

DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

Press release – for immediate release

Durham Book Festival makes events accessible internationally

Livestreaming and live captioning open North East's leading literary event to an international audience

Making literature accessible for both local and international audiences is at the heart of this year's Durham Book Festival.

The annual event returns from 13-16 October with headline guests including LJ Ross, Marina Hyde, Jeremy Vine, Alexander McCall Smith, Kit de Waal, Fiona Hill, Richard O'Neill, and the announcement of the Gordon Burn Prize.

Commissioned by Durham County Council and produced by New Writing North, with funding from Durham University and Arts Council England, the festival offers an array of talks, workshops, readings and performances, as well as new commissions, films, walks and networking events at Gala Durham and Clayport Library.

Uniquely among this year's literary festivals, Durham Book Festival will be livestreaming almost all its events, meaning they can be accessed from anywhere in the world. Thanks to support from Swinburne Maddison and the Boshier Hinton Foundation, it will also provide Stagertext live captions for all events, for both its in-person and digital audiences.

Access for all is at the heart of the festival's programming. Audiences can attend events remotely by livestream for £5 per household. They can access many free aspects of the programme, including receiving free books as part of the Big and Little Read initiatives; borrowing festival titles from Durham County Council libraries; and reading, watching and listening to a range of free digital content on the festival website. Disabled writers and artists are also invited to a free hybrid networking event hosted by writer and activist Lisette Auton.

Rebecca Wilkie, Durham Book Festival Director said: 'We have learned so much about festival audiences and their needs in the past two years, precipitated by the pandemic. Our audiences tell us that Durham Book Festival is a cultural highlight for

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them, whether that is meeting favourite authors, thinking deeply about important issues or finding something new – a place of discovery, empathy and joy. We want it to be a festival for everyone, so it was vital to us that, having offered a digital programme since 2020, we continue to strengthen and grow our livestream offer as we return to in-person events. Whether you are a regular attender from North East England or you are attending our livestream for the first time from anywhere in the world, we are thrilled to welcome you to the festival.'

Cllr Elizabeth Scott, Durham County Council's Cabinet member for economy and partnerships said: 'We are delighted to have been able to evolve the way we deliver Durham Book Festival so that it be accessed by a wider and more inclusive audience, raising County Durham's profile internationally as a cultural county. As one of the many eagerly-anticipated events in County Durham's cultural calendar, Durham Book Festival aims to bring people together through a shared love of literature and creativity so it is important to us that everyone has the opportunity to attend and benefit from such events. Being able to offer this festival to such a wide scale audience across many platforms demonstrates our commitment to cultural-led regeneration and cements our position as The Culture County.'

Professor Karen O'Brien, Vice-Chancellor and Warden of Durham University said: 'As an institution of learning, we're very pleased to once again be supporting Durham Book Festival. This year's programme is exciting, challenging and highly varied. I'm looking forward to joining our renowned graduate Jeremy Vine for his talk on WH Auden and dropping in to other events during the Festival too. It's excellent that New Writing North have made such efforts to make this year's Festival as accessible as possible. We share their hope that this will open up the Festival, and literature, to new and larger audiences.'

DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

FREE BOOKS FOR COUNTY DURHAM

A highlight of the festival is sure to be an event with bestselling crime writer **LJ Ross**, whose books have sold over 7 million copies worldwide. *The Mystery of the*

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Vanishing Mayor is a brand-new short story, written especially for Durham Book Festival, which is this year's Durham Book Festival Big Read. The festival has worked with Durham County Council's library service to distribute 3,000 free copies of *The Mystery of the Vanishing Mayor* throughout County Durham. LJ Ross will be appearing at Gala Durham (15 October) to talk about her career and the books that have inspired her.

The Little Read project brings picture books to life for the under 10s, sending free copies of *Polonius the Pit Pony* by **Richard O'Neill** to every primary school in County Durham. Children and families will have the chance to take part in special storytime with the internationally acclaimed storyteller and author at Clayport Library (15 October), while schools can watch Richard's specially recorded video event from the classroom.

GORDON BURN PRIZE

Celebrating bold and innovative fiction and non-fiction, the Gordon Burn Prize (13 October) is one of the UK's most anticipated literary awards with the 2022 shortlist featuring books by **Margo Jefferson**, **Graeme Macrae Burnet**, **Preti Taneja**, **David Whitehouse** and **Lea Ypi**. The event will feature readings from the shortlisted authors before the £5,000 prize is awarded to the winner.

SOCIETY AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

Durham Book Festival has always been a space for conversation, exploration and the sharing of ideas.

In *Who Are We Now?* (15 October), *New Statesman* editor **Jason Cowley** and writer **Alex Niven** will consider what it means to be a nation poised on the brink of enormous change. In *Fix the System, Not the Women*, **Laura Bates** (14 October) presents a blazing examination of the societal systems that fail to protect women, and a rallying cry for reform.

Time for some light relief? Journalist **Marina Hyde** (15 October) will delight as she slashes her way through the hellscape of politics in *What Just Happened?!*, drawn from her spectacularly funny *Guardian* columns.

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REIMAGINING THE NORTH

The North East proves fertile ground to inspire many of this year's authors. Broadcaster and writer **Jeremy Vine** (15 October), a Durham University alumnus, will talk about his love for the poet W.H. Auden and the County Durham landscapes that inspired him. Jeremy has also produced a self-guided walk exploring the North Pennines with Ruth Robson, available to download from the Durham Book Festival website.

Former presidential advisor **Dr Fiona Hill** (16 October) will share her own journey from Bishop Auckland to the US National Security Council, where she worked as a specialist in Russian affairs. **Brian Groom** (16 October) will introduce *Northerners*, his authoritative new history of place and people that lays out the dramatic events that created the North.

Elsewhere, an event and linked series of short films, **The New Great Britons** (16 October), produced with Durham University's Dr Natalie Mears, takes its inspiration from the BBC's 2002 campaign to find the Greatest Briton. Twenty years on, writers and academics will champion northern, working-class figures whose stories rarely make it into the traditional canon of 'greatness'.

FABULOUS FICTION

Calling all Agatha Christie fans! Two of the most exciting contemporary crime novelists, **Lucy Foley** and **Janice Hallett** (15 October) will be sharing their compulsive new mystery novels, *The Paris Apartment* and *The Twyford Code*. Come along and solve the mystery with fellow fans of the genre.

Milk Teeth by Sunderland-born **Jessica Andrews** and *Assembly* by **Natasha Brown** (16 October) are two of the most talked-about novels of 2022, covering themes of precarity, shame, race and class, while examining how we allow ourselves to live. While in a **Baskerville Proof Party** (16 October), readers can access an exclusive preview of two of 2023's most anticipated novels, *Speak of the Devil* by Newcastle-born **Rose Wilding** and *Needless Alley* by **Natalie Marlow**.

With his trademark wit and warmth, **Alexander McCall Smith** (14 October), will make a joyful return to Durham to celebrate a particularly prolific year which sees the

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publication of several titles, including *The Sweet Remnants of Summer*, *A Song of Comfortable Chairs*, *The Exquisite Art of Getting Even*.

MEMOIR AND NATURE WRITING

Novelist and editor **Kit de Waal** (15 October) grew up in a household of opposites. Her haphazard mother forbade Christmas and birthdays and believed the world would end in 1975. Her father sent barrels of goodies to his relatives in the Caribbean, cooked elaborate meals and splurged money they didn't have. Kit's memoir *Without Warning and Only Sometimes* is the story of an extraordinary childhood.

In New Nature Writing (16 October), non-fiction writers **Helen Mort** (*A Line Above the Sky*), **Nina Mingya Powles** (*Small Bodies of Water*) and **Amanda Thomson** (*Belonging*) discuss their latest works that combine memoir with an exploration of the natural landscape.

WRITING THE CLIMATE

Durham Book Festival producers New Writing North declared a Climate Emergency in 2019. The festival will host the book launch of *Startling* (14 October), the tenth poetry collection by New Writing North's climate writer-in-residence, **Linda France**, while audiences are invited to write and send a letter about their take on the accelerating climate and ecological crisis to whomever they wish – their MP, the CEO of Shell, their best friend or their descendants. As Linda says, 'when you write, you hold the whole world in your hands'. Clayport Library will display a selection of the **Climate Letters** during the festival.

Could the North East be the future of green energy? Scientists at Durham Energy Institute are exploring the idea that we are sitting on an unlikely resource – abandoned mines. Such mines have huge potential for decarbonising heat, and our region's historic mining infrastructure could put it at the heart of the green revolution. Find out more at **Green Energy in the North East** (15 October).

NEW COMMISSIONS

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Every year Durham Book Festival commissions new writing and during the festival will be launching a host of exclusive films and essays. The commissions will be available to watch, read and listen to throughout the festival, from Monday 10 October 2022.

Highlights include an essay on the extraordinary life of Durham-born writer **Violet Hunt**, who founded both the Women's Suffrage League and English PEN, as well as becoming a prolific writer and literary salon host. Co-commissioned by English PEN, acclaimed author and Durham University academic Naomi Booth will explore Violet's story.

Letters from the World, in which Durham Book Festival has commissioned five international writers to write a letter to the people of Durham from wherever they are in the world. **Kateryna Babkina** (Ukraine), **Oyinkan Braithwaite** (Nigeria), **Mariana Enriquez** (Argentina), **Khaled Khalifa** (Syria) and **Sang Young Park** (South Korea) will write letters on the same day from four different continents, offering a window into the lives and experiences of writers and thinkers all over the world.

Following the success of Durham Book Festival-commissioned films *Writing the Missing – The River Cycle* and *Writing the Missing – All At Sea*, Lisette Auton and Rob Irish come together for the final time in the Water Trilogy to create ***Writing the Missing – Folding Water***, pushing the creative boundaries of access, words and kindness.

Award-winning Sunderland-born writer **Jessica Andrews** has written an essay inspired by the life of Eileen O'Shaughnessy Blair, George Orwell's often overlooked first wife who was born in South Shields, which reflects on the many facets of north-eastern female identity and how it is perceived today.

Tickets are available at www.durhambookfestival.com and Gala Durham box office on 03000 266 600.

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

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For all media enquiries, including interview requests, review tickets and any other images, please contact Laura Fraine laurafraine@newwritingnorth.com 07840254153.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Durham Book Festival takes place in October 2022 at Gala Theatre and Clayport Library. Durham Book Festival is a Durham County Council event produced by New Writing North, which is made possible by support from partners Durham University, Arts Council England and BBC Newcastle.

Tickets for Durham Book Festival 2022 are on sale at www.durhambookfestival.com

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