songs-the-morning-sang/2025-09-26> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://manchesterwire.co.uk/a-new-exhibition-explores-the-magic-of-early-morning-walks-at-the-portico/> - An article detailing the collaboration between poet Ian McMillan and photographer Andrew Brooks for their exhibition 'The Songs The Morning Sang' at Manchester's Portico Library. The exhibition features 25 pieces resulting from a year-long creative correspondence, inspired by McMillan's early morning tweets during the first COVID lockdown. Brooks embarked on daily pre-dawn walks, capturing images within two miles of his home, which McMillan then transformed into narratives. Supported by public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, the exhibition runs from 5 June to 27 September 2025. ([manchesterwire.co.uk](https://manchesterwire.co.uk/a-new-exhibition-explores-the-magic-of-early-morning-walks-at-the-portico/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.manchesterworld.uk/community/the-ordinary-becomes-extraordinary-in-new-portico-library-exhibition-5119006> - An article highlighting the exhibition 'The Songs The Morning Sang' at Manchester's Portico Library, showcasing the collaboration between poet Ian McMillan and photographer Andrew Brooks. The exhibition features 25 pieces resulting from a year-long creative correspondence, inspired by McMillan's early morning tweets during the first COVID lockdown. Brooks embarked on daily pre-dawn walks, capturing images within two miles of his home, which McMillan then transformed into narratives. Supported by public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, the exhibition runs from 6 June to 27 September 2025. ([manchesterworld.uk](https://www.manchesterworld.uk/community/the-ordinary-becomes-extraordinary-in-new-portico-library-exhibition-5119006?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.derbyshiretimes.co.uk/arts-and-culture/you-think-you-know-new-mills-look-again-5118844> - An article discussing the exhibition 'The Songs The Morning Sang' by poet Ian McMillan and photographer Andrew Brooks at Manchester's Portico Library. The exhibition features 25 pieces resulting from a year-long creative correspondence, inspired by McMillan's early morning tweets during the first COVID lockdown. Brooks embarked on daily pre-dawn walks, capturing images within two miles of his home in New Mills, which McMillan then transformed into narratives. Supported by public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, the exhibition runs from 6 June to 27 September 2025. ([derbyshiretimes.co.uk](https://www.derbyshiretimes.co.uk/arts-and-culture/you-think-you-know-new-mills-look-again-5118844?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.andrewbrooksartist.com/about> - A biography of photographer Andrew Brooks, detailing his artistic practice, exhibitions, and collaborations. Brooks is known for his work capturing the forms and rhythms of nature and the city, often creating imagined or re-imagined scenes to present a heightened sense of place. His exhibitions include 'Secret Cities' in various locations and 'Immersion Iceland' at the Spectra Festival of Light in Aberdeen. He has also collaborated with Curated Place on projects such as 'Hidden Manchester' and 'Immersion Iceland'. ([andrewbrooksartist.com](https://www.andrewbrooksartist.com/about?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.andrewbrooksphotography.com/campaigns/collaborations> - A page detailing Andrew Brooks' collaborations with Curated Place, including projects like 'Hidden Manchester' and 'Immersion Iceland'. These projects involved exploring various locations, such as tunnelling beneath Manchester, climbing St Giles’ Cathedral in Edinburgh, and flying over an active volcano in Iceland. Brooks' adaptability, creativity, and professionalism have been instrumental in creating outstanding projects that have captured the imagination of thousands. ([andrewbrooksphotography.com](https://www.andrewbrooksphotography.com/campaigns/collaborations?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.creativetourist.com/event/ian-mcmillan-andrew-mcmillan-volumes/> - An event listing for 'Volumes', a collaboration between poets Ian McMillan and Andrew McMillan, held at the Church of St Mary in the Baum on 24 October 2016. The event featured the premiere of two brand-new poems, set to music by Manchester-based composer Michael Betteridge, performed by female voice choir Cantare and male voice choir The Sunday Boys. The McMillans also read from their own work and introduced songs based on their favourite poets. ([creativetourist.com](https://www.creativetourist.com/event/ian-mcmillan-andrew-mcmillan-volumes/?utm_source=openai))