



24-27
September
2026



events
for
all

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Francesca Del Mar
pr@marlboroughlitfest.org

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A huge thank you to our LitFest Friends and sponsors, local partners, supporters, venues and volunteers, and to all who make the festival possible. Special thanks go to our patron Sir Simon Russell Beale, to the staff of The White Horse Bookshop and to you, our audience, who welcome our authors with such warmth and enthusiasm. We are so lucky to have you and to have Marlborough as the setting for our festival.

We hope you enjoy this taster of the 40+ LitFest delights in store for September. If you'd like to know more, click on the QR code or visit our website at marlboroughlitfest.org.

Founder Sponsor: Robert Hiscox. **Main Event Sponsor:** St Mary's & St Margaret's Calne. **Event Sponsors:** Brearley & Rich; Fine & Country; Hamilton Trust; The Little Gallery; McFarlane Property; Wansbroughs

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How to book tickets

Priority booking for Friends: 29 June
General Box Office opens: 10 July

We offer a 50% discount on all ticket prices for students (aged 16+) and those in receipt of benefits.

On our website: marlboroughlitfest.org
(no booking fee, postage charged at £2.50 if required)

By telephone: **0333 6663366** Mon-Sat 9am-5pm (through TicketSource - no booking fee, postage charged at £2.50 if required)

In person: **The White Horse Bookshop, Marlborough** Mon-Sat 9am-5.30pm, Sun 11am-4pm and from the Box Office in the Town Hall over the festival weekend from 4.30pm Fri 25 September. Please note that the bookshop cannot take orders by telephone.



We do not automatically exchange or refund tickets. If we have to cancel an event, however, we will refund ticket holders. Details in the brochure are correct at the time of going to print. However, LitFest reserves the right to make changes in the event of unforeseen circumstances. Please keep an eye on our website at marlboroughlitfest.org for updates

or contact us at general@marlboroughlitfest.org if you have any queries. All events will run for approximately one hour unless stated otherwise. We welcome visitors with disabilities, and our stewards will be able to direct you to step-free access and seat you in a suitable place. Minors must be accompanied by an adult for all events.

Welcome to LitFest

We look forward to welcoming you to Marlborough for our packed four-day festival. But Marlborough LitFest is more than a weekend. As a charity, we passionately believe in the importance of bringing the best in books to Marlborough and its surrounding area throughout the year.

In this National Year of Reading, we have focused on spreading the joy of reading to as many school children as possible, inviting more than 1500 pupils to free author events in Marlborough, Pewsey, Calne and Devizes. Meanwhile, St John's Marlborough hosts a Big School Read for local secondary schools and takes part in the Sixth Form Debate (see page 4). Together with the Children's LitFest events scheduled over the festival weekend, we reach 2000 local children. None of this would

be possible without our generous supporters and volunteers.

Watching AF Steadman of Skandar series fame transfix a Town Hall full of children last year was to see the transformative power of reading – the single most important indicator of a child's future success – in action. Which is why we are proud to partner with some outstanding local schools who put reading at the heart of the curriculum. Marlborough St Mary's CE Primary School opens the festival with songs on the Town Hall steps, while St Mary's and St Margaret's Calne becomes LitFest's Main Event Sponsor for 2026.

And we're just as focused on helping adults explore reading for pleasure, creative writing and even – new for 2026 – sketchbooking (see page 4).



We'd like to involve as many people as we can, inviting you all to take part in our 2026 Big Town Read (page 45), celebrating LitFest links to the Pinned Up festival in HMP Erlestoke (page 41), and taking an author to the Jubilee Centre, Marlborough's centre for the over-60s.

So please pick up a book, enjoy, and come along to the festival to join in a weekend of bookish fun.

*Mary-Vere Parr, LitFest Chair,
and the LitFest Committee*
www.marlboroughlitfest.org



Sixth Form Debate

A-level students from St John's Marlborough battle it out in front of a public audience. Their topic is whether genre fiction is inferior to classic literature.

Town Hall

Thursday 24 September
4pm

Tickets required but free



Learn how to create an illustrated diary, scrapbook or other combination of words and images. This two-hour workshop is an introduction to the art of sketchbooking, complete with watercolour tutorial.

Designed to help us document daily life and foster our creativity, sketchbooking encourages observational skills and allows artists of all levels to experiment and create an archive of ideas without the pressure of producing a finished work of art.

Emma Leyfield (www.facebook.com/valerianstudio) is a Gloucestershire-based

Illustrated Sketchbook Workshop with Emma Leyfield

sketchbook artist, illustrator, writer and teacher, specialising in watercolours and portraiture. She is also a huge bookworm, fascinated by the magic of storytelling for children of all ages, and has just completed an MA in Children's Book Illustration at Anglia Ruskin University.



Inspired as much by the works of Shirley Hughes and Quentin Blake as the beautiful things found at home, in the garden and in nature, Leyfield's work encompasses traditional hand-drawn illustrations; ink and word drawings; pencil, ink and paint live studies; printmaking; decorated letters; and even jam labels ...

All materials supplied, including a sketchbook to take home.

White Horse Bookshop
£30

Friday 25 September
10am-noon/2-4pm

10 places each



Photo © Katrin Hochberg

Minette Batters & Helen Browning

My Farming Life

What a privilege to have two titans of agriculture, both women, both from Wiltshire, together on stage sharing their stories.

Helen Browning OBE has farmed Eastbrook Farm at Bishopstone since taking over from her father in 1986, aged 24. She is CEO of the Soil Association and has pioneered organic farming methods throughout her career.

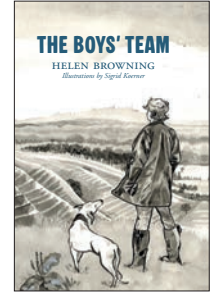
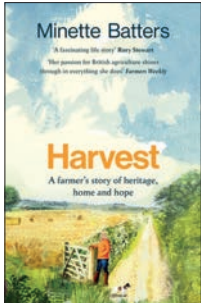
Baroness Minette Batters took on Barford Park Farm, near Salisbury, in 1998, despite her father's warning that there was no future in farming. She became the first female NFU president, serving from 2018 to 2024. Last year,

she published the Farming Profitability Review, calling for a National Plan for Farming.

Browning's *The Boys' Team* is an unflinchingly honest coming-of-age account that reveals the private face behind the public persona.

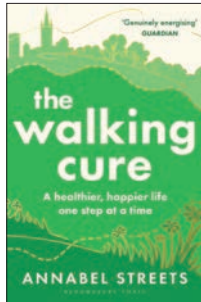
Batters' *Harvest* blends memoir with manifesto: having seen Brexit, Covid and international conflict push farms and food production to a state of crisis, who better to understand how British farming really works?

The authors will be in conversation with Farmers Weekly deputy editor Abi Kay.



Annabel Streets

Wootton Rivers Walk



Join Annabel Streets, bestselling author of *52 Ways to Walk: The Surprising Science of Walking for Wellness and Joy*, on a Wootton Rivers ramble.

In her new book, *The Walking Cure*, a Waterstones Book of the Month, Streets blends personal experience with practical tips and scientific research to demonstrate how the right place, walked at the right time, can heal, energise, restore and inspire.

“How we move, the direction of our movement, even the timing of it, subtly and biochemically alters us,” she says. “But so does the landscape through which we walk.” Together, they produce a heady cocktail of life-enhancing chemicals known as ‘hope molecules’.



Photo © Aaron Hargreaves

The walk round Wootton Rivers features many of the 20 landscape types discussed in Streets’ book: rolling hills, open farmland, meadows, gardens, cemeteries, leafy lanes and canal towpaths.

Head for the hills, Streets suggests, to relieve headaches and eyestrain, lower stress by striding out on a footpath over farmland, tramp leafy

lanes for a sense of purpose and companionship, and find both rest and literary inspiration following a canal towpath.

Poet and former National Canal Laureate Roy McFarlane will be joining the walk and running a workshop on the Poetics of Water on Saturday 26 September, 2.30–5pm (see page 11).



Tim Kendall

William Golding: The Faber Letters

In this special event to celebrate the publication of **William Golding: The Faber Letters**, editor Tim Kendall, Professor of English Literature at Exeter University, is in conversation with Judy Carver, William Golding's daughter, and Dr Nicola Presley from William Golding Limited.

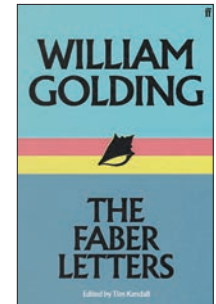
Charles Monteith was a young editor at Faber when he rescued William

Golding's *Strangers from Within* from the slush pile. What followed was an extraordinary relationship that shaped what we know today as *Lord of the Flies* into a bestselling novel and turned an unknown middle-aged schoolmaster into a knighted Nobel Prize winner.

In this beautifully produced, expertly annotated volume, Kendall draws on both public and private archives to trace a 40-year relationship, casting light as much on the role of the London editor as the developing author: the minutiae – the coaxing, contracts and deadlines – as well as the mentoring.

It also charts a mutually rewarding friendship between two men who both considered themselves outsiders. The letters progress from "Dear Monteith" and "Dear Golding" to "Dear Charles" and "Dear Bill," and cover gossip as much as Golding's dreadful spelling and appalling choice of titles.

William Golding Limited is sponsoring this year's Golding Speaker, Sebastian Faulks (see page 9).





Jeremy Hunt

Can We Be Rich Again? The Surprising Potential of Britain's Economy



You might not think that a book about our nation's economy could make for happy reading. In recent years a succession of economic shocks have led to low growth, stagnant living standards and divided politics. As debt and taxes have risen to record levels, many worry that the UK economy is stuck in a low-growth trap, with ruinous implications for future generations. But Jeremy Hunt, the Conservative MP who served as health

secretary, foreign secretary and, crucially, as chancellor, believes that it's not all bad.

In his new book, *Can We Be Rich Again?*, he argues that, despite widespread pessimism, Britain still has a lot going for it – we have the third largest technology ecosystem in the world, a huge financial services sector and globally admired universities. What's more, he believes, the solutions to our economic malaise are in plain sight if we are willing to learn from what works elsewhere.

Can We Be Rich Again? sets out a credible case for optimism for Britain's economic future, and a roadmap of how we might get there. In the words of Andy Haldane, former chief economist at the Bank of England, it's "an optimistic, can-do, compelling account of how Britain's vast potential can be uncorked."



William Golding
William Golding

Sebastian Faulks Farewell to Eden

Marlborough LitFest hosts an annual Golding Speaker to highlight the town's long connection with the Nobel Laureate and Booker Prize winner, William Golding, at an event sponsored by William Golding Limited.

Sebastian Faulks, this year's Golding Speaker, needs little introduction. The bestselling author of more than 20 books, including *Birdsong*, *Charlotte Gray* and *Engleby*, he is one of Britain's most successful writers.

In *Farewell to Eden*, his new novel, Faulks tells the story of Philip Deval, a soldier who arrives in Palestine on a peace-keeping mission in the final days of the British Mandate. Years later, we find Philip teaching at a school in the English countryside, where he meets an enigmatic music mistress. They grow close, but Philip is a changed man. He must confront the secrets and scars of all he has lived through – which threaten to upend his future.

Billed as a sweeping and profound novel about faith in all its forms, *Farewell to Eden* paints a rich portrait of an embattled postwar Britain and asks the question: 'How, after great



suffering, do we retain our humanity and learn to love again?'

Faulks was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1993 and appointed CBE for services to literature in 2002.

Sebastian Faulks will be in conversation with writer and interviewer Rebecca Fletcher.

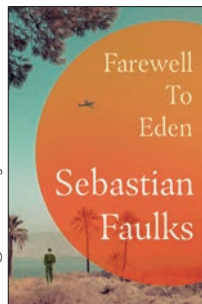


Photo © Still Moving



Saturday 26 September

1-4pm **STORY-THEMED CRAFT**

ACTIVITIES with Aldbourne

Children's Book Group **Age 4+**

The Parade Cinema Free

3pm **STORYTELLING** **Age 3+**

The Parade Cinema Free

4pm **CHLOE DALTON, RAISING**

HARE new children's edition (see page 23)



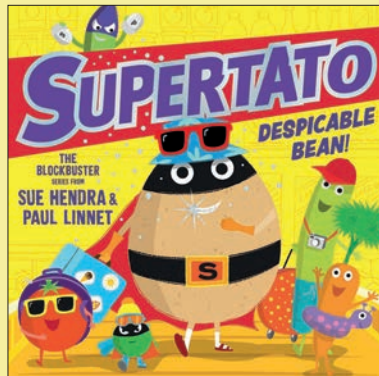
Pre-Festival Events

Before the festival weekend, enjoy spotting our **Once Upon a Trail** books hidden in shop windows along the High Street **18-27 September** or take part in a free music and theatre performance for young families from **Tall Tales Theatre** in Pewsey (10am) and Marlborough (1pm) libraries **19 September**.

Sue Hendra Supertato

Sue Hendra and partner, Paul Linnet, are co-creators of the bestselling *Supertato* picture books which feature steadfast spud, Supertato, and his valiant veggie friends in their hilarious and epic battles against Evil Pea.

We are delighted to welcome Sue to Marlborough LitFest to celebrate the nation's favourite supermarket



superhero. This popular series of books has been adapted for TV, on BBC iPlayer and CBeebies, and is perfect for young readers who love plenty of madcap heroics! Sue's event promises giggles galore in a veggie-venture for the whole family. There'll be stories, capers and, even better, everyone gets to make their own veggie superhero to take home. After this, the vegetable aisle in your local supermarket will never be the same ...

White Horse Bookshop
£6.50

Saturday 26 September
10am

Age 4-7

For Writers

The Poetics of Water: Poetry Workshop with Roy McFarlane



Join poet, playwright and writer Roy McFarlane for an afternoon exploring how poets write about water in its many forms: seas, rivers, lakes and canals. As National Canal Laureate 2022–25, McFarlane explored the nature and history of the UK canal network, creating

collaborative work with current canal users.

The workshop will explore the myths, journeys, personal experiences, emotions and stories linked to poetic descriptions of water and will encourage you to find your own poetic voice.

McFarlane's new book *The Way of the Poet* is a journal following daily life in creative practice, full of guidance, encouragement and reflections on writing. He will also be joining Annabel Streets on her walk in Wootton Rivers on Friday 25 September (see page 6).



Poetry in the Pub

Join Alex Hickman, writer and poet, at the Green Dragon for our open mic poetry event. All poets of any age are welcome to pop by with poems inspired by this year's National Poetry Day theme of 'Wonder' or other subjects. Poems submitted in advance to general@marlboroughlitfest.org will be read first. Alex has run our Poetry in the Pub sessions for many years and blogs at hickmanalex.substack.com.

Prose in the Pub

Join Marlborough Writers at their second prose-aloud event – a new LitFest tradition dating from 2025! Read your piece of up to 500 words in any genre before a friendly audience, or listen to local writers share their work. To join an informal workshopping session, please see marlboroughwriters.uk or email kyra.edgington@gmail.com.

Quaker Meeting House
£30
Saturday 26 September
2.30–5pm
Limited places

The Green Dragon
Saturday 26 September
5pm
Tickets not required

The Green Dragon
Saturday 26 September
6pm
Tickets not required



Sherin Aminossehe

200 Years of Britain's Railways in 14 Journeys

All aboard for a tour of the most breathtaking stations, bridges, and other rail structures across Great Britain.

When the world's first public railway, the Stockton & Darlington Railway, opened in 1825, it marked the start of rail travel in Britain and around the world. Over the following two centuries the network expanded across the country and led to the construction of some of the most spectacular examples of British architecture and engineering.

In her captivating book, *200 Years of Britain's Railways*, Sherin Aminossehe invites the reader to join her on 14 highly illustrated journeys. Passing through stations as far afield as St Ives, Pitlochry, Barmouth and Newcastle, along the way there are bridges and

viaducts to traverse, architectural delights – from signal boxes to station clocks – to admire, and a whole host of people to meet, from George Stevenson to Philip Larkin.

Packed with Aminossehe's stunning illustrations, this is an excursion that travel, history and architecture enthusiasts alike will not want to miss.

Aminossehe moved from Iran to England as a child, training as an architect. She is now the Ministry of Defence's first director of infrastructure.





Anthony Seldon

Sunak at 10

to mention wars in Ukraine and Gaza. And then there was the Rwanda asylum plan ... No surprise, perhaps, that his election defeat was so emphatic. But how did it all go wrong so quickly, following Boris Johnson's record victory in 2019?

To make sense of such turbulent times requires a calm, erudite head. Step forward Sir Anthony Seldon, educator, writer and historian, who has written more than 50 books of recent history, including definitive accounts of every prime minister since John Major. In ***Sunak at 10***, Seldon draws on his unique access and impeccable sources to write about Sunak's premiership. He is, as the Guardian says, "the leading authority on our contemporary prime ministers."



The July 2024 general election was a disaster for the Conservative Party. After almost 15 years in power, the Tories suffered their worst-ever defeat. And at the helm was Rishi Sunak, the former chancellor, best known for his furlough and Eat Out to Help Out schemes during Covid.

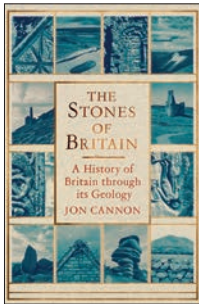
Sunak lasted two years as prime minister – a lot longer than his predecessor, Liz Truss, who was in Number 10 for a mere 49 days.

Sunak's first job was to calm the markets, before wrestling with energy and cost-of-living crises, not



Jon Cannon

The Stones of Britain: A History of Britain through its Geology



Art historian, author, teacher, raconteur: Jon Cannon was a man who lived to communicate. Whether it was in person, on the airwaves or through his many books, he was a natural. He described himself as an 'extollager', someone who relished passionately both the study and communication of a subject.

His death three years ago at the age of 60 has deprived his many fans of his oral erudition and humour, yet his books speak to us still, none more so than the one on which he was working until the end – ***The Stones of Britain***.

Yes, this is a definitive guide to the rocks and soil that have created our islands, but it is so much more – a visceral account of how those stones have shaped our landscapes, our towns, our buildings, our very beings.



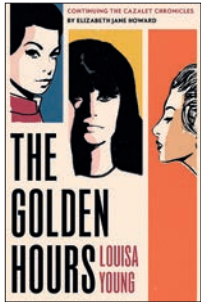
Discussing the book will be Liu Hong Cannon, Jon's widow. Her preface to ***The Stones of Britain*** is a testament to her love – of Jon, and of his passion for what makes us who we are.

Liu Hong Cannon will be in conversation with the Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle, Dean of Westminster. The event will be chaired by the Right Reverend Dr Andrew Rumsey, Bishop of St Albans.



Louisa Young

The Golden Hours



"The Cazalets live again, summoned into being by the surest and cleverest of authors," trumpets novelist Elizabeth Buchan.

Louisa Young picks up the mantle of the much-loved, five-volume Cazalet Chronicles from 'Aunt Jane'. In 2013, Elizabeth Jane Howard waved off her cast of familiar characters at the end of a 1950s family Christmas in *All Change*. What a joy then to meet them all again on Christmas Eve of 1962 in Young's *The Golden Hours*, the first of a new Cazalet trilogy.

The family pile has changed: a crumbling stately home in Norfolk replaces the beloved Home Place in Sussex. Gone too is the family timber firm and much of the family's wealth. But the cast list remains, as the old guard and order give way to middle-aged children and their brood navigating the Swinging Sixties.

Photo © Julian Calder



With 12 novels already to her name, including the award-winning *My Dear I Wanted to Tell You* trilogy, Young captures Howard's spirit while taking the family saga on with her own pace, imaginative energy and emotional conviction. With "so much life still to live," she says, and "important matters of unfinished business ... the story is just not over."





Photo © Sarah McKenna-Ayres

Michael Pugh

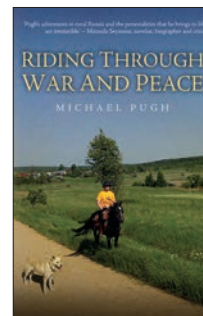
Riding Through War and Peace

leave the slow way, travelling west on horseback through a bucolic Russian landscape of wildflower meadows, visiting monasteries, Tolstoyan battle sites and forgotten aristocratic estates.

Arriving in Belarus, he swaps his Kabardin steed Parliament for Marlboro, a stallion with a nose for adventure. At midsummer he experiences fire, dancing and song at the festival of Kupala, and, riding on, he explores the vanished lives of the Poles and the Jews. Despite dark warnings about Ukraine, Michael finds there a welcoming people, fiercely proud to defend their beautiful country from Russia. Finally, he navigates the complex legacy of Austria-Hungary in Romania.

Throughout, his journey is lifted by the antics of horses and guides, the kindness of strangers and friends and great quantities of delicious food and fiery moonshine.

Likened to Patrick Leigh Fermor, Pugh is a lawyer, academic and founder of the Llangwm Literary Festival. He first visited Moscow as a student in 1992.



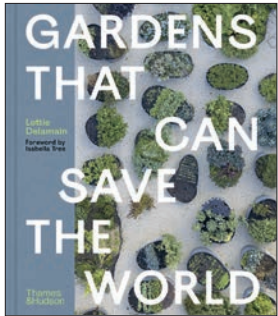
White Horse Bookshop
£13
Saturday 26 September
11.30am

It's hard not to love an author whose bio reads, "Michael ... spent six years as a partner for Hogan Lovells in Moscow before leaving by horse."

In summer 2014, after the Russian seizure of Crimea, Michael Pugh decides it's time to leave the splendour of his life as an expat lawyer in Moscow. But he chooses to

Lottie Delamain

Gardens That Can Save the World



With the world warming, prices soaring and crises all around, it's easy to feel powerless in our everyday lives. But what if the solutions to many of these problems could be found simply by going outside?

Bringing together the galvanizing stories of 65 projects – big and small and from around the world – that revolve around plants, Lottie Delamain's uplifting and inspirational new book ***Gardens That Can Save the World*** reveals how small changes can have a big impact.

From learning how to repair damaged soil to discovering how gardens can nourish our bodies and minds, from understanding how gardens can

empower struggling communities to meeting those reimagining neglected landscapes, this beautifully illustrated book reveals how people from all walks of life are harnessing nature to right the planet's wrongs.

Whether you have a large garden or a couple of pot plants, join us to discover how you can play your part.

Delamain is an RHS Chelsea award-winning garden designer. She trained at the Incbald School of Design and has worked on gardens around the UK. She is a trustee of We Are Grow, a charity working with schools and communities to deliver programmes in sustainable food growing and outdoor learning.

Photo © Dave Watts





Photo © Neil Goodwin

Nicholas Fogg

The Tudor Theatre: 1576-1642

Mention the golden age of Tudor theatre and we think of Christopher Marlowe, James Burbage, Ben Jonson, and, of course, William Shakespeare. But there was so much more to an era that marked the birth of professional, purpose-built theatres in England – a thriving thespian scene full of personalities and rivalries that was eventually shut down by the Puritans.

Shakespeare expert Nicholas Fogg shines new light on this fascinating period in *The Tudor Theatre*. And it's quite the local production. Fogg has been Marlborough's mayor three times and the book features a preface by Sir Simon Russell Beale, our very own LitFest patron.

Drawing on contemporary records, Fogg recounts the epic and often tumultuous story of those years, including how Alleyn's Admiral's Men put on 105 performances in four months in 1594 – 17 different plays, eight of which were new.

As Fogg says, in 1576 a young man could have seen the first performance at James Burbage's The Theatre – the first space dedicated to drama in England since Roman times – and, as an old man, attended the last performance at the Globe 60 years later. At its heart, Tudor theatre was created by the people for the people – and it continues to speak to us today.

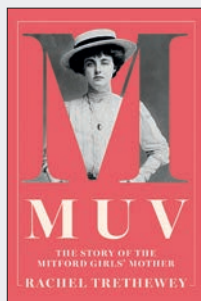


White Horse Bookshop
£13

Saturday 26 September
1pm

Rachel Trethewey

Muv: The Story of the Mitford Girls' Mother



The trials, tribulations and escapades of the Mitford girls – Nancy, Pamela, Diana, Unity, Jessica, and Deborah – have been the subject of great fascination and scrutiny over the past century or so, but what of their mother, Sydney, Lady Redesdale, whose life was in many ways just as controversial, tempestuous and tragic as theirs?

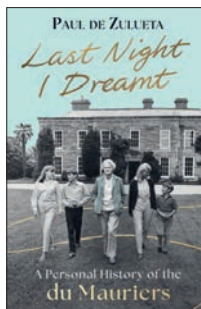
Sydney was the daughter of magazine proprietor and politician Thomas Gibson Bowles, who founded *The Lady* magazine, and Jessica Evans-Gordon, who died when Sydney was seven. In this “intriguing and informative” (Nicky Haslam, *The Oldie*) biography, Rachel Trethewey paints a vivid portrait of the life of a fascinating, complex and divisive woman, and examines how her

life experiences impacted – both positively and negatively – on the lives of her daughters.

Muv: The Story of the Mitford Girls' Mother offers a wealth of new information about the Mitfords, including from unpublished sources and conversations with Lady Redesdale's descendants, and is a must-read for any Mitford fan.

Trethewey is the author of six books, including *The Churchill Girls*, and received the Antonia Fraser Grant from the Society of Authors for *Mothers of the Mind*.





Paul de Zulueta

Last Night I Dreamt: A Personal History of the du Mauriers



Once in a generation, a book comes along that changes our cultural landscape. *Rebecca*, by Daphne du Maurier, became an instant bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic when it

was published in 1938. The book has never been out of print since. Ditto *Jamaica Inn* and *Frenchman's Creek*. But what of the author herself? Was she as reclusive as people have claimed?

Born into a famous artistic dynasty, du Maurier moved to Cornwall with her husband and three children in 1943, having holidayed there as a child. She was determined to be an author at a time when women of her class were not expected to pursue a career. And now her grandson, Paul de Zulueta, has written an intimate family biography, drawing on archives and new interviews, as well as his own memories of his grandmother.

Last Night I Dreamt explores how Daphne's turbulent personal life – spanning war, affairs, a marriage to

a famous but damaged general, and unrequited love – inspired her writing. It also uncovers the influence of her forebears, in particular her domineering father Gerald, the most famous actor-manager of his generation.

The result is a moving portrait of one of the great British artistic families, written with unique insight and emotional candour.





Photo © Buster-Grey Jung

Zakia Sewell

Finding Albion: Myth, Folklore and the Quest for a Hidden Britain

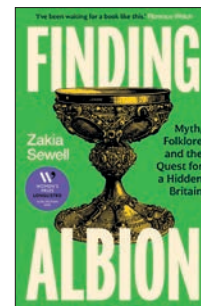
Zakia Sewell is on a quest to find another Britain – one that shuns divisive flag waving and anti-immigration rhetoric. Traversing the length and breadth of our island, via, among other places, Carmarthenshire, the Inner Hebrides and the Notting Hill Carnival, she's in search of a more honest national identity that challenges tired narratives of empire and reconnects us with a deeper past.

She discovers it in folk songs, ancient legends and the mystic stone circles that punctuate our landscape. *Finding Albion* follows the Wheel of the Year, a pagan way to chart the changing seasons. Her journey begins as the sun rises on one spring equinox over Glastonbury Tor and ends on spring

equinox a year later here in Wiltshire at Stonehenge.

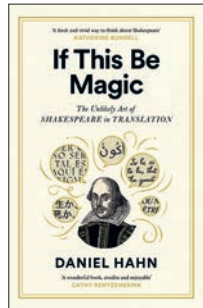
Building on *My Albion*, her BBC Radio 4 series, the book explores whether she can truly belong in Britain – her father's family line stretches back to tin-mining stock in Cornwall, her mother's to the tiny Caribbean island of Carriacou. It's an uplifting mission that heralds the promise of a brighter future. "We are in dire need of different stories about Britain," she says. And like William Blake, she believes that the spirit of Albion will rise again.

Zakia Sewell will be in conversation with Bishop Andrew Rumsey.



Daniel Hahn

If This Be Magic: The Unlikely Art of Shakespeare in Translation



Award-winning translator, author, editor and lifelong Shakespeare enthusiast Daniel Hahn will engage and entertain us with *If This Be Magic*, his fascinating exploration of what it means to translate one of the greatest writers in the English language. Hahn will be familiar to regular LitFest audiences as host of our popular Translation Duel since 2017 (see page 26).

Why might *Hamlet* be even longer in Italian? How does *Romeo and Juliet* begin in Thai? How do you build a joke in German, or recreate a rhyme in Japanese – and why are Lady Macbeth's pronouns such a challenge? When every line of poetry, every pun, every rhythm and structure is transformed – in fact, when every word is changed! –

is it still Shakespeare? And is it still any good?

Drawing on examples from across Shakespeare's plays and from languages across the globe, Hahn will reveal how translators choose their words, what might be lost or gained, and how meaning shifts in surprising ways. Witty, insightful and deeply engaging, join Hahn as he revels in creativity and the power of words.

Daniel Hahn's translations include novels from a dozen countries, as well as short fiction, non-fiction, children's books and plays. He is the author of *Catching Fire: A Translation Diary* and the editor of a new edition of *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*.



Photo © Camilla França Photography

Chloe Dalton Raising Hare, new children's edition

We're delighted to welcome Chloe Dalton back to LitFest to introduce the children's edition of *Raising Hare* at a special family event.

In 2024, a lucky few gathered in The White Horse Bookshop to hear Dalton talk, for the first time at a literary festival, about her experience of nurturing a baby hare. During lockdown in 2020, confined to her rural home, Dalton came across an abandoned leveret. *Raising Hare* is her account of looking after this elusive animal and the incredible bond they formed. She and the hare (known as Hare) cautiously feel their way to a place of trust and eventually Hare comes and goes as she pleases, living a semi-wild existence between Dalton's home and the surrounding countryside.



Photo © Fisher Studios



The rest of the story is history: *Raising Hare* was an immediate hit, catapulting Dalton from foreign policy specialist to international bestselling author. "A great and important tale for our times," declared Michael Morpurgo. "A simply wonderful story, profoundly beautiful," agreed Chris Packham. It won the 2025 Wainwright Prize for Nature Writing and was

shortlisted for the 2025 Women's Prize for Non-Fiction.

Dalton will talk about this beautifully illustrated edition of *Raising Hare*, which is aimed at children aged 8–12, and will share fascinating facts about hares to inspire curious minds of all ages about the natural world.



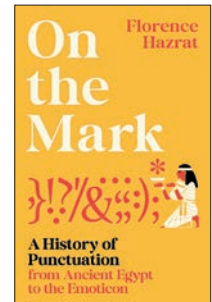


Florence Hazrat

On the Mark: A History of Punctuation from Ancient Egypt to the Emoticon

cultures and provides a history of humankind. Join Hazrat for an entertaining and enlightening journey across the world and through the evolution of language – from ancient Egypt to the latest emojis – to celebrate the silent marks that infuse our words with meaning and shape our literary cultures. Along the way, meet the people who, over the centuries, have made punctuation what it is and discover how the tiniest of symbols have moved markets, shifted elections, toppled political systems and decided the fate of a human life on death row.

Masterfully weaving together anthropology, the history of writing, the philosophy of language, psychology, literature and more, **On the Mark** shows how punctuation is at the heart of human communication.



What was the first punctuation mark? When and why did we start leaving gaps between words? What was the point of the percontation point (‡)? Where did the pilcrow ¶ originate?

While most of us have likely not stopped to consider where the punctuation marks that pepper our everyday language originated, for writer, researcher and educator Florence Hazrat those very same dots, dashes and symbols are an obsession. For her, they tell a fascinating story which spans ages and





Five years ago, the travel writer Rory MacLean lost his wife, Katrin. She was 55 and they had been married for 32 years. Katrin had been his first reader, accompanying him on numerous trips, including from Berlin to Moscow after the fall of the Wall – the subject of *Stalin's Nose*, his bestselling debut. He couldn't imagine life without her.

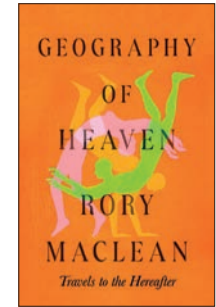
Rory MacLean

Geography of Heaven: Travels to the Hereafter

To try to make sense of this loss, MacLean set out in search of where she had gone. A rationalist with a "wishy-washy" faith at best, he had been surprisingly moved by a single ray of sunshine that had fallen on his wife's ashes in a churchyard. Could there be an afterlife? A place where love endured?

Over the next few years, he travelled the globe in search of sacred places where the veil between life and death is thin, a journey which he captures in his profoundly moving, genre-bending new book, ***Geography of Heaven: Travels to the Hereafter***.

"Five years ago," he writes, "I would never have believed that this inexplicable enterprise could guide me out of the darkness. To understand that none of us are created for naught."



Translation Duel

Monolok by Paweł Soltys



For the first time, and in a new extended format, LitFest's popular translation duel takes on Polish, as translators Antonia Lloyd-Jones and Anna Zaranko tackle an excerpt from writer, vocalist and songwriter Paweł Soltys' new book.

Antonia Lloyd-Jones has translated works by Poland's leading contemporary novelists and reportage authors, as well as classics, biographies, essays, crime fiction, poetry and children's books. Her

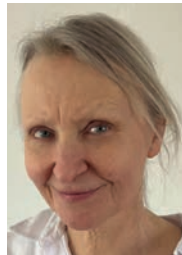


translation of *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* by 2018 Nobel Prize laureate Olga Tokarczuk was shortlisted for the 2019 Man



Photo © Zajęcie Monika Soltys

Booker International Prize. A former mentor for the Emerging Translators' Mentorship Programme and co-chair of the UK Translators Association, she is compiler and co-translator of *The Penguin Book of Polish Short Stories*.



Anna Zaranko has translated a variety of works from Polish, ranging from novels and short stories to poetry, historical essays, literary criticism

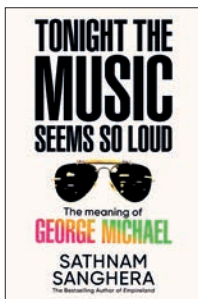
and diaries. Her translations of the 19th-century classic *The Peasants* by Władysław Reymont and the 1960s novella *The Memoir of an Anti-Hero* by Kornel Filipowicz received the Found in Translation Award.

Presided over by translator, editor and author Daniel Hahn, this event is a treat for all lovers of language and close reading. Catch Daniel Hahn talking about his new book, *If This Be Magic: The Unlikely Art of Shakespeare in Translation*, at The White Horse Bookshop, Saturday 26 September, 2.30pm (see page 22).



Sathnam Sanghera

Tonight the Music Seems so Loud: The Meaning of George Michael



George Michael wrote 'Last Christmas', one of the biggest hits of our age, in his childhood bedroom in about an hour, and with his best friend Andrew Ridgeley he founded Wham!, one of the defining bands of the 1980s. As a solo artist, he would go on to collaborate with some of the greatest musicians of all time, and ten years after his tragic death on Christmas Day 2016, his legacy is still writ large across British culture.

Sathnam Sanghera returns to LitFest in 2026 to talk about his new book, ***Tonight the Music Seems so Loud: The Meaning of George Michael***, an in-depth portrait of one of Britain's best-loved musicians, a songwriter whose talent was perhaps only fully acknowledged after his death.

Guiding us through George Michael's complex personal story – his music, life and legacy –



Sanghera explores issues of fame, sexuality, identity, immigration and belonging. ***Tonight the Music Seems so Loud*** captures one of Britain's greatest artists in all his glory.

Sanghera is an award-winning author and journalist, whose books include *Empireland*, *Stolen History*, *The Boy with the Topknot* and *Marriage Material*.

Sathnam Sanghera will be in conversation with writer and interviewer Rebecca Fletcher.





Founder sponsor
Robert Hiscox

Adam Hart Operation Pimento

continue the fight against the Nazis. He duly embarked on a perilous, 108-day journey across Europe, hiding in the attic of a brothel, a Frenchwoman's chimney and a Spanish prison cell.

In *Operation Pimento*, Hart retraces Frank's emotional steps back to the UK, encountering descendants of those who'd risked their lives to help his great-grandfather. "While Frank's journey was heroic, my journey taught me the ordinary civilians in France and Spain were the true heroes," Hart says. "They risked torture and execution at the hands of the Nazis to help Frank. When I met the descendants of these people, they shook my hand and even cried in front of me."

On 14 August 1943, Frank Griffiths took off in a Halifax bomber from RAF Tempsford, the SOE's 'Special Duty' airbase in Bedfordshire. Frank and his crew were on a daring midnight mission codenamed Operation Pimento, and he had an awful sense of foreboding. Five hours later, the plane was shot down near Anney in south-east France. Five civilians were

killed on the ground and six crew died. Only Frank survived.

Wind forward 80 years and Frank's great-grandson, Adam Hart, has pieced together what happened that fateful night – and in the months afterwards. For despite being seriously injured, Frank was determined to return to England to

White Horse Bookshop
£13
Saturday 26 September
5.30pm



Andrew Rumsey

Blank Arcades

Introduced by author and journalist Jon Stock

Over the past few years, Andrew, an acclaimed singer-songwriter, has released three albums of original folk songs, each one recorded on a single summer's day in historic Wiltshire churches: *Evensongs* (2023), *Collodion* (2025) and *Blank Arcades* (2026). Fans of his music include Mark Radcliffe, who has featured the albums on his BBC Radio 2 Folk Show.



Musician, author, Anglican, Andrew Rumsey has lived and worked in Wiltshire since 2011 as Bishop of Ramsbury, an ancient role with roots in Anglo-Saxon England. He is also the Church of England's national lead for church buildings and cathedrals. In September he begins a new role as Bishop of St Albans, but he will be returning to Marlborough for a farewell evening of words and music.

Andrew is a natural wordsmith, his lyrics moving effortlessly from the quirky to the sublime. 'Fastest in the Slow Lane' is a paean to the tortoise, and, in 'Trebarwith Strand', he observes, "some will abandon all they planned to watch the tide pull back the land." Elsewhere, the rhyming is exquisite too: "Lazarus" and "dazzle us" anyone? No surprise he's also written three books, which celebrate faith, place and landscape. Prepare for a joyful night of songs, wit and erudition.

Town Hall
£16
Saturday 26 September
7pm

White Horse Bookshop
 Sunday 27 September
 10am
 Free but tickets required
 Age 3+



Sunday 27 September
 10am **LIZZIE LEWIS** of **TALL TALES**
THEATRE performs a family
 theatre event.

Outreach to Schools
 This is an important part of LitFest, funded by donations and ticket sales. We strongly believe that meeting authors and finding out about the process of writing books inspires children to read and write for themselves. This year, Maz Evans, Ross Montgomery, Emily Randall-Jones and Onjali Q Rauf will share their stories with 1500 primary schoolchildren in Marlborough, Pewsey, Calne and Devizes.

Once again we are running a primary schools' writing competition during the summer term, with the theme **'What I like to read and where I like to read it'**. Winning entries will be on display in the Town Hall during LitFest weekend. For secondary pupils, St John's Marlborough hosts The Big School Read with Crookhaven author JJ Arcanjo.



Kev F Sutherland Comic Artist

Comics have an enduring appeal for children and adults, with their combination of great storytelling and dynamic graphics immersing the reader in fantastical worlds. Kev F Sutherland, known as Kev F, is a renowned comic writer, performer and artist whose portfolio includes comic giants like The Beano. He's also written a series of graphic novels based on Shakespeare's plays but with a twist, including *Midsummer Night's Dream Team*.

Kev F has presented his Comic Art Masterclasses at the Royal Academy of Arts and takes them

on tour to schools, colleges and festivals countrywide and abroad. His hands-on workshops for LitFest are perfect for aspiring artists, storytellers or anyone curious about the world of comics. They'll be action-packed, full of tips and tricks of the trade and participants will create their very own comic strip.

White Horse Bookshop
 £6.50
 Sunday 27 September
 11.30am & 1pm
 Age 7+

Frank Tallis

Wise: Finding Purpose, Meaning and Wisdom Beyond the Midpoint of Life

How should we age wisely? Is it possible to remain psychologically healthy, given the daunting challenges of later life? Accumulated regrets, bereavement, disappointments, physical deterioration – and the big one: our mortality. We are, after all, living longer than ever, thanks to medical advances.

Frank Tallis, acclaimed author and clinical psychologist, offers reassuring answers in his new book **Wise**. In it he explains how we can embrace the inevitability of death, even if our brains are hard-wired to resist it. Tallis, 67, urges us to make the most of the time we have left. A midlife crisis for some, an opportunity for the wise.

Intriguingly, the greatest philosophers and psychologists, from ancient Greece to the 21st century, concur in their advice. We have a



single task to accomplish: wholeness. Benefits such as better decision making will flow in the second chapter of life once mind and body, past and present, rationality and intuition – the polarities within the self – are fully integrated. The key to a greater sense of ease is self-awareness. “There is an enormous emphasis at the moment on the young,” Tallis says. With **Wise**, he says he “just wanted to redress the balance.”

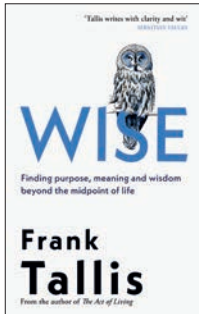




Photo © Marc Sethi

Authors' Circle
Kay Newman

Benjamin Wood

Seascraper

"Benjamin Wood is one of the finest British novelists of his generation, but you've probably never heard of him," declares Johanna Thomas-Corr, chief literary critic for *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*.

After four award-shortlisted novels, this must surely change with ***Seascraper***, winner of the 2025 Nero Book Award for Fiction.

In this "fiercely atmospheric" novel, Wood returns to his Southport hometown to tell the story of Thomas, a 20-year-old shanker who spends his days with a horse and cart scraping for shrimp on the fictional Longferry beach. He's a frustrated folk musician, lives with his flirtatious mother and secretly pines for Joan who works in the Post Office. Into Thomas's fog-bound world walks an enigmatic

stranger, promising Hollywood glamour beyond the dreams of daily drudgery.

Wood is a master of weaving psychological suspense into tales so precisely observed they feel real. Indeed, there may be something of the author in the depiction of a frustrated teenage singer-songwriter. Listen out for Wood singing as Thomas in the audio version of ***Seascraper***.

A senior lecturer in creative writing at King's College London, Wood supervised Helen Bain's PhD on the poet Sylvia Plath. Bain will be talking about the resulting novel, *Daffodil Days*, as one of this year's Hiscox Debut Authors (see page 34).



Historian and bestselling author Guy Walters brings to life one of the most dramatic and little-known stories of the Second World War in ***Stealing Hitler's Rocket***.

As Nazi Germany collapsed in 1945, a secret race began among the Allies to seize the revolutionary V2 rocket – the world's first ballistic missile, standing as tall as a

Guy Walters Stealing Hitler's Rocket

four-storey building – along with the scientists and knowledge behind it. While the American programme is well known, Walters reveals the crucial and often overlooked role played by Britain in capturing, testing and understanding this extraordinary technology.

At the heart of the story is Operation Backfire, when British teams painstakingly reconstructed and launched V2 rockets from the ruins of Germany, unlocking secrets that would shape the future of warfare, the Cold War, and even the space age. Drawing on vivid accounts and meticulous research, Walters explores not only the technological breakthrough but also the moral complexities of exploiting innovations born from war and human suffering.

Walters will discuss the gripping story behind ***Stealing Hitler's Rocket***, shedding new light on Britain's part in the origins of modern rocketry and the geopolitical struggles that followed.



Town Hall
£13

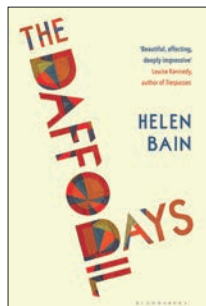
Sunday 27 September
11.30am

Founder Sponsor
Robert Hiscox

Helen Bain and Sara Bayat Hiscox Debut Authors



Photo © Sarah Weal



Daffodil Days is Helen Bain's fictional account of Sylvia Plath's life in North Tawton, Devon, from July 1961 to February 1963. Refracted through the voices of the townspeople who encounter Plath, Bain builds a layered portrait of the poet – contradictory, unstable, unexpected – raising questions about the fluctuating nature of identity and the complexities surrounding fact and truth in biography.

This “deeply researched and utterly convincing” debut, “its prose supple and intelligent” (The Guardian) brings to life not only Plath and Ted Hughes’s disintegrating marriage but also the world around them.

In *Hesket: A Norfolk Haunting*, Sara Bayat

similarly summons a rural community through the voices of eight characters, each contending with a personal loss. Beneath the façade of an unremarkable place and unremarkable lives lies a dark history – centuries-old tales of witch trials and death – which breaks through the surface calm as a local wood is earmarked for development. Merging evocative descriptions of the countryside with psychological



Photo © Beth Moseley

realism and English folk-tale traditions, Bayat’s “moving and accomplished debut” (Samuel Fisher) examines how we are shaped by our ecology and haunted by loss and love.

Helen Bain and Sara Bayat will be in conversation with Dr Nicola Presley.



The Little Gallery

— 1 The Parade, Marlborough —

Simon Martin British Landscapes: A Sense of Place

British Landscapes: A Sense of Place, published to accompany the exhibition of the same name at Pallant House Gallery in Chichester, explores how artists responded to the landscape of Britain during the 20th century. Drawing on works from the Modern British art collection of Pallant House Gallery, alongside exceptional works on long-term loan from private collections, it features artists including Barbara Hepworth, Clare Leighton, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, Eric Ravilious and Keith Vaughan.

Covering a wide range of genres, including British post-impressionism, the printmaking revival, travel posters, surrealism and wartime landscapes, the book also considers the St Ives artists and their contemporaries.

Simon Martin examines the concept of placemaking, and how artists have conveyed the spirit or sense of a particular place in their artworks, including not only pastoral idylls but also urban, suburban and industrial landscapes. He looks at the relationship of people to the land – from images of rural labour and farming to the development of leisure tourism – and how the British landscape has been central to the formation of regional and national identities.

Martin is an art historian and curator, and the Director of Pallant House Gallery. He has curated many exhibitions and written widely on Modern British and contemporary art.

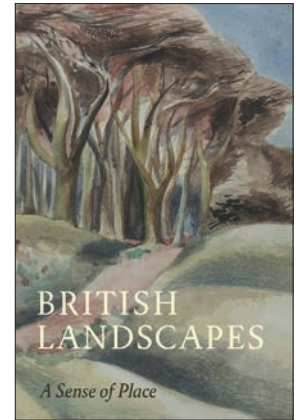


Photo © Taran Wilkhu





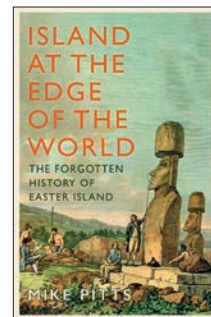
Mike Pitts

Island at the Edge of the World: The Forgotten History of Easter Island

Tracing the history of this mysterious island – from 18th-century tales of lost continents, cannibalism, giants and aliens to more recent ideas that islanders cut down all the trees, causing mass starvation and social collapse – archaeologist Mike Pitts draws on the latest scientific and archaeological research, plus a huge range of historical accounts, to shed new light on generations of false histories and change the way people think about this mysterious land.

Described by the Mail on Sunday as “revelatory ... fascinating ... [and] wholly convincing,” *Island at the Edge of the World* is the most compelling and comprehensive account yet published of the extraordinary story of Easter Island.

Pitts is a Marlborough-based archaeologist, journalist, author of multiple books on archaeology and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. For 20 years he edited *British Archaeology* and he continues to conduct original archaeological research.



Situated in the south-eastern Pacific Ocean, Easter Island is best known for its nearly 1000 monumental statues carved by the early Rapa Nui people. But where the Rapa Nui came from, how they got there, why and how the colossal statues came to be, and what happened to the civilization the islanders created remains shrouded in mystery.

Authors' Circle Founder
Jan Williamson

Tash Aw

The South

Billed as the first of a Proustian quartet, Tash Aw's fifth novel *The South* is a new departure for the London-based Malaysian writer renowned for his empathy and intelligence.

Distilling the complex vision of previous Man Booker Prize longlisted novels such as *Five Star Billionaire* into a Chekhovian world of a single summer in rural south Malaysia in the 1990s, Aw tells the tale of Jay and his family as they move from the city to the country to manage his grandfather's dilapidated fruit farm.

Like Chekhov's Russia,
Aw's Malaysia is

both a universally resonant vision of a timeless and placeless lost world and an historically precise portrait of a country undergoing rapid modernisation, its economy and climate at tipping point.

Aw's "compressed, exquisite" writing (The Guardian) can "subtly shift and unsettle your perception of character and situations" (The Times). His vivid depiction of the physical, emotional and social landscapes of first love and family dynamics is also "shimmeringly intelligent," overlaid by the shifting perspective of time and memory.

Tash Aw will be in conversation with novelist Kate Weinberg.

Photo © Tara Sosnowardoyo





E.C. Nevin

A Killer Plot

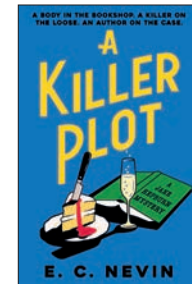
After unmasking the killer of her literary agent in *A Novel Murder*, author Jane Hepburn seems to have returned to a quieter life in **A Killer Plot**, attempting to complete her next novel, despite struggling with writer's block. But the burst of internet fame which resulted from her successful bout of sleuthing has got her onto the guest list of a book launch at which she'll be brushing shoulders with the stars of the publishing world.

Jane's looking forward to an evening drinking wine and eating canapés with her friends, debut author Natasha and agent intern Daniel, but once again she's fated to stumble across a body, this time that of an editor's assistant, in the bookshop where the launch is taking place. Chaos ensues as the police get involved, and things grow more

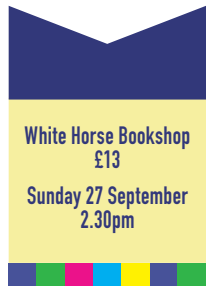
complicated when the assistant's boss also shows up dead.

Jane, Natasha and Daniel must put their crime-solving skills into action to ensure no one else falls victim to the dangerous assassin stalking the publishing world.

E.C. Nevin was an editorial director and crime and thriller editor at a major UK publisher. Her first foray into crime fiction, *A Novel Murder*,



was described by author Jennie Godfrey as "funny, sharply observed and fiendishly clever."



Amy Jeffs

Arthur: A New Life

In *Arthur: A New Life* medieval art and culture specialist Amy Jeffs takes an epic journey back to the Middle Ages, where a new King Arthur is waiting to be discovered – a larger-than-life warlord, a hero raised by fairies, a leader of the wild hunt, a monster-slayer, lying wounded under the ash cloud, longing to rise again.

Drawing out dark and beautiful tales from original medieval and early-modern texts, Jeffs' beautiful and captivating new book – as its title suggests – breathes new life into the story of one of England's most legendary kings.

From Merlin's conception and the building of the Round Table to the abduction of Guinevere and King Arthur's ambitious quest for empire, Jeffs transports the reader to

medieval citadels and volcanoes, caves and riverbanks, and from Hell to the Otherworld. As well as re-engaging with the familiar – the sword in the stone, the construction of Stonehenge, and Guinevere his queen – Jeffs also delves into lesser-known sources, the legends' crafted nature, and their symbiotic relationship with the political cultures of their time.

Somerset-based Jeffs is the author of three previous books, including the Sunday Times bestseller *Storyland: A New Mythology of Britain and Wild: Tales from Early Medieval Britain*.

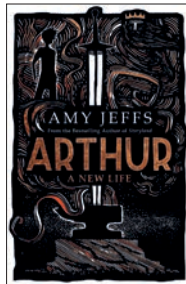


Photo © Rachel Humphries

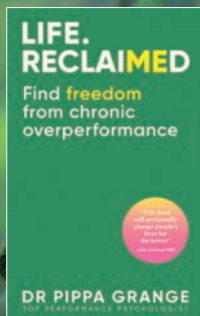


St Peter's Church
£13

Sunday 27 September
2.30pm

Pippa Grange

Life. Reclaimed



In a culture that rewards going 'above and beyond' the pressure to be exceptional often leads to a cycle of chronic overperformance and, eventually, burnout.

If you are feeling tired and overwhelmed and want to discover for yourself how you can step off the performance treadmill, take some time out to come along and listen to top performance psychologist and coach, Pippa Grange, talk about her warm, insightful and life-changing new book, *Life. Reclaimed*.

Drawing on her work with elite performers in both industry and sport – including the England men's football team – Grange blends

real-life stories with the principles of regenerative performance to arm the reader with the practical tools and tried-and-tested strategies needed to dismantle false goals, reset priorities and start to live the lives we truly want without compromising on what we care most about.

Whether it's love, family or work, with Grange's unique framework at hand, we can all learn how to succeed in a way that keeps us sane, whole and healthy.

Take a breath, come along, and start reclaiming your life ...

St. Peter's Church
£13

Sunday 27 September
4pm



Penned Up

Creating a literature festival at HMP Erlestoke

Marlborough LitFest is delighted to host this event to mark the 10th anniversary of the only literature festival currently taking place in a UK prison. Offering a unique insight into what goes into creating a festival behind bars, Penned Up's director and co-founder David Kendall sets the scene: "Penned Up has a unique location within the walls, and razor-wire-topped fences, of HMP Erlestoke, but at its heart remains a tangible, honest exchange between audience and speaker," he says.

"Its programme has included some great names: Nick Cave, Tony Adams, Rapman, Dr Rachel Clarke, Billy Bragg, Kit de Waal and hundreds more. But more importantly, the festival is put together with a

committee of serving prisoners who oversee and support it at each stage. It is crucial to Penned Up that prisoners have a non-tokenistic voice in the festival's curation."

Joining David Kendall to discuss how Penned Up has evolved will be Mark Hewitt, director and co-founder; Jasper Jameson, former member of

HMP Erlestoke Penned Up committee, now an advocate, fundraiser and trustee in the charity sector; and Elizabeth Williams, Learning and Skills Manager, HMP Erlestoke. The session is chaired by Saili Katebe, performance poet, writer and Penned Up writing workshop facilitator.

Photos © Marta Pinto / Rob Auckland

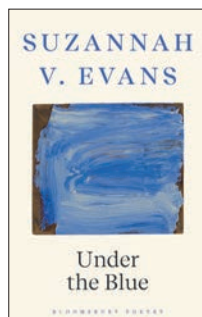


LitFest regularly supports an author event at the Penned Up festival at HMP Erlestoke in May, donates books to the prison library and invites prisoners to take part in LitFest's Big Town Read. The panellists are donating their fees to The Friends of HMP Erlestoke which supports offenders with the challenges of resettlement and rehabilitation.



Suzannah V. Evans

Under the Blue



Suzannah V. Evans' debut poetry collection, *Under the Blue*, is an arresting and candid exploration of the beauty of life and the realities of care. In it Evans brings together a series of fragmental prose poems, letters to her family in poem form and evocative 'postcards', delivering a multi-faceted meditation on intimacy and togetherness, sickness and pain, what can be said and what remains unsayable.

Designed to be read from beginning to end to experience the intensity of its narrative progression, the collection is both beautifully written and deeply moving.

"Evans is tender, subtle and fierce in her exploration of all that cannot be expressed through language but



Photo © Naomi Woddiss

must be attempted in any case," says Jasmine Gray, reviewer for the Poetry Book Society.

Multi-award-winning poet, researcher and educator Evans will be reading from and discussing her collection.

Evans is also author of *Brightwork* and *Marine Objects / Some Language*, and the editor of *All Keyboards*

Are Legitimate: Versions of Jules Laforgue. Her poetry has been awarded the Ivan Juritz Prize for Creative Experiment and a Northern Writers' Award, and it has been performed at international festivals and broadcast on BBC Radio.

Under the Blue has been shortlisted for the 2026 Dylan Thomas Prize.

Geraldine Roberts

The Rebel and the Peacemaker: The Incredible True Story of Mary and Charles Bagot

What makes for a special relationship? Trust, compromise and a dash of diplomacy ...

Meet Charles and Mary Bagot, the Regency couple who, banished to the mudflows of Washington, went on to lay the groundwork for modern global diplomacy.

When it came to the Bagots, the Regency gossips had more than their fill. Their marriage, initially the toast of high society, was marked with scandal and, when rumours of a salacious affair broke, the couple found themselves sent overseas. Their penance: to work as the first British ambassadors to America at a pivotal moment in the new nation's history.



Photo © Emily Graham Photography

But despite their misfortune the Bagots thrived in their new environment. Their innate gift for politics, culture and social affairs was a tonic to Anglo-American tensions and the couple went on to emerge as leading diplomats of their day, first in the United States and later in both Russia and Canada.

In her captivating and meticulously researched book *The Rebel and the Peacemaker*, historian Geraldine Roberts draws on years of research and exclusive access to the Bagot family papers to tell a sweeping story of love, scandal and diplomacy. With 2026 marking 250 years of American Independence, what better time to celebrate the extraordinary lives of this remarkable couple?

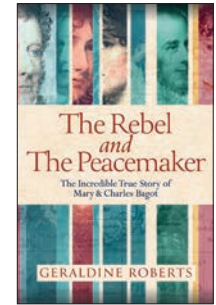




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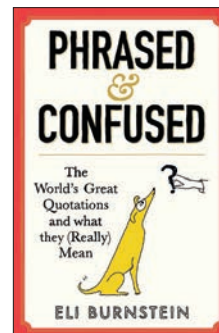
Eli Burnstein

Phrased and Confused: The Curious Meanings of Timeless Quotations

we are, quite often, getting the wrong end of the stick, tricked into thinking they mean something other than they actually do?

In *Phrased and Confused*, his smart, witty and delightfully illustrated new book, Canadian humour writer Eli Burnstein takes a deep dive into 45 of the most enigmatic and misunderstood quotations in history – from 600 BCE to the 1980s – to deliver a crystal-clear understanding of what they mean and a deeper appreciation of the big ideas they stand for.

So what are you waiting for? *Seize the day* and join Burnstein for a trip down *the road less travelled* to discover how a mere handful of



words can baffle us, paradoxically, into heightened states of clarity.

Burnstein's humour writing has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *McSweeney's*, *Slackjaw* and *Points in Case*. He is the author of the *Dictionary of Fine Distinctions*. He also runs a spelling bee.

"I think therefore I am"
"The exception proves the rule"
"Money is the root of all evil"
"You are what you eat"
"Ignorance is bliss"

We all know the quotes. We've probably even used some of them ourselves. But do we really know what they mean? And could it be that



The Big Town Read

The Best of Everything by Kit de Waal



Photo © Helen J. Allen

Paulette, a 29-year-old auxiliary nurse, dreams of love, marriage and a gingham quilt for the baby's cot. That dream is tragically shattered; but giving her baby the best of everything becomes her life's meaning.

So why does she lie awake at night worrying about Nellie, the boy being raised by his grandfather a few streets away?

Longlisted for the 2026 Women's Prize for Fiction, de Waal's sixth book is as full of heart as her 2016 debut *My Name Is Leon*: her writing as warm, wise, funny and moving; her characters so vivid you want to reach into the pages to hug them. "A story about kindness that will break your heart, then make it sing," says author Donal Ryan.

In this National Year of Reading, when we are all being urged to rediscover the joy of reading, we encourage you to share ***The Best of Everything*** with your book group, family and friends before coming along to meet the author in September.

The Big Town Read is run in association with Wiltshire Libraries. Copies of the book will be available in Marlborough Library and in local cafés from mid-June, and reading group questions will be on the LitFest website from late July.



Events at a glance

THURSDAY 24 SEPT

4pm

p4 Sixth Form Debate
Town Hall

7pm

p5 Minette Batters and Helen Browning
Town Hall

FRIDAY 25 SEPT

10am

p4 Sketchbooking Workshop
White Horse Bookshop

2pm

p4 Sketchbooking Workshop
White Horse Bookshop

2-3.30pm

p6 Annabel Streets
Wootton Rivers Walk

4pm

p7 William Golding: The Faber Letters
Little Gallery

5pm

p8 Jeremy Hunt
Town Hall

7.30pm

p9 Sebastian Faulks
Town Hall

SATURDAY 26 SEPT

10am

p10 Sue Hendra
White Horse Bookshop

p12 Sherin Aminossehe

St Mary's Church Hall

p13 Anthony Seldon

Town Hall

11.30am

p14 Jon Cannon
St Mary's Church Hall

p15 Louisa Young

Town Hall

p16 Michael Pugh

White Horse Bookshop

1pm

p17 Lottie Delamain

Town Hall

p18 Nicholas Fogg

White Horse Bookshop

p19 Rachel Trethewey

St Mary's Church Hall

1-4pm

p10 Story Craft Activities

Parade Cinema

2.30pm

p20 Paul de Zulueta

St Mary's Church Hall

p21 Zakia Sewell

Town Hall

p22 Daniel Hahn

White Horse Bookshop

2.30-5pm

p11 Roy McFarlane Poetry Workshop
Quaker Meeting House

3pm

p10 Free Storytelling

Parade Cinema

4pm

p23 Chloe Dalton

Town Hall

p24 Florence Hazrat

White Horse Bookshop

p25 Rory MacLean

St Mary's Church Hall

5pm

p11 Poetry in the Pub

Green Dragon

5.30pm

p26 Translation Duel

St Mary's Church Hall

p27 Sathnam Sanghera

Town Hall

p28 Adam Hart

White Horse Bookshop

6pm

p11 Prose in the Pub

Green Dragon

7pm

p29 Andrew Rumsey

Town Hall

SUNDAY 27 SEPT

10am

p30 Lizzie Lewis

White Horse Bookshop

p31 Frank Tallis

Town Hall

p32 Benjamin Wood

St Peter's Church

11.30am

p30 Kev F Sutherland

White Horse Bookshop

p33 Guy Walters

Town Hall

p34 Debut Authors

St Peter's Church

1pm

p30 Kev F Sutherland

White Horse Bookshop

p35 Simon Martin

Town Hall

p36 Mike Pitts

St Peter's Church

2.30pm

p37 Tash Aw

Town Hall

p38 E.C. Nevin

White Horse Bookshop

p39 Amy Jeffs

St Peter's Church

4pm

p40 Pippa Grange

St Peter's Church

p41 Penned Up

Town Hall

p42 Suzannah V. Evans

White Horse Bookshop

5.30pm

p43 Geraldine Roberts

St Peter's Church

p44 Eli Burnstein

White Horse Bookshop

p45 The Big Town Read

Kit de Waal

Town Hall

Children's LitFest events appear in blue



St Peter's Church

is at the west end of the High Street with access at the side of the building. The Cardinal Coffee Shop will be open on Saturday and Sunday.

Tower tours will be available on both days.

The White Horse Bookshop

is conveniently located within a minute's walk from the Town Hall on the north side of the High Street.



The Town Hall

A late Victorian building which dominates the east end of the High Street. The Assembly Room is the main festival venue. The Court Room will be a bookshop and café for the weekend. Parking is available in the High Street or in Waitrose car park, between the High Street and George Lane.



St Mary's Church Hall is next door to the church behind the Town Hall. Access is from the bottom of Kingsbury Street via Patten Alley. From the church follow signs to the entrance of the hall up steps to the left of the church. Step-free access is from Silverless Street.



The Green Dragon

stands on the south side of the High Street, 100 metres from the Town Hall. Originally a coaching inn, it dates back to the 15th century.



The Parade Cinema,

housed in a splendid late Georgian building, is open all day, serving food and drink in its covered courtyard.



Quaker Meeting House, The Parade, is on the right between the Parade Cinema and the Fire Station. It will be signposted.



The Little Gallery,

The Parade. From the Town Hall, cross the pedestrian crossing and walk a short distance. The Little Gallery is opposite The Bear.



Marlborough LitFest thanks you for your support

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