

DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

Press release

Embargoed until 00.00 Thursday 10 September

LINE-UP REVEALED FOR FIRST DIGITAL DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

The annual literary festival returns this October with a huge range of digital events, including headline guests Alex Wheatle, Alastair Campbell, Ann Cleeves, Anthony Anaxagorou, Brit Bennett, David Almond, DBC Pierre, Fatima Bhutto, Ian Rankin, Jenny Offill, Laura Bates and Richard Osman

The programme has been announced for Durham Book Festival 2020, the North East's largest literary festival. Free tickets are now available for a huge range of events to be streamed online at durhambookfestival.com.

Between 9 and 18 October 2020, writers, artists and thinkers from across the world will take part in more than 50 events and activities online.

Durham Book Festival is commissioned by Durham County Council and produced by New Writing North, with funding from Durham University and Arts Council England and support from BBC Radio Newcastle.

The festival was founded in 1990 and is one of country's oldest literary festivals with events usually taking place in iconic venues in Durham City. This year, due to Covid-19, the entire festival will take place online. An array of talks, workshops, readings, live drawings, studio tours, podcasts, essays, and more than 20 newly commissioned pieces of writing will be available free of charge for the duration of the festival.

A FEAST OF FICTION

A highlight is sure to be an afternoon with crime writer **Ann Cleeves**, who has written a brilliant new story exclusively for the festival, which is this year's Durham Book Festival Big Read. In the lead up to the event, the festival will distribute 4,000 free copies of *Written in Blood* throughout County Durham as well as a free e-book. Ann will be interviewed by the broadcaster Steph McGovern about her career, her

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creations, including television's *Vera*, how books have supported her in her life and why reading is so important for mental health.

Elsewhere, crime fans will enjoy events with **Ian Rankin** in conversation with fellow writer A.A. Dhand about his new novel *A Song for the Dark Times*, which sees the return of his much-loved detective John Rebus; and TV's *Pointless* star **Richard Osman**, who introduces his highly anticipated debut crime novel, *The Thursday Murder Club*.

Leading authors will be discussing some of the big topics. 2020: Booker-prize-winner, **DBC Pierre** whose novel *Meanwhile in Dopamine City* takes on surveillance and misinformation in the age of the internet, has written an exclusive piece about his family connection to Durham and his love of the city; **Jenny Offill's** fragmentary novel *Weather* is a response to climate crisis and an increasingly polarised society; while **Sarah Moss's** *Summerwater* is a state-of-the-nation Brexit novel set in a run-down Scottish holiday park.

Others turn to the recent past to make sense of the world. **Brit Bennett's** much anticipated second novel, *The Vanishing Half*, spans 1950s-1990s America, where black twins adopt different racial identities and lead very different lives as a result. **Clare Chambers** takes us back to the suburbs of 1950s London in *Small Pleasures*, the word-of-mouth hit of the summer; while **Louise Hare's** *This Lovely City* charts the course of a postwar jazz musician as he arrives in London from the Empire Windrush. **Lily King's** perceptive coming-of-age story *Writers and Lovers* takes on the nature of creativity itself.

The festival also offers the chance for its audience to be some of the first to discover new titles hotly tipped for 2021. At two 'proof parties', ticket holders will receive proof copies of new books by acclaimed writers **Danielle McLaughlin**, **Fiona Mozley** and **Lisa McInerney**; and debut novelists **Buki Papillon** and **Kit Fan**.

IDEAS TO CHANGE SOCIETY

A series of inspiring conversations produced in partnership with Birmingham Literature Festival seeks to tackle some of the major issues in society today. **Laura Bates** returns to Durham Book Festival after sell-out events in previous years to talk about her latest book *Men Who Hate Women*. In *Living Better* **Alastair Campbell** offers an honest and ultimately life affirming account of his lifelong struggle with depression.

In an exclusive series on Durham Book Festival's Instagram channel, academics

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from Durham University are given ten minutes to propose their **New Ideas for the New Normal**. From how heavy metal music provides us with a roadmap for navigating life in a pandemic, to the philosophy of travel, these talks are sure to make you stop and think.

In another exclusive, Durham Book Festival in partnership with English PEN, has commissioned writer and activist **Fatima Bhutto** to respond to PEN International's Women's Manifesto, which states that while 'literature knows no frontiers', these frontiers were traditionally thought of as borders between countries and peoples. For many women in the world – and for almost all women until relatively recently – the first, and the last and perhaps the most powerful frontier was the door of the house she lived in: her parents' or her husband's home.

FROM DURHAM TO THE WORLD

Uniquely in 2020, Durham Book Festival's digital iteration will be broadcast to the world, bringing the stories of Durham and North East England to a much wider audience than could attend the festival in person, including the huge North East diaspora and Durham University alumni worldwide.

New Narratives for the North East is a series of 15 essays, short stories and poems which offer new perspectives on the region, from the pay-what-you-feel café in Chester-le-Street which supports its community, to the region's little-known surf scene. The writers, including **David Almond, Mim Skinner, Andrew Hankinson, Richard T Kelly and Melissa Tutesigensi**, will also be appearing in a series of podcasts launched during the festival.

25% of people in the North East define themselves as disabled, but they are not taking up space in our cultural spaces. Where are the missing? asks disabled writer **Lisette Auton** in her New Narratives for the North East commission. Exclusively for the festival, she has created a film with three other County Durham-based disabled artists to showcase the amazing talent in the region.

Handling manuscripts, letters and material inside the Palace Green Library Archives at Durham University has for several years been one of Durham Book Festival's most popular events. For the first time in 2020, the festival is presenting two digital events **Inside the Archives**, where you can find out more about women's lives in early modern Britain, and the undiscovered literary history of Durham.

Drawing on previously unseen research by Dr Laura McKenzie and created by Ruth

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Robson, **Walking Durham** is a brand-new walking tour of Durham that will reveal the city's remarkable literary history. Watch from home on video or download the podcast of the tour and take the walk yourself in real life.

Finally, don't miss the **Writing Durham** podcast, featuring interviews with some of Durham's most famous literary voices, including **Pat Barker, Anne Stevenson** and **Benjamin Myers**.

THE GORDON BURN PRIZE

Celebrating bold and fearless fiction and non-fiction, which often blurs the boundaries and defies classification, The Gordon Burn Prize is one of the UK's most exciting awards with the 2020 shortlist featuring books by **Jenn Ashworth, Paul Mendez, Deborah Orr, Peter Pomerantsev, Lemn Sissay, and Lisa Taddeo**. In a special digital event, shortlisted authors will read from their work as the judges Anthony Anaxagorou, Rachel Howard, Sali Hughes and Richard T. Kelly celebrate the titles, before the £5,000 prize is awarded to the winner.

SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Durham Book Festival offers both entertainment and educational material for schools and families to access at their convenience, with videos available to stream from their launch date until 1 November.

The Little Read project brings picture books to life for the under 8s. 1500 copies of *Greta and the Giants* will be distributed across County Durham, including to every primary school and nursery setting. This positive and inspiring picture book offers young children a vital message about caring for the environment. The book-gifting campaign is supported by a range of video resources, which include a reading of the story by its author **Zoe Tucker**; a live drawing presentation by illustrator **Zoë Persico**; and a set of creative workshops including placard-making, songwriting and drama workshops, all inspired by the book.

Younger children will also enjoy a dazzling story-time about celebrating difference and being your own wonderful self as author and illustrator duo **Garry Parsons and Simon James Green** share their colourful picture book *Llama Glamarama*.

Sharna Jackson recently won the Waterstones Children's Book Prize for her stand-out debut children's novel, *High Rise Mystery*. Her lively detective duo is back in the

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sequel, *Mic Drop*, in an event ideal for children aged 9-12.

Ideal for KS3-5 readers, the gripping and unforgettable, *Cane Warriors* follows the true story of Tacky's War in Jamaica, 1760. Celebrated author **Alex Wheatle** was awarded an MBE for services to literature in 2008.

Young people and adults alike are invited to take part in a creative writing workshop with award-winning poet, writer and publisher **Anthony Anaxagorou**. Adapted from his new book *How to Write It*, he offers a masterclass in crafting poetry for all abilities.

POETRY

A selection of poetry events at the festival includes The Poetry Book Society Showcase featuring some of the most anticipated new collections of the season from poets **Nina Powles**, **Bhanu Kapil** and **Rachel Long**. There will be a screening of the BBC Arena documentary on **Tony Harrison**, *Them and Uz*, featuring new and exclusive responses from working-class writers **Degna Stone**, **Shaun Wilson**, **Jodie Russian-Red** and **Inua Ellams**.

This spring, Durham Book Festival invited contributions from the public to create a collective poem about the natural world in the time of Covid-19 and Climate Crisis. The resulting poetry film, *Murmuration*, has been drawn together by poet **Linda France** and animated by artist **Kate Sweeney**, to be released as part of the festival.

STUDIO TOURS, BIBLIOTHERAPY AND MORE

And that's not all. The digital format of Durham Book Festival 2020 has allowed the producers to create a wide range of content for everyone, whether you prefer to watch along online, download a podcast for your daily walk, or read an essay.

Go inside the studio in exclusive events with internationally-acclaimed graphic novelists **Bryan and Mary Talbot** and one of the most celebrated contemporary cartoonists, **Adrian Tomine**. Pit your literary knowledge against the **Q/Elves** from the popular television quiz show. Take part in a life writing workshop, or join in the festival's bibliotherapy sessions on Twitter with writers including **Cathy Rentzenbrink**, **Jen Campbell** and **Sara Collins**.

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Cllr Joy Allen, Durham County Council's Cabinet member for transformation, culture and tourism, said: "This year's festival line-up is truly inspirational and really does offer something for everyone.

"It is obviously a shame that we can't have physical events across County Durham this year but by moving the festival online, we can spread the joy of reading and writing to a much wider audience. We can also shine a light on the North East and showcase the tremendous literary talent that flourishes here.

"This will encourage more people to visit County Durham in the future, boosting the takings of local businesses and helping with our economic recovery."

Claire Malcolm, chief executive of New Writing North, said: "I'm incredibly proud of how the New Writing North team has risen to the challenge of creating a digital event this year. We decided early on to be positive about the opportunities that digital would offer for extending our film and audio commissioning and for producing across platforms. As always new commissions mark the festival out as unique and this year we have invested seriously in new work from both the region and internationally. It feels important to use literature as the positive connection point for people locally and to connect Durham to people across the world. We hope that our events will both delight our regular attendees and engage readers from across the globe in the work and ideas coming out of the North".

Professor Stuart Corbridge, Vice-Chancellor, Durham University, said: "At Durham University we're passionate about making literature accessible to all, so we're thrilled that the Durham Book Festival will continue in 2020 with an exciting line-up of digital events.

Though the format may be different this year, we'll still be playing our full part as a festival sponsor, with our experts delving deep into the region's literary past and sharing new and thought-provoking ideas.

There truly is something for everyone in this year's programme, so I would encourage anyone to join in and experience this unique addition to Durham's cultural calendar."

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[High res images relating to festival highlights can be found via this link](#)

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Durham Book Festival is a Durham County Council festival produced by New Writing North, which is made possible by support from partners Durham University, Arts Council England and BBC Radio Newcastle.

Free tickets for Durham Book Festival 2020 will be available to book online at www.durhambookfestival.com from 10am on Thursday 10 September.

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