

DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

Press Release

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Durham Book Festival 2014 programme unveiled

The annual book festival returns with guests including Kate Adie, Sheila Hancock, Dennis Skinner MP, Kirsty Wark, Jung Chang, Meg Rosoff, Kate Tempest and Stuart Maconie plus a specially-commissioned family show adapted from Anna Kemp and Sara Oglivie's picture book, The Worst Princess.

The programme for the 2014 Durham Book Festival was announced this evening at an exclusive launch event held at Durham Castle. The launch included a special reading and Q&A with author Richard Benson on his novel *The Valley*, a recounting of his ancestors' lives in a Yorkshire mining town over the course of a century

The Valley is one of 6 books in the Gordon Burn Prize shortlist which was unveiled at the launch by Lee Brackstone, Commissioning Editor of Faber and Faber.

Durham Book Festival is commissioned by Durham County Council and delivered by New Writing North. This year's festival takes place from 6-18 October across County Durham, with special Schools Days at Durham Johnston School on Monday 6 October and Tuesday 7 October. Events will be taking place in venues across the city, from Gala Theatre and Durham Town Hall to Durham Cathedral and the beautiful new event space at the recently-refurbished Palace Green Library, as well as libraries and community centres across the county.

Headliners at this year's festival include Sheila Hancock, one of the UK's best-loved actors, who will be talking about her first novel, *Miss Carter's War*, a portrait of post-war Britain through the eyes of one woman. Also speaking will be Kate Adie, who will talk about World War I through the eyes of women. She will be followed by *War Correspondents*, a piece of new theatre co-commissioned by festival producers New Writing North, which combines song, testimonies and performance to tell the stories of journalists reporting from war zones. Both events will take place in the stunning setting of Durham Cathedral.



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Dennis Skinner, one of the UK's longest-serving and most respected MPs, will be speaking about his time in the House of Commons, which spans over four decades. Chris Mullin, a Durham Book Festival stalwart, will host an affectionate – but not uncritical – tribute to his old friend, Tony Benn.

For younger readers, Durham Book Festival is running The Big Read across the whole of County Durham, getting children and families reading *The Wind in the Willows*. 1,000 free books will be distributed across the county and are available through schools and libraries.

For very young audience members (and their families), New Writing North has commissioned a musical theatre adaptation of the picture book *The Worst Princess* by Anna Kemp and illustrated by Sara Ogilvie.

The Worst Princess will tour to libraries, arts centres and community centres across County Durham and South East Northumberland as well as Manchester Literature Festival and Sheffield Off the Shelf Festival. This new production follows on from last year's *My Granny Is A Pirate*, adapted from Val McDermid's first picture book, which visited 30 venues around County Durham and beyond, giving 35 performances. 78% of those who attended performances were first-time attenders for performances at the venues and the feedback was outstanding.

Durham Book Festival has also commissioned a number of new pieces of work, which will be presented during the festival week. These include a piece by Anne McElvoy, public policy editor at *The Economist*, looking at the impact of the Miners' Strike, 30 years on, as she revisits Easington with photographer Keith Pattison, who documented the strike there in 1984. Stuart Maconie will talk about his journey across County Durham, the people he met and the stories they told, and Michael Chaplin follows in the footsteps of his late father, Sid Chaplin, undertaking seven walks between Holy Island and Durham city. Michael will be considering whether the North East is still the coherent region it was in his father's time in the 1950s, and what its future might be.

Anna Disley, acting chief executive of New Writing North and Durham Book Festival, said:

"We are delighted to be working in partnership with Durham County Council to bring the country's top writers, artists and thinkers to County Durham.

"Journalism features strongly in our special commissions programme this year, with some of the country's leading reporters focusing on where we find ourselves in the North East in 2014, as well as taking a fresh look at our history and heritage. We also cast our net further afield, looking at war reportage in international conflict in a new song theatre performance at Durham Cathedral.

“We are building on our relationship with Durham University, and this year we have worked together to programme debates, events on poetry, ancient history and novels as well as the Durham Book Festival Big Read.

“We hope there is something for everyone whatever their age or interest, and we look forward to welcoming a range of audiences to enjoy our packed programme.”

Cllr Neil Foster, Durham County Council’s Cabinet member for economic regeneration, said:

“As a council we are committed to supporting a wide range of events and festivals and we are thrilled to have commissioned Durham Book Festival once again.

“It is particularly pleasing to see this event growing in popularity with such a wide range of audiences. I am sure the line-up will ensure this trait continues.”

The festival is also delighted to host poet Paul Farley as this year’s Festival Laureate, a position which is made possible with support from Durham University. As Festival Laureate, Paul will be writing a new poem for the festival, which will be performed there for the first time, and will also be doing a special event for students at Durham University as well as a visit to a school.

Durham Book Festival is the biggest and longest-running event of its kind in the North East of England. The 2013 festival programme was bigger than ever before, with just under 100 events and performances taking place. The events reached over 8,000 people around County Durham and beyond, delivering the biggest audience figures the book festival has ever had. In addition, the audience satisfaction was outstanding, with 99% of people surveyed rating their experience at the festival as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’.

Durham Book Festival is a Durham County Council festival and is programmed and produced by New Writing North, the writing development agency for the North of England. Durham Book Festival is made possible through funding from Durham County Council, Durham University, and Arts Council England, and with sponsorship from a range of corporate sponsors.

The full programme and booking opens at 10am on Wednesday 13 August 2014 at www.durhambookfestival.com.

Ends

For all media enquiries and interview requests please contact Olivia Chapman, Communications Manager for New Writing North and Durham

Book Festival, on 0191 204 8854 (office), 07411 164 837 (mob) or email olivia@newwritingnorth.com.

Notes to Editors:

- Durham Book festival is a Durham County Council festival produced by New Writing North and has been made possible by support from the following partners: Durham University, Arts Council England, and with sponsorship from, Banks Group; Muckle LLP; Swinburne Maddison, and the University of Sunderland.
- Durham Book Festival is one of three festivals that are part of Durham County Council's Gala Durham Festival Hub, along with Brass: Durham International Festival and Lumiere, the biennial festival of light which returns to Durham in November 2015.
- The Gordon Burn Prize is supported by Gordon Burn's publisher, Faber & Faber, New Writing North, and the Gordon Burn Trust. The judges for the 2014 prize are the comedian, actor and musician Julian Barratt, the poet John Burnside, the artist Sarah Lucas, and novelist Benjamin Myers, winner of the 2013 Gordon Burn Prize. The shortlist is:
The Valley by Richard Benson (Bloomsbury), *The Kills* by Richard House (Picador), *The Wake* by Paul Kingsnorth (Unbound), *The Trip to Echo Spring* by Olivia Laing (Canongate), *American Interior* by Gruff Rhys (Hamish Hamilton), and *The Free* by Willy Vlautin (Faber & Faber).
The winner will be announced on Friday 10 October at a special event at Durham Book Festival at 6.30 pm in Durham Town Hall, with the shortlisted authors reading from their work.