

DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

Press Release

Friday 10 October 2014

For immediate release

City of books: Durham Book Festival 2014 starts

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 Ogilvie's picture book, The Worst Princess.

It's been months in the planning, but Durham Book Festival 2014 is finally here. The festival starts today with the exciting announcement of the Gordon Burn Prize. The audience of guests, publishers, shortlisted authors and VIPs will learn who's won from this year's exceptional shortlist of 6 writers testing the boundaries of their chosen genre, in the spirit of the late Newcastle-born author and journalist Gordon Burn.

The ceremony will kick off nine packed days of events at venues across Durham City. With a third of events already sold out, and the headline events close to reaching their 500-seat capacity, this year's book festival is already the most successful, before it even starts.

Some events sold out within a matter of days of going on sale, including veteran Labour MP Dennis Skinner talking about his political career, and festival stalwart Chris Mullin leading a tribute to Tony Benn.

Festival manager Rebecca Wilkie said:

"We've been so pleased with the response from both regular and new audience members for this year's festival. We try to programme something to suit most tastes – from Mercury-shortlisted musician and performance poet Kate Tempest to established literary novelists like Linda Grant and issues-based speakers like Laura Bates on Everyday Sexism – so it's heartening to see these events are clearly in demand and tickets selling so well.

"We're also really proud of the events for children and young adults this year. The Worst Princess started touring County Durham a fortnight ago and the



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feedback from audiences – many of whom have never been to a theatre performance before – has been wonderful. I can't wait to see it in the sold out Durham Town Hall on Sunday 12 October."

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.

For younger readers, actor and former *Strictly Come Dancing* contestant Mark Benton will be bringing the Durham Book Festival's Big Read to life by reading extracts from *The Wind in the Willows*, which Durham Book Festival distributed 1,000 free copies of across the whole of County Durham, through schools, community centres and libraries. **Mark will be available for filming, interviews and photos – please contact Olivia Chapman (details below) to arrange.**

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.

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 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 details are 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).