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With thanks to:
All the writers who have taken part; Gerry Thompson, Ben Bishop and Gavin Lombos for co-running workshops; poets John Hegley and Tim Turnbull for special workshops; Mike Morris, Kay Petherick and Clare Delamere for supporting the project at Reading YOI; Sue Sherrard at Reading Youth Offending Service; Suzi Liew at Cranbury College Pupil Referral Unit; Sue O’Hara, Sheila Perry and Kerri-Ann Billington at Reading St Leonards Approved Premise; Judy Munday at Thames Valley Partnership for funding support, Duncan McLarty at Radio Berkshire for co-running the project and Arts Council / BBC’s ‘Made in England’ scheme which enabled the project to take place.

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Ballads of Reading Jail 2009

These poems and ballads have been written during poetry workshops at Reading Prison (a Young Offender Institution); St Leonards Probation Hostel (for those taking their first steps out of the prison system); and Reading Youth Offending Service (for young people at risk of going into it). The prison is famous through Oscar Wilde’s *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, and this influence lead us to adapt the mostly rap lines to a ballad form, which can be spoken or sung. It also lead us to look for and develop story in the poems.

No particular themes were given, though the project had an overall interest in England’s landscape and social landscape. The project was part of ‘Made in England’, a partnership between Arts Council England and BBC English Regions, which aims to explore our country through its people and its art. We were taken aback by the amount of writing being done in Reading Jail, and by the interest in writing rap lines and poetry. Much of this reflects a desire by prisoners to communicate with family and loved ones.

One of the main purposes of the project was to reduce re-offending. We encouraged participants to reflect on their lives (much as Oscar Wilde had done), through a belief that understanding your story, and the part others play in it, is an important step in moving forward positively in your life. Our other main purpose was to present the young writers as creative and thoughtful people, to a wide audience. Some of the back-stories and lines were broadcast on BBC Radio Berkshire in the week of 20th – 24th April 2009, and some of Shaun’s story and lines (page 7) were chosen for Radio 4 ‘Pick of the Week’ the following Sunday.

The collection finishes with two poems by poet John Hegley which he wrote for the project, the first near the beginning of the process, the second just before we went on air.

**Jon Potter**, Company Paradiso Productions

‘I’d never really written much before. It was while I was sat in a prison cell, and I had all this stuff going through my head, that I decided to pick up the pen. I needed to express myself. I still keep things in perspective with my poetry, as in not wanting to go back.’

**Participant, Shaun D**
Three Stars

The cover illustration is donated by Florin. In return he asked the poetry class to write this love poem for his Wife and Family in Romania.

It is common for prisoners to ask others to write for them if they can’t do it themselves. Here Shaun describes how he also wrote for other inmates when he was in prison:

‘When you’re inside you get guys who come up to you, if they know you write poetry, who ask you “it’s my Girlfriend’s birthday, can you write me a poem”. And they will actually pay you for it – so hey, you get like a half ounce of tobacco for a poem.’
Three Stars

I send to you my true feelings
That I indeed love you
I think about you and my little Girls
I want you still to love me too

Now I’m cold and far away
Nothing in my life seems right
I look at the dark through the bars
I look to the east in the night

I’m sorry I ended up here
But I’ll be back with you all one day
If I had you here right now
I’d have a million things to say

You are my hope and my heart
You care for my soul in the night
When I see you together at home
It is warm and shining bright

My soul goes through the bars
And back to you I fly
I follow three shining stars
Rising high up in the sky.

Poetry Class poem for Florin T
Walk in My Shoes & If I Die Tomorrow

Shaun took part in the project when he was at Reading St Leonards Probation Hostel, for those taking their first steps out of prison. Here he describes his experience:

‘I was 19 when I stepped off a prison bus and they took me in through a little brown side door in a huge stone wall. Reading Jail. They sat me down on a bench and gave me some prison issue clothes. I said I’d wear my own clothes and they said you haven’t got enough. I said I want my phone call, and I called my Mum. I had no idea where she was. I said “I love you, and bring me some clothes”. They let me buy a smoking pack for £2.50, and I was in.

‘They moved me about, and 6 years later I came out of another prison, with 4 large duffel bags weighing a ton each, and a book of 300 poems. The prison officer helped me with the bags, up to the big electric prison gate, then he told me he couldn’t come any further. He said “over to you now mate. You were a shit when you came here, but I’ve got to know you. Don’t ever come back.”

‘I walked out and the sky was clear. I’ve never seen a day like that. Outside everything was brighter. It was May. There was a vibrant green on the trees. I saw my Mum and my Auntie running over and I just dropped my bags. It was all hugs and crying. And there was a dog running round, barking, running around all over the place – I’ll never forget that dog.’

Here Shaun describes the background to the poem ‘Walk in My Shoes’:

‘I got mixed up with the wrong people, thinking that they were all the world, and nothing can touch them. The friends, my so-called friends, they are no longer part of my life. At that time they were threatening me, and my family as well. I put my family in danger. It was kind of a horrifying time. They held a gun to my head, telling me there was only one way I was going to leave and that was dead. I thought about not being able to say goodbye to my family, to give my Mum a hug and a kiss and say goodbye, big time.’
Walk in My Shoes

Walk in my shoes and see how I feel
Try and find peace of mind when you can’t even find peace
Take a look through my eyes and see what I’ve seen
Believe me you won’t be having sweet dreams
Make friends with my friends find out who they are
Do you still wonder how I made it so far
Live how I used to and watch your own back
Stay clear of your loved ones, can you live like that?
Knowing they’re planning and arranging your end
That’s not just the enemy, that’s my so-called friends.

If I Die Tomorrow

If I die tomorrow tell me would you cry
Would you pray the Lord to take my soul before the next sunrise
Would you think or forget about me as seasons change and pass
Would you remember the sound of my voice or better still my laugh
Would you remember the times we talked and the times we shared
Would you wish for me to come back while holding a piece of your hair
If I die tomorrow I ask you if you cry
Let them be tears of happiness because my soul’s free and I’ll be flying.

Shaun D
Making Peas

Meadows heard some of the other poems in the collection during the prison writing class, and felt they weren’t reflecting the nitty gritty of prison life, so he put this poem forward. ‘Making Peas’ is making money, and ‘shot’ means sell.
Making Peas

When I think of
Giving all this up
I think of being broke
And living with no hope
I’ve been doing this
Since the age of 14.

Shot, shot by the clock
How can I stop
Always making peas
This is who I am
That boy who sells
Grams for 40 pound.

I’ve got whatever you want
As long as you got the cash
You see shottin is a habit
It got me put inside
But how can I stop
When shottin is my life.

Meadows
The Day I Got Stuck

Peter said this lyrical first line during a group conversation about dads, in class. He then made it into a poem, combining some new lines, in the first part, and some existing ones, in the second part.
The Day I Got Stuck

He comes and he goes and he comes and he goes and he don’t come
Mum is he going to stay maybe he just might
Next thing you know he’s on the next flight
Half here, half there
No time to spare
He’s living in the fast lane
I’m on my bike he’s on a train
I hear he’s on his way back
Coming in from the end of the track
Then he goes
4 long years
I’ve got nothing to say to that.

I got myself in a great big mess
You couldn’t expect more or less
From a low class citizen like me
Got stuck in traffic
Took the short cut
I chose that path
And had my laugh
Then came the day
They put me in a dark place to stay
And I think of him
He came and he went and he came and he went and he didn’t come.

Peter A
On the Run

Deen also responded to the challenge of writing in the ballad form. This poem was a favourite with the writing group. Every week we would read it out, in its different forms as it developed, and we all gave our opinions on how it should end.
On The Run

He is critically injured  
The pain is unbearing  
He carries on running  
This escape will be daring  

His Sons are watching  
He is urged on by this sight  
He will keep on going  
Through the whole night  

Balls of steel  
Legs going strong  
But one slip up  
And it could all go wrong  

Prayers to God  
That he will make it  
His life is at stake  
Head-hunters will take it  

He needs to get away  
Blood still pouring  
It’s a jungle out there  
With lions roaring  

Snakes, lizards, predators  
Poisonous insects lurking  
But he carries on somehow  
His legs continue working  

Will he leave his Sons fatherless  
Or will he survive  
They are closing in  
Will he make it out alive
He’s running out of breath
He stops for a break
Mouth’s dry like a desert
Where is the lake

The men now have sight of him
That’s his kick start
He’ll never quit
He’s got too much heart

He turns to face them
His adrenalin’s pumping
But he’s knocked over
And he goes down thumping

His head is throbbing
And he’s still going
His wounds are deep
Raw flesh showing

“He’s fallen, let’s kill him”
His life is on the line
“Let me go first”
“His arse is mine”

He somehow rose
And miraculously progressed
The pain he was feeling
Could not be expressed

He thinks of quitting
But he thinks of his Sons
He looks behind him
And sees their guns
He spots the water
And hops in the lake
Lucky alligator
Eats human steak

But his Sons were watching
And no matter where he’d bin
He’d always keep on going
He’d never give in.

Deen A
Ballad of Reading Jail

Simon wrote these as rap lines, but because of the nature of the project, we asked him if he could convert them to ballad lines. Our guide was: if you can sing it to the tune of 'The Yellow Rose of Texas', then it’s a ballad. Then later it can be spoken or sung to an appropriate tune.
Ballad of Reading Jail

I walked out the door at seventeen
I thought I had nothing to lose
But then I couldn’t come back
Cause I felt I brought bad news

I sat on through the night
Waiting up for the rising sun
I drank and drank and hoped
My life would just be done

Where I come from it’s a joke
With parents selling crack
From the open front door
While the kids play out the back

We go from cradle to street
To a cell or an early tomb
And the girls ain’t no angels
In the teenage baby boom

I ended up in prison
And I thought my life was wrecked
They took my possessions
But not my spirit or my respect

Dear Mum read these lines
You know where I am
Locked up in a cell
The man with the plan

When I was young we were close
I never meant to make you sad
Your eldest will be back
With all the promise he had.

Simon N
Inauguration Day, 20th Jan 2009

One of our classes happened to fall on Tuesday 20th January 2009, the day of Barack Obama’s inauguration. Jamal had written these rap lines some time before, and that day we talked a lot in the writing group about hope for the future. George Bush and ‘the New President’ found their way into the lines that day.
Inauguration Day, 20th Jan 2009

All my life I’ve seen Bush’s murder and poverty on the news
It has all left me empty and mentally bruised
You think I’m obsessing try to live in Muslim shoes
Now will there be a change - you choose

Mr Obama, are we still heading towards failure and doom
Or will we see a better day, and whom
Will make a change, for those who may be dead soon,
Still stuck in cages in the same room.

My Brother keeps my head up with his weekly letter
I’ll send him these lines about a change for the better
And I’ll pray to God every day and will he listen?
I wonder if he does, will I still be in prison

I can’t be the only one who sees another mother cry
And can’t get this film out of my eyes
Go to a Third World place – we’ll make a change if we try
I put my hope in a New President, I can’t deny.

Jamal A
Obama

Obama is an inspiration to many of the writers who took part in the project. Byron wrote these lines during a session at the Probation Hostel when we asked participants for material about a character, or someone else, rather than themselves, because we had less writing of this kind.
Obama

Inspiration is something good to have in your life
For me it is better to have that than a wife

Obama set himself a goal and struggled through
How he did it no one has a clue

He achieved what Martin Luther King saw in a dream
It was pleasing to see that in my lifetime.

He has reached an historic place in History
Which has inspired me to write my life story

Goals can be re-set and they can be reached
Respect your licence conditions and don’t get breached.

Byron
Another Country

Leonard also took part in the project at the Probation Hostel. He had been writing poems for many years, but had never felt they were worth keeping. Like Shaun, he had written many poems for others when he was in prison. These lines recall when he served in the army.
Another Country

Let me rest here for a while
Wipe my eyes and try to smile

I see by reading upon your stone
You died at 21 and you died alone.

You passed away in this country not long ago
But fighting for what I do not know.

I must have been lucky it never happened to me
A landmine I was very lucky I did not have to see

Perhaps instead of Northern Ireland
Another country, another waste of life, is awaiting me.

Leonard H
Charlie Finn (the unknown soldier)

Andy was only able to attend two classes at Reading Jail before he was transferred. This is common – the average stay in Reading Prison is only 6 weeks. He sent through the lines for ‘Charlie Finn’ by letter.

This poem and the next by Andy use references that seem to come from psalms and hymns. This ‘timeless’ feel, and his theme of when it is right to fight, suggested both could be suitable for song. ‘Charlie Finn’ was sung by James Ewers from the Reading band My Luminaries on Radio Berkshire in April 2009.
Charlie Finn (the unknown soldier)

In the darkest hours
Of the loneliest nights
I see the world burst up
And fight upon a field of low yield.

God knows, hell knows
I see clubs of the street rise to their feet
As blood flows
Remember Charlie Finn
The soldier nobody knows.

Like warriors of old
Youth still fight
How little we have learnt
Over centuries of war.
As one goes out
One comes in
And shrieks of Charlie Finn
Wring out across a world of sin.

Oh young Charlie Finn
Do not despair
Let man into those bloodshot eyes
See behind those gunshot eyes
See what goes on
Sin in the night, let man in
And you will fall on a field of better yield.

Andy B
Stand and Fight

Andy’s second piece, ‘Stand and Fight’, again began as rap-type lines, but converted easily to ballad form. ‘Stand and Fight’ was sung by Thames Valley Male Voice Chorus on Radio Berkshire in April 2009.
Stand and Fight

All my life through
I’ve tried to do what’s right
I know no other way
But to stand and fight
I’m feeling so up
Yet I’m locked down in the night
I’m hypeing so much
Like I could take flight

I’ve stood out from the rest
Stepped into the breach
Where war stuck to me
Like a bloody leech

I’ve seen gunshot eyes
Heard shrieks all around
Traded tit for tat
Paid pound for pound

Now I stand in the valley of wrong
And the soil falls through my fingers
And all I feel is despair
A dark despair that lingers

I live for the time
Which I’ll never know
When a man like me
Can learn to love and grow

Oh I’m feeling so up
Locked down in the night
I’m hypeing so much
Like I could take flight
All my life through
I’ve tried to do what’s right
I know no other way . ..

Andy B
This project ran not just in Reading Jail but also with young people at risk of going into the prison system, in partnership with Reading Youth Offending Service, and Cranbury College Pupil Referral Unit. Here, Jamie, age 17, describes his experience of writing:

‘I was 14 when I went to Secure Training centre for robbery, and I came out same attitude and I was worser if anything. I was getting arrested all the time. But then I started to write things down what I’ve been through, and now I’m trying to put my life forward. I been sat in that cell for 4 months just thinking of my life, making songs. If I write it down I go deeper into the situation.’

Jamie explains his reasons for writing:

‘My Mum don’t really think that I care about her. Cause of all the trouble that I’ve got her in by the social workers, by the Council, police, selling drugs, robbin houses, robbin people, rippin people off, walking round Hexham, round my estate, just getting drunk, you name it. I wanted to turn my life around, and I got baptised in prison.

‘I’m not really a talkative person. I’m kinda shy innit. But when I’m rappin I don’t care. It just flows. On the front of my book I had lots of words, big words and that, that I didn’t know about, so every day I was like learning new words, asking the teachers in education what does that mean, writing it down on the front of my book. I went through all that just to give the CD to my Mum, to see what her face was like.’
Mum

And my Mum I really love you
You’re the angel in my life no one is above you
Without you in my life I’d have no one to run to
I should be truly hated for what I put my Mum through
Yeah listen up this is a love song
See I’m 17 now and I realise that I done wrong
As a single parent Mum you’ve always carried on strong
And you heat up my heart like a red hot tong
And in your heart Mum I hope you feel this
My Mum’s still bringing up kids with an illness
I hope you still love me Mum that’s my real wish
Social workers in your life that’s a real bitch
And I’m sorry for the pain and trouble
They say they lowered your income you should be claimin double
Bringing up 2 more kids that’s a blatant struggle
Dad was hardly ever there but I’m not blamin Russell
From now on I’m going to show my Mum that I’ve grown up
And anything that I do from now on then I own up
In jail I couldn’t wait to pick the phone up
And if I couldn’t hear my Mum’s voice then I’d go nuts
I heard my Mum cry on the phone that day
I went back to my cell I laid down and prayed
I said to God I can’t treat, my Mum this way
He replied and said show her love, from this day.
Hard on the Roadside

These lines, also from Jamie, describe three friends of his who have died, Dermott in a car accident and Junior and Lee in stabbing incidents.

‘Lee was my next door neighbour, and he died like 21. I was only 14, 15 and I used to look up to him. He got into some trouble with this boy, started fighting, got rushed to the hospital. We thought he was going to be all right. Everyone came to my house innit. I was sleepin, everyone came in crying, saying Lee’s dead, Lee’s dead. . .

‘Dermott wasn’t drivin he was in the passenger. They was drivin around these country roads, and the car just flipped, kept flippin. He must have come out the car window. People were allowed to go in and see him, but I didn’t want to go in. They were comin out sayin his face was swollen up like a balloon. It just wasn’t him.

‘He was a good person. All three of them people that I’m talking about, they were all good people. They didn’t deserve to go the way that they did. That’s why people need to buck up their ideas man.’
Hard on the Roadside

Yeah from the positive
The hood is where we gotta live
It’s getting crazy in the ends of Whitley
And I can’t believe I lost my best friend Lee
And yeah trust me there’s plenty more
How about when he used to live right next door
He was the kinda man you couldn’t ignore
In my mind every time
I talk about it I get a chill right down my spine
And I didn’t expect to write this rhyme
And I hope it gets to your heart before your spine
And it broke my heart ripped into 2
This goes to Lee this goes to Dermott too, missin you.

Yo – rest in peace Lee, rest in peace Junior, rest in peace Dermott
Look – I’m not the Preacher I won’t be sayin it twice
But these guns and shit they be takin your lives
In your arms house because you waving a knife
At the end of the day you be payin the price
And now I’m old I got the Lord to take hold of me
He needs to bless in me I need to be the best in me
When Lee died he took half and Junior took the rest of me
It just ain’t sinkin in, and when I hit my pillow at night
That’s when I think of them, think of them, reminiscin
And when I pray at night I hope that you’re listenin
Man I’m so upset I’ve got to mask my face
I’ve got my eyes shut when I walk past the place
To your Family, they gotta stay strong fam
It’s not just about rollin round in a strong gang
I say to God every day you took the wrong man.
Yeah - that’s all my rap bars man. 

Jamie J
Rest in Paradise Junior

This poem is by Emily, age 14, who is one of a number of young people in the project who also knew Junior and have been affected by his stabbing last year. We worked with her at Cranbury College Pupil Referral Unit (for young people excluded from school). She had not been involved in crime at all, but was part of the circles of young people we were meeting.
Rest In Paradise Junior

You were our soldier, Junior, you were our life,
Now you are gone, nothing seems right,
And sitting here writing these bars,
I look at the blue sky and wonder where you are.

I think of you both day and night
As the stars are shining bright
We will never leave you behind,
You will never leave our minds.

Why did people hurt you that way,
You didn’t deserve to die that day.
Now you are my shining diamond,
Floating high up in the sky.

Emily
My Mum

These lines from Leanne reveal another young person having to come to terms with overwhelming grief. Here she describes the context for the poem.

‘I was told that when she was like 8 months pregnant with me she was driving around on a Harley. Yup, that’s my Mum.

‘When she got married it all went down hill. She was drinking a big bottle of vodka on her own a day. Cause he’d come home, he’d shout, he’d yell, he’d go out and get drunk and come home and create a really big scene.

‘I woke up Christmas day and I had pains going down my side where two of my ribs had been crushed, and I had a black eye, a broken nose, a dislocated jaw and I’d chipped the bone in my arm there, where me and him had had a big fight. Apparently I really hurt him, but he hurt me more.

‘Months passed, she was drinking more, she was going out more, slowly being taken away from me. In ways I’m sad that she’s gone, but in ways I’m happy because she won’t have to go through the pain and torment he put us through.

‘It kind of made me think if I could write this down, it would be easier, instead of hiding it from everyone else. Writing it down made me feel a bit lighter, like I could keep it away for another day. This is my poem to my late Mum, and it means a lot to me.’
My Mum

She was the person that never left my side
Always said I was her princess Sweet Pea
But now I see her like this . . .
It breaks my heart
I just break down and cry
I love my Mum she’s my moon, my sun, my stars
She gave me life like the beautiful princess would have
Then one day she was gone.

Like ash blown away in the wind
I find out she’s married he was a nice guy
But four broken ribs, two black eyes
And a broken nose tell a different story
Nothing but tears and sorrow.

Leannne
Cars

These lines were written by Kallum and Liam at Cranbury College. I asked Liam about the inspiration for the poem and he said it was as much video games as real experience. Here he describes how he feels about poetry:

‘I’d never done poetry before. It’s not my kind of thing. My mates would probably laugh but I don’t mind. It was quite fun doing it. They’d probably say it was crap and that, just to annoy me.

‘It’s a poem about what people do, like when they nick cars and that. I don’t do it. I don’t like it.’
Cars

Ragin it about
Nickin cars, crashin em out
Window seal, pull and peel
Comin off, flip the lid
Hangin in you hit the switch
Flip the motor body twitch
Watch your back the cops around
Exhausts are glowing
Tail pipes blowin
Rip it bang it
Roar it prang it
Lights splash cameras flash
Coppers racin got to dash
Tyres burstin
Spikes and cursin
Blowin up and blowin down
Saab up a tree and
The cops around

Kallum, Liam
Moving On

Keith’s lines were written at St Leonards Probation Hostel, and by chance he was broadcast on Radio Berkshire reading ‘Moving On’ on the day he left Thames Valley Probation to start his new life. He said he’d listen to the broadcast that morning as he was driving away.

‘Akee trees’ are trees that were in Keith’s garden in Jamaica where he spent his young childhood. The poem was begun in the very first session we ran at the Hostel, which Keith attended just after he’d had a breakfast of bread and cheese.
Moving On

They sent me to Bullingdon Prison and they threw away the keys
I came out to St Leonards, where I eat bread and cheese.

My Mother never told me, when I was sitting on her knees,
Under the akee trees, that I’d be eating bread and cheese

Never said that I’d spend 4 years in a cell that made me wheeze,
Through the night’s big freeze, eating bread and cheese.

But now they’re teaching us interviews, housing, CVs
You can learn you driving theories and eat bread and cheese

And next I’m off to East London to live by the sea,
To another Bail Hostel, where I’ll eat curried goat.

Keith H
Little Ann

This poem was written by John and William during a workshop at the Probation Hostel with poets Tim Turnbull and John Hegley, when they asked for ballad type lines about interesting people.
Little Ann

Little Ann who thinks she’s big
Sells cans of lager at the Leaf and Fig.

Polite and charming
With a smile that’s disarming,
She pulls the curtains across
And leaves you with nothing.

William and John
Valentine’s Day

This piece also began as longer poem lines, but developed into this ballad form. It was written in the weeks before Valentine’s Day, a time when many of the participants on the project were writing to loved ones. Here Jay talks about his life and the background to the poem:

‘I was on a downward spiral going nowhere. We’d have a few drinks and end up doing stupid things. It started off minor but as we got older, we started getting more stupid and things got more serious. What I got sent down was for robbery. When I went to prison I left my Son and my Girlfriend out on the outside and we drifted apart. She went her separate way, and moved away with my little Boy.

‘In a big way I feel I’ve let not just my Son down but also his Mother. I know it can’t be easy for anyone when a family member goes to prison, but she stayed by me as long as she could. But I couldn’t expect her to stay and wait because I was in there 2 years 9 months. It’s not that I don’t still love her, I do still care about her, but the only mutual tie between us now is our little Boy.

‘When we split up I started writing the occasional bit of poetry to my Baby’s Mother. I never used to keep them when I was in jail, I don’t know why I was embarrassed about it, cause it’s a good way of getting your feelings out on paper.

‘My little Boy’s 4 now. He’s an absolute gem. I haven’t seen him for a year and a half, but he’s beautiful. When he was younger he had blond hair and blue eyes, but his eyes got darker and he started looking more like his Mum.

‘This poem is called Valentine’s Day, and it’s for my Baby’s Mother. I hope she’d like it. I think she would.’
Valentine’s Day

I love you and our little Boy
That’s one thing I can say
But our love was not to be
Cause it was Judgement Day

The Prison Chaplain stepped in
Brought us to talk together
We didn’t see eye to eye
I found we wouldn’t be forever

I did my best to be there
I gave all the love I had
And I want my Son to grow up
And learn to call me Dad

We’ve both got new lovers
But I can’t get you to see
I’ll always be there
But you won’t reply to me

4 years have gone by
And my heart still fills with joy
But you’ve moved far away
And taken our little Boy

Where is Cupid now
On Valentine’s Day
Now I’m out of prison
In a town where the demons play

I did my best to be there
I gave all the love I had
And I want my Son to grow up
And learn to call me Dad

James C
Hayley

This song by Richard encapsulates the project. It also began from a writing exercise called ‘I believe’, then became a poem, then was developed to have more story, to suit the radio, then became a song to fit with the whole ballads theme. Here, Richard describes meeting Hayley (not her real name) again:

‘On one of the days we were working on the poem, I bumped into her in town. She came running over to me and threw her arms around me and scared the living daylights out of me. I told her I’d written a poem and that it might be turned into a song. The initial reaction was shock, but then she was delighted I’d been thinking about her.

‘We’ve decided we’re going to meet up again in a few weeks time and just be friends from now on. We’ve both moved on a lot since we were together. And me in myself am a lot better.

‘The reference to ‘fluffy sheep’ – by the way – is when I used to have hair, it was fluffy like wool, and people used to call me ‘sheep’.’
Hayley

I know I should have stayed
But I lost all my reason
The day I left you Hayley
Was the day that lead me to prison

I believe in The Devil and I believe in God
I believe in fluffy sheep and I believe in cod
I believe in the chips we ate
Together on the back of the bus
And I, I, I . . . I believe in us

I believe in your red moped
And your long wavy hair
I believe in your bad cooking
And the way you just don’t care

I believe in The Devil and I believe in God
I believe in fluffy sheep and I believe in cod
I believe in the chips we ate
Together on the back of the bus
And I, I, I . . . I believe in us

Your calm kept me from harm
I love you my dear Hayley
I let you go far too easily
And now I think of you daily

You believe in the Devil and you believe in God
You believe in fluffy sheep and you believe in cod
You believe in the chips we ate
Together on the back of the bus
But you don’t. . . . . .believe in us, or do you?

Richard C
Lines & Partners in Rhyme

John wrote these first lines at an early stage in the project, then wrote ‘Partners in Rhyme’ hot off the press just before we went on air on BBC Radio Berkshire on 23rd April 2009.

Each day’s recording that week can be heard on www.companyparadiso.co.uk.
Lines

Cast outside
and cast asunder
make another social blunder
the cards you’re dealt, it doesn’t always help
go straight to jail and don’t pass out
the prison is for risen aspiration
rehabilitation
social integration
isn’t it?

Partners in Rhyme

I said to the lads in the jail
Your poems put wind in my sail
You could make it your job
We don’t want to rob
All the world of the chance to dance in the thrill of your gale
These lads sometimes need to be told
How their poems are pieces of gold
With a bit of our aid we can sharpen the shade
Of the blistering history they hold
It helps none of us if we should fail.

John Hegley