

# DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

## The joy of reading: Durham Book Festival audiences and Durham residents receive an exclusive gift from Ann Cleeves

As Ann Cleeves' ninth novel in the *Vera* series, *The Darkest Evening*, hits the bookshelves this month, Durham Book Festival is offering readers a free and exclusive new story about the famed detective, as well as a free event with its author.

*Written in Blood* is a new Ann Cleeves story, penned as the Big Read title for this year's Durham Book Festival. Set in Durham City, detective Vera Stanhope is attempting to take some rare time-out at a creative writing class, but is drawn into solving a murder at the book festival.

Durham Book Festival is a Durham County Council event, produced by New Writing North and supported by Durham University, Arts Council England and BBC Radio Newcastle.

In the lead-up to Durham Book Festival, which runs 9-18 October, 4000 copies of *Written in Blood* funded by Ann's publisher Pan Macmillan will be distributed by Durham County Council through a wide network. The books will be available from libraries, community hubs, and local businesses, as well as within the prison library service and via food banks throughout the county. A grant from the County Durham Community Foundation will fund shared reading workshops themed around the book in community groups.

As well as picking up physical copies of *Written in Blood*, readers can also download a free e-book version from the Durham Book Festival website.

Ann Cleeves will then be interviewed by the broadcaster Steph McGovern for a digital book festival event, to be broadcast on Saturday 17 October. They will talk about Ann's award-winning career; how books have supported her in her own life; and why she feels reading is so vital to mental health.

Free tickets to watch the event online will be available from Thursday 10 September, when the full Durham Book Festival programme is made live at [durhambookfestival.com](http://durhambookfestival.com).

---

Commissioned by



Festival Partners



Supported using public funding by  
ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND



BBC  
NEWCASTLE

NEW WRITING  
NORTH

---

# DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

The Big Read is a long-running campaign at Durham Book Festival which celebrates the joy of reading. Previous titles have included *Brooklyn* by Colm Tóibín, *The Little Stranger* by Sarah Waters and *Northern Lights* by Philip Pullman. Each year, thousands of books are gifted to people from across County Durham, inviting them to read for pleasure and be part of a shared moment for the county.

**Claire Malcolm, Chief Executive of New Writing North said:** “The Big Read is a very special part of our programme where we invite everyone to join us in reading one special book. For many of us, reading is the most amazing passport to escapism: it costs nothing and offers complete freedom. Never have we needed books more! The Big Read is also a celebration of libraries at the heart of their communities and as the places where many of us discover we are readers. At a time when so many of us are feeling stressed and anxious due to Covid-19, we are thrilled to be working with Ann Cleeves, who is not only a fantastic writer, but has also dedicated her career to supporting reading in libraries and the community to bring us joy and support mental health.”

**Ann Cleeves said:** 'I'm delighted to be taking part in Durham Festival's Big Read, and that *Written in Blood* will go wild into the community for everyone to enjoy. In this short story, Vera is very much out of her comfort zone, advising aspiring writers as part of the Durham Book Festival. Reading fiction is a good way to lose yourself, I hope people enjoy a moment to escape into the world of Vera Stanhope!'

**Cllr Joy Allen, Durham County Council's Cabinet member for transformation, culture and tourism, said:** “The Big Read is one of the most popular parts of Durham Book Festival, as it effectively turns County Durham into one big book club, with thousands of people all reading and talking about the same novel at once. We are thrilled *Written in Blood* by Ann Cleeves is this year's chosen title. To have a book specially penned for the festival by an author who has done so much to raise the profile of our region is a great honour and I cannot wait to read it.”

Alongside the Big Read, Durham Book Festival also produces the Little Read, a picture book gifting programme which provides books, events and teaching resources to primary schools and nurseries throughout County Durham. Donations to support the Big and Little Read campaigns can be made via the Durham Book Festival website.

**Ends**

---

Commissioned by



Festival Partners



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



**BBC  
NEWCASTLE**

**NEW WRITING  
NORTH**

---

# DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

**PLEASE NOTE:** The full Durham Book Festival programme will be announced on Thursday 10 September

For all media enquiries, including interview requests and high res images, please contact Laura Fraine [laurafraine@newwritingnorth.com](mailto:laurafraine@newwritingnorth.com) 07411 164 837.

## **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.

---

Commissioned by



Festival Partners



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



**BBC  
NEWCASTLE**

**NEW WRITING  
NORTH**

---