

Berwick Literary Festival

6–12 Oct
2025



Celebrating Words
Written | Spoken | Performed

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Play a vital role in helping the Festival thrive and support the planning, preparation and people behind the scenes who bring the Festival to life each year. Patron contributions help us to keep the Festival ambitious, inclusive and rooted in the town. To find out more about becoming a Patron, and learn more about the scheme, please visit berwickliteraryfestival.com/patrons

Welcome to the 2025 Berwick Literary Festival programme

This year our theme, *The Things That Make for Peace*, could hardly be more timely. Eighty years have passed since the guns of the Second World War finally fell silent, yet the work of reconciliation is never finished. Here in Berwick-upon-Tweed, a town that changed hands more than a dozen times and still bears the marks of turbulent centuries, we understand that truth deeply. Our iconic walls, once raised in defence, now embrace a community that gathers to celebrate traditions, ideas and creative spirit.

This October, you will hear voices from many traditions: novelists and playwrights, historians and poets, songwriters, storytellers and screenwriters. They will explore how peace is built – patiently, imaginatively, sometimes defiantly – within families, across borders and in the human heart. We believe the conversations sparked here will linger long after the festival flags are lowered.

None of this would be possible without people. Our team of volunteers includes stewards, technicians, schools' partners, marketers, workshop leaders and more. They give so generously of their time and expertise. Our Patrons provide the financial bedrock that allows the programme to flourish. Local businesses open their doors; sponsors and grant-makers add vital support; and you, our audience – whether you travel ten minutes or ten hours – bring the energy that turns plans on paper into a living, breathing celebration.

We want to offer heartfelt thanks to every one of you. With your help, 2025 promises to be our richest, most wide-ranging festival yet. May the sessions you attend, the stories you discover, and the friendships you form inspire you to carry the practice of peace into daily life.

We are so looking forward to welcoming you.
Joan Montgomery 2025 Festival Director
Stephen Platten Chair of Trustees



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Pre-Festival Events



Writing the Stories that Make Us • Sabrin Hasbun Online Course: 11, 18 & 25 September • £120

Prize-winning author Sabrin Hasbun leads a workshop series exploring writing as a tool for change. Each session blends short readings, guided exercises and group discussion. Optional one-to-one feedback follows the course. Open to prose writers and poets of any genre and level of experience.

A Palestinian-Italian writer and Cardiff Met lecturer, Hasbun's work bridges cultures and champions collaborative creation. Her family memoir, *Crossing* traces love, loss and the search for belonging across borders.



The Wicked of the Earth • A. D. Bergin Tuesday 30 September, 7:30pm–8:30pm Horncliffe Memorial Hall • £9

Join writer and historian A. D. Bergin for a gripping exploration of *The Wicked of the Earth*, his acclaimed historical thriller inspired by the true events of the 1650 Newcastle witch trials.

At its centre is one of Britain's largest witch trials and the extraordinary all-female campaign to free the accused; an episode that speaks as powerfully to our present moment as it does to the past. Bergin reflects on blending fact and fiction, the uncomfortable echoes of history in today's world, and how places like Berwick have shaped our collective story.



These Mortal Bodies • Elspeth Wilson Friday 3 October, 7:30pm–8:30pm Fogo Kirk • £10 • Book via [TicketSource.co.uk](https://www.ticketsource.co.uk)

Scottish writer and poet, Elspeth Wilson discusses her work across genres. Wilson's debut novel, *These Mortal Bodies*, is an exploration of friendship and obsession set in an all girls' college, asking how far we'll go to belong. The thread of friendship – in all its nuances and complexities – runs throughout her work and is something she returns to again and again. Elspeth's poetry pamphlet, *Too Hot to Sleep*, was shortlisted for the Saltire Society's 2023 Poetry Book of the Year award and her writing has been supported by Creative Scotland.

Workshop: Bringing Stories to Life Chris Adriaanse

Monday 6 October, 10am–12.30pm
The Straw Yard • £25

Join writer and storyteller Chris Adriaanse for this workshop on shaping and embodying stories. Together we will explore folk and fairy tales from the fascinating world of traditional storytelling. Through a series of exercises, we will walk the landscapes, meet the characters and reveal the depths of these old stories so that they feel real and alive. Suitable for anyone wishing to enhance their storytelling skills, whether for writing or telling. No prior experience needed. Please bring paper, pen and some curiosity.



In Conversation with Kirsty Wark Monday 6 October, 5pm–6pm St Andrew's Church • £12

Famed for her direct, compassionate and fearless journalistic skills, and best known as the long-standing presenter of BBC's *Newsnight*, Scottish journalist and broadcaster Kirsty Wark is known for going toe to toe with politicians. She has brought issues like the menopause and sexism into the public arena through her award-winning documentary-making and is just as passionate about books (she has written two so far). Wark will discuss her own novels and others that have left an impression on her, reflect on her life, and share stories from her remarkable career.



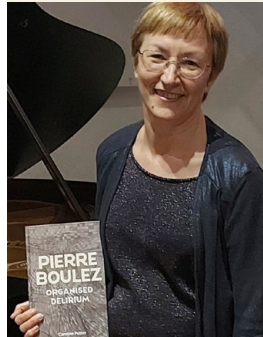
The Two Roberts • Damian Barr Monday 6 October, 7:30pm–8:30pm Salvation Army Hall • £9

Scotland, 1933. After years grafting at Lees Boot Factory, Bobby MacBryde is off to the Glasgow School of Art. On his first day he will meet another Robert, a quiet man with loose dark curls – and never leave his side. Stunningly reimagined, *The Two Roberts* is a profoundly moving story of devotion and obsession, art and class.

Award-winning writer, broadcaster and literary champion Damian Barr joins us to reflect on the power of storytelling in shaping identity, memory and change. In conversation, he'll share the journeys behind his books, his enduring love of libraries, and why amplifying unheard voices matters now more than ever.



“Epic and touching”
DAVID NICHOLLS



“A fascinating tour”
BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE

Erik Satie: 100 Years Since His Death

Caroline Potter

Monday 6 October, 7:30pm–8:30pm
The Straw Yard • £9

2025 marks the 100th anniversary of the death of French composer Erik Satie, best-known for his lulling *Gymnopédies* and quirky sense of humour. Caroline Potter, author of *Erik Satie: a Parisian composer and his world*, named *Sunday Times*’ Classical Music Book of the Year, will be talking about Satie’s life and music. She will focus on his preoccupation with death: from factual statements, through embarrassment concealed by humour, to heartfelt expressions of loss.



Writing Our Silences – A Poetry Writing Workshop

Tuesday 7 October, 10am–12:30pm
The Straw Yard • £25

Gaps between verses, the drop at the end of a line: a poem’s unspoken details often hold its mystery and power, leaving space for interpretation. In this workshop, we’ll read poems about silence and poems that hold silence. Through writing exercises, we’ll explore different kinds of silence – chosen or imposed, companionable or strained – and silence held in remembrance. We’ll focus on distilling a poem, allowing it to remain unresolved or unfinished, or perhaps in a way that breaks a long-held silence.



Structuring a Story with Notebooks and Paper: Creative Workshop

Tuesday 7 October 1:30pm–4.30pm
The Straw Yard • £25

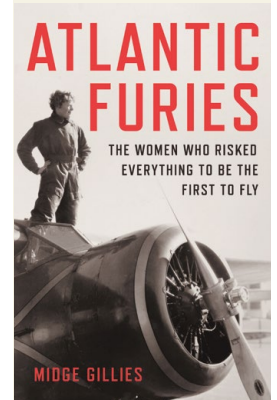
A hands-on workshop led by a writer/ animator duo exploring how stories take shape through touch, sound and image. Working with notebooks and paper, you’ll be guided through exercises that map relationships between character, object and place, building emotional tension and texture into your storytelling. Using non-linear approaches, visual prompts and sonic cues, you’ll discover how concealment and revelation can become powerful tools for narrative structure. Ideal for writers, artists, storytellers and anyone curious about new ways to explore creative process.

Atlantic Furies • Midge Gillies

Tuesday 7 October, 5pm–6pm
Ad Gefrin, Wooler • £9 or £18 with pre-event Cream Tea

In the early 20th century, the dream of crossing the Atlantic by plane was as potent as putting a man on the moon would be 50 years later. But many believed women too physically frail and emotionally vulnerable to endure the gruelling conditions of flying long distances. In *Atlantic Furies*, Midge Gillies uncovers the stories of six courageous, rule-breaking aviators who risked everything to prove them wrong.

A multi-award-winning museum and whisky distillery, Ad Gefrin is offering a pre-talk Cream Tea from 3:30pm.



Shorelines: Stories from the Coast

Border Readers
Tuesday 7 October, 7pm–9pm including interval
Wooler Library, Cheviot Centre, Wooler • £8
Book via eventbrite.co.uk / 01668 232123

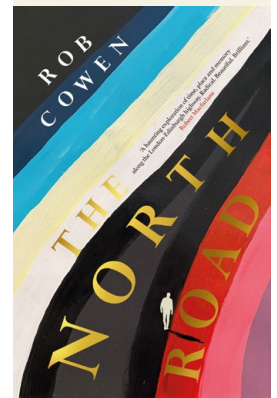
An evening of intimate, live readings of short stories set along the coastlines of Northumberland and Devon, including stories by Ann Cleeves, Jo Scott, Tony Glover and Linda Cracknell. Each tale places the reader at the water’s edge – among islands, harbours, estuaries and beaches – where landscapes shape lives, and every tide carries a turning point. We’re particularly delighted that both Northumberland-based stories have been specially commissioned for this Border Readers’ tour.



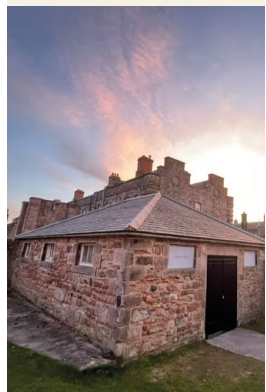
The North Road • Rob Cowen

Tuesday 7 October, 7:30–8:30pm
Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks • £9

At the heart of this book is a highway. The A1; The Great North Road. A 400-mile multiplicity of ancient trackway, Roman road, pilgrim path, coach route and motorway that has run like a backbone through Britain for the last 2,000 years. In this profoundly personal book, Cowen follows this ghost road from beginning to end on a journey through history, place, people and time. Weaving his own histories and memories with the layered landscapes he moves through, this is the story of the roads that lead us to where we find ourselves.



“Radical.
Beautiful. Brilliant”
ROBERT MACFARLANE



Cabaret of Words

Tuesday 7 October, 7pm (Doors open 6:15pm)
The Straw Yard • FREE, but booking required

The Festival's warm-hearted open-mic night, where poets, flash-fictioneers, script-writers and storytellers bring original work to life. Ten-minute pre-booked slots are followed by two five-minute wild-card spots for those struck by last-minute inspiration (or courage). Bonus points if your piece nods to this year's theme *The Things That Make for Peace*. Relax with a drink, cheer on local talent or take to the stage yourself. You may also nominate someone to read your work for you. Booking: thestrawayard.co.uk. Queries: hello@berwickwritersforum.com



The Power of Storytelling: conflict, struggle and forgiveness

Marina Cantacuzino & Sara Cameron McBean
Wednesday 8 October, 2pm–3pm
The Straw Yard • £9

Sara Cameron McBean is an award-winning writer who worked for many years with UNICEF; her travels included a life-changing experience in Colombia where she encountered the extraordinary stories of the Children's Movement for Peace. Marina Cantacuzino is an author and broadcaster who founded The Forgiveness Project, a charity that works with real stories to help people break cycles of harm and promote concepts of compassion, empathy and forgiveness.



Bonjour, Sophie: Paris and Memory **Elizabeth Buchan**

Wednesday 8 October, 5pm–6pm
Salvation Army Hall • £9

Bestselling author Elizabeth Buchan returns with a spellbinding novel of family secrets, resilience and self-discovery. In 1959, a young woman is determined to escape her claustrophobic life in Sussex and uncover the truth about her mother's past in post-war Paris. Rich in atmosphere and emotional depth, this is a coming-of-age story about belonging, memory and the courage it takes to start again. Join us to explore the inspiration behind the novel and the enduring allure of the City of Light.

“Delightful, funny, poignant” RACHEL HORE

Revolting: A Riotous History of Rebellions and Revolutions • Terry Deary

Wednesday 8 October, 7:30pm–8:30pm
Holy Trinity Church • £12

Bestselling author Terry Deary discusses his new book, *Revolting: A Riotous History of Rebellions and Revolutions*, and takes readers on a lively journey through some of the most significant rebellions and uprisings that have happened through the ages.

Few enjoy the success of Ivaylo, the Bulgarian swineherd who managed to fight off the Mongols, slay the Tsar and marry his widow in the space of a year. But then, some rebels have more modest aims: Spartacus mainly wanted to go home to see his mum.

From peasants to slaves, martyrs to mutineers, Deary celebrates the resilience and determination of those who have dared to challenge the status quo. *This event is in memory of Simon Heald.*

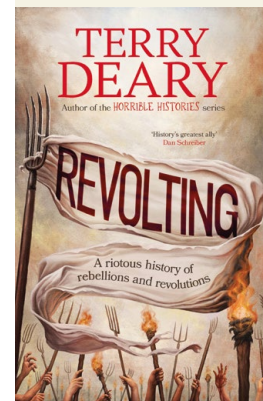
Martins Book Printers Tour (1) and (2) **Thursday 9 October, 9am–10am and 10:30–11:30am*** **Martins The Printers, Spittal • £9**

Martins the Printers is an independent family-owned book printers, operating in Berwick-upon-Tweed since 1892. In the beginning, Martins was a general commercial printer with its own local newspaper, *The Mercury*, produced until 1945. In the 1950s the company started to concentrate on book publishing and today it is one of the few remaining book printers and binders left in the UK. The event includes a tour round the working factory.

*10:30am tours have wheelchair access.

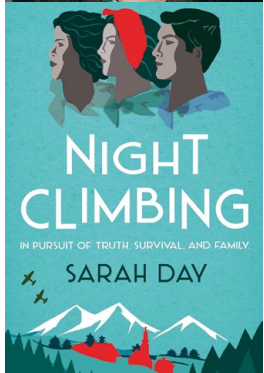
To Make People Happy • John Osborne **Thursday 9 October, 10am–11am** **The Straw Yard • £9**

There has never been a better time for uplifting stories and poems. *To Make People Happy* explores the humour section of second hand book shops, jokes overheard on market stalls and finding the positives in life. John Osborne's poems have been longlisted in the Forward Prize, published in *The Big Issue*, *Rialto* and *The Guardian* and broadcast on BBC Radio 1, Radio 3, Radio 4, 6 Music, Soho Radio and XFM. Join us for this uplifting talk at The Straw Yard and be happy.



“fizzing with energy”
 THE TELEGRAPH ON DEARY





Night Climbing: Propaganda and Misinformation Between the Wars • Sarah Day

Thursday 9 October, 2pm–3pm
The Straw Yard • £9

In 1936, a group of British school children and their teacher embarked on a hike across the Schauinsland Mountain in Germany's Black Forest – a trip which ended in disaster. Afterwards, a media frenzy in both Britain and Germany, coupled with the looming threat of war, began to obscure the truth about what really happened. Taking this true story as its inspiration, Sarah Day's second novel explores the role of propaganda, misinformation and populism in sowing the seeds of the Second World War, and asks whether the rhetoric in Britain and Germany shared more in common than we'd like to think.

Join us for a compelling discussion of history, fiction and the echoes of the past in our present.



A Mudlarking Year • Lara Maiklem

Thursday 9 October, 4pm–5pm
Salvation Army Hall • £9

Lara Maiklem is a licensed mudlark with over 20 years of experience searching the Thames. In 2019 she brought the ancient tradition of mudlarking vividly to life with her award-winning, *Sunday Times* bestselling book, *Mudlarking: Lost and Found on the River Thames*, which recounted over 2,000 years of London history through the flotsam and jetsam of everyday objects washed up on the river's shore. Her new book, *A Mudlarking Year*, follows the seasons through this most unique part of the city and delves even deeper into the mud.

Lara was made a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 2020 for her work in bringing the Thames and its treasures to public attention. Join us for an afternoon of discovery with the leading voice of modern mudlarking.

“elevates trudging around in the mud to an epic gallivant through our past”
DAN SNOW

BOOK YOUR TICKETS NOW:
click on an event heading to book,
or visit maltingsberwick.co.uk

Memories and Emotions Poetry Workshop **Tasneim Zyada**

Thursday 9 October, 6pm–8pm
The Straw Yard • £25

Tasneim Zyada is a London-based Palestinian poet and international performer. She documents the generational stories that rise to the surface within her own, and in this workshop will be exploring memories and emotions through creative writing.

Open to all abilities from first time writers to writing veterans looking for inspiration, the intention is for everyone to come as they are, with three stages structured to cater to everyone's capacity: filling the well; filling your cup; expressing yourself.

As part of Berwick Shines, Tasneim Zyada will be undertaking a residency in conjunction with the Berwick Literary Festival. She is also appearing at the concert on Saturday evening (see p21).

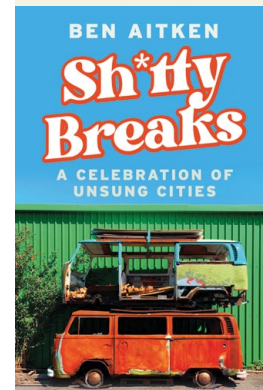


Sh*tty Breaks: A Celebration of Unsung Cities • Ben Aitken

Thursday 9 October, 7:30–8:30pm
Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks • £9

Award-winning travel writer and journalist Ben Aitken shares stories from his latest book *Sh*tty Breaks: A Celebration of Unsung Cities* – a love letter to places like Sunderland and Dunfermline that rarely make the tourist guides. Over twelve months, Ben set out to explore the UK and Ireland's least celebrated spots, not to mock them, but to uncover their quiet charm and character.

Join us for an evening of humour and insight as Aitken makes the case that anywhere, just like anyone, can surprise you, if given half the chance.



“a love letter to forgotten towns”
MONISHA RAJESH

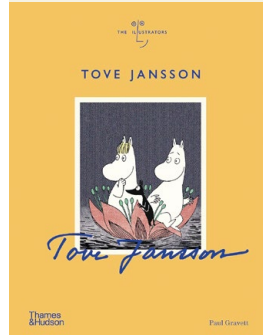
Martins Book Printers Tour (3) and (4)

Friday 10 October, 9am–10am and 10:30–11:30am*
Martins The Printers, Spittal • £9

A tour round a working printers – details as p11.

*10:30am tours have wheelchair access.





“Tove Jansson is one of the most original, philosophically dextrous and generous artists to have graced this world” ALI SMITH

Tove Jansson: The Moomins & More • Paul Gravett
Friday 10 October, 11:30am–12:30pm
Berwick Parish Centre • £9

In this 80th anniversary year of her much-loved Moomin characters, Tove Jansson is being celebrated not only in her native Finland but worldwide. As well as her Moomin novels, she authored acclaimed literary works, notably *The Summer Book*, adapted to the screen, as well as innovative children's books.

Jansson was multi-talented, also writing plays and an opera and pursuing her lifelong passion for painting. Paul Gravett examines her remarkable work and life as a Swedish-speaking lesbian Finn, and how they resonate more than ever today. *This event is also suitable for high school students.*

How Then Shall We Live? Rebuilding the Common Life • Kathy Galloway

Friday 10 October, 12 noon–1pm
Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks • £9

We are living through a period of profound environmental loss, with an estimated 200 species disappearing each day. If we continue down our current path, the future looks increasingly precarious. The pressing question is how we might live differently, letting go of destructive habits and embracing more sustainable, grounded ways of being. What might that look like in everyday life? How can we build change that is not only possible, but hopeful, inclusive and enduring?

Join us for a conversation that faces the facts with courage, and explores how compassion, imagination and community can help shape a better path forward.

English Mind, Arab Heart • Omar Sabbagh
Friday 10 October, 12 noon–1pm
The Straw Yard • £9

Poet, writer and critic Omar Sabbagh will discuss his published work across different genres dating from 2004 to the present, focusing on the common theme of his pervasive love of the English language. He will also read individual poems from his latest two books of poetry, *Night Settles Upon the City* (Daraja Press, 2024) and *Gazan Days* (Dar Nelson, June 2025).



The People's Victory: VE Day Diaries from Across the Country • Lucy Noakes

Friday 10 October, 2pm–3pm
Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks • £9

Familiar images of celebrating crowds, bunting and bonfires on VE Day in May 1945 are only part of the story of that day. Across the country many celebrated, but others chose to spend a quiet day at home, to walk in the country, or not to celebrate at all. In conversation, Lucy Noakes explores the intimate diaries kept by hundreds of people for the Mass Observation social survey organisation on VE Day, and shows some of the feelings, preoccupations and concerns of 'the people' as the 'people's war' began to come to an end.

The Secret Painter • Joe Tucker

Friday 10 October, 2pm–3pm
Salvation Army Hall • £9

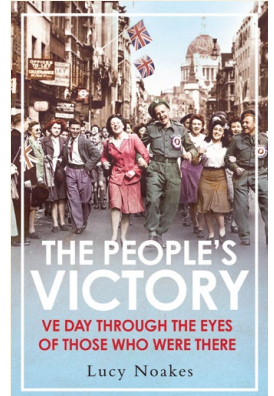
Joe Tucker's Uncle Eric was an eccentric, charming man who lived with his mother for nearly eighty years. Known for his working men's club comedy and daily trips to the bookie, Eric secretly created over 500 remarkable paintings of street scenes, performers, and pubs. Near the end of his life, he requested an exhibition of his work, prompting his family to explore Eric's secret world.

Tucker's investigation reveals a touching story about expression, art, and the hidden lives of those closest to us.

Why Unbounded Empathy Matters: A Personal Journey • Jo Berry

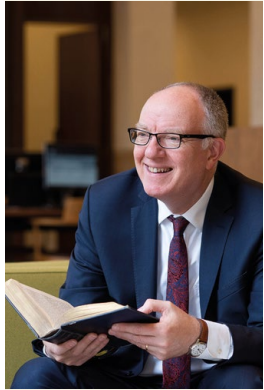
Friday 10 October, 4pm–5pm
St Andrew's Church • £12

Jo Berry is an international speaker and founder of Building Bridges for Peace. After her father was killed by an IRA bomb in 1984, she began an extraordinary journey of reconciliation, meeting with the ex-combatant responsible: their ongoing dialogue was featured in the BBC's *Facing the Enemy* and embodies her belief in unbounded empathy as a path to peace. Her work has become a vital resource in peace studies and conflict transformation education globally, and she recently received a CBE for services to peace and reconciliation.



“Beautifully written, affectionate, witty and touching” THE GUARDIAN





Burning the Books: Then & Now • Richard Ovenden

Friday 10 October, 4pm–5pm

Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks • £9

The control of knowledge through destroying books has been a feature of human history for millennia. Richard Ovenden will explore this history, from the first libraries and archives in ancient Mesopotamia through the world of social media and AI, exploring political, religious and ideological motivations. The talk will highlight the social importance of libraries and archives in the digital age.

Richard Ovenden is a British librarian and author. He currently serves as the 25th Bodley's Librarian in the University of Oxford, having been appointed in 2014.



Patrons' Drinks and Canapes

Friday 10 October, 6pm–7:30pm

The Straw Yard • FREE to Patrons, booking required

Patrons of Berwick Literary Festival are invited to a free drinks event. We will be serving wartime-style canapés along with a themed cocktail and non-alcoholic option. The event is nestled between events and will give patrons an opportunity to enjoy refreshments before the evening talk with Max Hastings.

To find out more about becoming a Patron, visit berwickliteraryfestival.com/patrons

“Hastings brings these men to life with sensitivity and beautiful prose” THE TIMES

**MAX
HASTINGS
SWORD**



Sword: D-Day Baptism of Fire • Max Hastings

Friday 10 October, 7:30pm–8:30pm

Holy Trinity Church • £12

Veteran chronicler Max Hastings explores with extraordinary vividness the actions of the Commando brigade, Montgomery's 3rd Infantry and 6th Airborne divisions on and around a single British beach. *Sword* offers a searching analysis of why British troops did not reach Caen on 6 June 1944, as Montgomery had promised Churchill that they would – and the story of the brigadier sacked for that failure.

Join us to learn about D-Day as you have never read the story told before, with a blend of narrative, analysis and human insight from an award-winning author, journalist and broadcaster.

One Submarine • Gav Don

Saturday 11 October, 10am–11am

Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks • £9

From January 1941, heroic Royal Navy submarine HMS *Triumph* fought the Axis with torpedoes, gunfire and Special Operations, serving as a "bus" for men of SOE and MI9. The most successful submarine of 1941, her crew of 64 won 30 medals for bravery in action. Her story includes that of the secret agents she landed in Greece and Italy as these men worked with the Greek Resistance. By December *Triumph* had survived her year at war, contrary to all expectations. Her voyage home was delayed by just one more mission.

Succeeding as a Woman in a Man's World

Janie Frampton with Pat Nevin

Saturday 11 October, 10am–11am

Salvation Army Hall • £9

and

Saturday 11 October, 2pm–3pm

Duns Volunteer Hall • £9

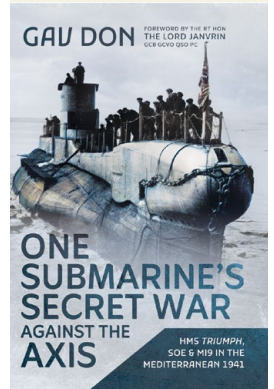
Janie Frampton cemented her place in history as the second woman referee to operate in the men's professional game of football in England. In conversation with footballer, Pat Nevin, she will discuss how her journey as a woman in the male-dominated environment of football has been one of resilience, determination and defiance against the odds. Breaking the glass ceiling is not just about measuring Janie's success, but a triumph for all women who dare to dream beyond the limits society sets.

Adventure Babies: Sensory Storytelling

Saturday 11 October, 10:30am–11:30am & 12 noon–1pm

Berwick Library • FREE, but booking required

We are delighted that Ashleigh from Adventure Babies is back with us again to tell stories in Berwick Library on Festival Saturday. Join us to take your little ones on a storytelling adventure. Featuring interactive puppets, props, music, sensory play, lights and bespoke parachutes to bring a brilliant book to life, the session is suitable for accompanied children from birth to 3 years old.





Mr Bates vs The Post Office: Transforming Real Life into TV Drama

Gwyneth Hughes

Saturday 11 October, 12 noon–1pm

Holy Trinity Church • £12

Gwyneth Hughes, writer of BAFTA award winning TV drama *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* (2024), talks about turning real-life stories into screen dramas. The true story of the fight for justice of over 900 subpostmasters after false theft convictions, and the appalling impact on their lives continues to unfold, over 25 years later.

Hughes' wide-ranging career includes her original thriller miniseries *Five Days*, as well as Tippi Hedren biopic *The Girl*, both nominated for BAFTAs and the Golden Globes. Her classic dramatisations include *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Miss Austen Regrets*.



Air Raids, Ration Books and Digging for Victory: Life on the Home Front in WW2

Carol Harris & Mike Brown with Linda Bankier

Saturday 11 October, 12 noon–1pm

Salvation Army Hall • £9

WW2 involved civilians like no other conflict in British history. Home life was transformed; families were split up, as adults were called up for war service, and children were evacuated from cities such as Newcastle to the relative safety of towns like Berwick. Daily life was dominated by the disruption and destruction of air raids. Shortages made luxuries of ice-cream, stockings and scented soap, and food rationing helped make the nation 'fighting fit'.

Join Linda Bankier, Berwick archivist, and authors Mike Brown and Carol Harris, as they talk about life in Berwick and beyond, during and immediately after WW2.

A related exhibition featuring items in the collection of Berwick Record Office will look at the effects of the war on daily life, how the town supported the war effort at home and abroad and what happened afterwards.

Venue and timings during the festival to be confirmed on social media and the website.

Bloodaxe Poets: Gillian Allnutt and Menna Elfyn

Saturday 11 October, 12 noon–1:15pm

The Straw Yard • £9

Neil Astley, founding editor of Northumberland-based Bloodaxe Books, hosts our annual celebration of contemporary poetry.

Menna Elfyn presents work from her latest collection, *Parch*. In Welsh, "parch" means respect, but also refers to a chapel minister. Elfyn explores both meanings with lyrical grace, reflecting on reverence, kindness, and what it means to live in a world too often parched of compassion. Gillian Allnutt reads from *Lode*, a deeply personal journey through the postwar years into an uncertain future. With themes of memory, loss and climate, Allnutt's poems ask what it means to care for each other and for the earth – returning, again and again, to the quiet power of love.



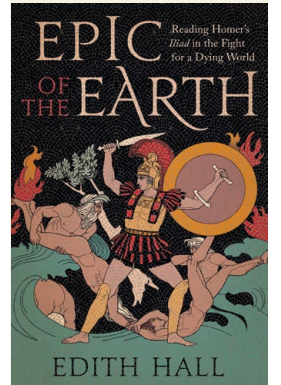
Epic of the Earth: Reading Homer's Iliad in the Fight for a Dying World

Saturday 11 October, 2pm–3pm

Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks • £9

Edith Hall, Classics Professor at Durham University, specialises in ancient Greek literature and philosophy. Her latest book, *Epic of the Earth: Reading Homer's Iliad in the Fight for a Dying World*, offers a new interpretation of this foundational war poem which focuses on the cost to the environment of international combat.

In this talk, Hall will present ancient images of war, peace and the natural world, asking what we can learn from the ancients about our responsibilities to the planet.

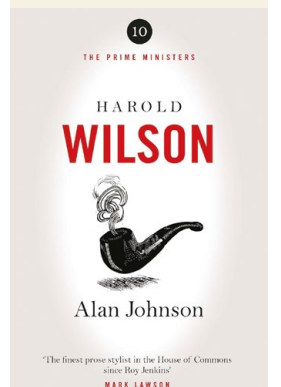


The Christopher Smith Memorial Talk: Harold Wilson • Alan Johnson

Saturday 11 October, 2pm–3pm

Salvation Army Hall • £9

In *Harold Wilson*, former Labour cabinet minister and bestselling author Alan Johnson presents a portrait of a truly twentieth-century man, whose achievements – from legalising homosexuality to protecting ethnic minorities, from women's rights to the Open University – radically improved ordinary people's lives for the better. Johnson's concise biography of Harold Wilson won the prize of 'Best Biography' at the Westminster Book Awards.





Children's Illustration Session • Jane Porter

Saturday 11 October, 2pm–3pm

Berwick Library • FREE, but booking required

Join award-winning picture book author and illustrator Jane Porter for a fun, interactive session for 5–8 year olds. Jane will take you on a tour around 'story island', then draw out a brand-new tale using your ideas. After that you'll make your own illustrated story map to take home and lead you into your own adventures. Children must be accompanied by an adult.



Succeeding as a Woman in a Man's World

Janie Frampton with Pat Nevin

Saturday 11 October, 2pm–3pm

Duns Volunteer Hall • £9

Football referee Janie Frampton in conversation; details on p17



James VI and I: The Peacemaker King's War on Witchcraft • Steven Veerapen

Saturday 11 October, 4pm–5pm

Salvation Army Hall • £9

James VI and I was feted as *Rex Pacificus*: an international peacemaker who sought British unity, Protestant unity, and Christian harmony. However, he was prepared to wage a spiritual war on 'witches': then identified by theologians across the continent as a real and present danger. Can the king of peace be reconciled with the inveterate witch hunter? Join us to find out.

“A real page-turner”

PHILIPPA GREGORY



A Fated Moment Sung: Scrabblegram Songs and Readings with soprano Holly Beckmyer

Saturday 11 October, 4pm–5pm

The Straw Yard • £9

Scrabblegrams are a form of constrained writing, using all 100 Scrabble tiles to craft a piece of prose. Composer Heather Cattanach has transformed some of these playful, poignant texts into original art songs for her daughter, soprano Holly Beckmyer. This unique performance weaves together song and spoken word, with topics ranging from the absurd to the deeply reflective. Featuring piano, soprano, Indian harmonium and saxophone.

James Macmillan in Conversation

Saturday 11 October, 5:30pm–6:30pm

Holy Trinity Church • £12

Renowned composer James MacMillan speaks about his life and work, and the motivating influence of his Catholic faith.

Known for his powerful, spiritually inspired compositions, MacMillan will also touch on themes of justice, peace, and reconciliation and the inspiration he drew from the poetry of C. H. Sorley, who was killed at the Battle of Loos in 1915, in writing his oratorio *All the Hills and Vales Along*. There will be time for audience questions and discussion.



Concert: The Things that Make for Peace

Featuring poet Tasneim Zyada and

soprano Yvonne Barclay

Saturday 11 October, 7:30–9pm

Holy Trinity Church • £12

Join us for an unforgettable evening where music and spoken word intertwine in a powerful celebration of peace, hope and healing. Featuring Palestinian-British poet Tasneim Zyada, who will be performing a piece of poetry commissioned especially for this event, and soprano Yvonne Barclay along with the Young People's Choir. This unique concert invites audiences to experience the transformative power of artistic collaboration as voices – both sung and spoken – rise in unity to inspire harmony and peace.



Who Will Comfort Toffle? & The Book About Moomin, Mymble and Little My • Animated Shorts

Sunday 12 October, 10am–10:30am

Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks • £3

The lonely Toffle learns to overcome his fears when he needs to rescue the Miffle from the Groke. A timeless story about courage and friendship, *Who Will Comfort Toffle?* is the iconic picture book by Tove Jansson, published in 1960.

Little My has disappeared, and Moomintroll is determined to find her. We embark with Moomintroll and Mymble on an epic and imaginative quest through Moominvalley. The English version of these films is narrated by Sophia Jansson, Tove Jansson's niece.





Empathy is Our Strength: How to Use It for Social Change • Keetie Roelen

Sunday 12 October, 10am–11am
The Straw Yard • £9

In this session, Keetie Roelen will discuss the power of empathy in addressing enduring socio-economic injustice. Innate in all of us, empathy lays a crucial foundation for action – big and small – to fight poverty and inequality in the UK and around the world.

Come along to learn about the 3Rs of empathy, hear success stories from across the globe, and to be inspired about what you can do to create positive change. Roelen will be drawing from her new book *The Empathy Fix: Why Poverty Persists and How to Change It*.



Mona Siddiqui in Conversation

Sunday 12 October, 11am–12 noon
The Guildhall • £9

Join renowned academic and broadcaster Mona Siddiqui for a wide-ranging conversation exploring religion, ethics, pluralism and public life. A familiar voice from BBC Radio 4's *Thought for the Day* and *The Moral Maze*, Mona has long been a thoughtful presence in national dialogue on belief and belonging.

Awarded an OBE for her services to interfaith relations, Siddiqui's publications include *A Theology of Gratitude* and *Human Struggle: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*. Expect a thought-provoking hour with one of the UK's most respected public intellectuals.



Tove • The Tove Jansson biopic

Sunday 12 October, 11:30am – 1:15pm • age rated 12
Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks • £9

Set in bohemian Helsinki after World War II, *Tove* depicts the life of libertine children's author and illustrator Tove Jansson, creator of the cult *Moomin* books. Initially a side project, she was catapulted to fame after her lover insisted upon bringing the characters to life in the theatre, followed by the books publication in Sweden.

In all, nine books were released in the series, together with five picture books and a comic strip released between 1954 and 1993, syndicated all over the world to 120 newspapers in 40 countries, reaching 20 million readers daily. The *Moomins* have since been the basis for numerous television series and films.

Thunderclap • Laura Cumming

Sunday October, 12 noon–1pm
Holy Trinity Church • £9

Thunderclap: A memoir of art and life and sudden death weaves together Cumming's love for Dutch Golden Age art and her relationship with her Scottish artist father in an intimate yet epic look at identity, memory, and mortality. This richly illustrated talk will run all the way from Rembrandt and Vermeer to the painting by Carol Fabritius with which Cumming first fell in love in her twenties.

Thunderclap, shortlisted for the inaugural Women's Prize for Non-Fiction, was The Saltire Book of the Year 2024. Cumming has been Chief Art Critic of *The Observer* since 1999.

The Joy of Flat Places • Noreen Masud

Sunday 12 October, 12 noon–1pm
The Straw Yard • £9

Noreen Masud has always loved flatlands. Her earliest memory is of a wide, flat field glimpsed from the back seat of her father's car in Lahore. As an adult in Britain she has discovered many more flat landscapes to love: Orford Ness, the Cambridgeshire Fens, Morecambe Bay, Orkney. These bare, haunted expanses remind her of the flat place inside herself: the place created by trauma.

In conversation, Masud will discuss her memoir-travelogue *A Flat Place*: a book about how flat landscapes might provide a kind of language to help us understand strange lives and experiences, including complex post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Teacher of Auschwitz • Wendy Holden

Sunday 12 October, 2pm–3pm
Holy Trinity Church • £9

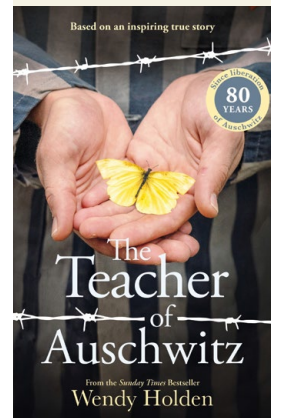
At the dark heart of Auschwitz, in a wooden hut whose walls were painted with cartoons, where children sang, wrote poetry and performed plays, one man made it his mission to shield young lives from the surrounding horrors. In *The Teacher of Auschwitz*, Wendy Holden brings to light the extraordinary true story of Fredy Hirsch – a young, gay Jewish prisoner who risked everything to protect the children of the camp.

Drawing on survivor testimony and meticulous research, this is a story of the power of hope in the face of unthinkable cruelty.



“Superb ... this book taught me to see anew”

DAILY TELEGRAPH





Moominland in 2025 • Frank Cottrell-Boyce

Sunday 12 October, 2pm–3pm

Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks • £9

Step into the whimsical world of Moominvalley with Frank Cottrell-Boyce, Waterstones' Children's Laureate and one of the UK's most beloved storytellers. Frank's acclaimed debut *Millions* won the Carnegie Medal and was adapted into a film by Danny Boyle.

This joyful event, nestled between animated Moomin shorts and a documentary on the life of Tove Jansson, invites us to reflect on the enduring power of the Moomins and the themes at the heart of their world – kindness, courage, nature and belonging.



In Conversation:

Richard Coles and Mona Siddiqui

Sunday 12 October, 4pm–5pm

Holy Trinity Church • £12

Richard Coles is a musician, writer and broadcaster, and an Anglican priest. After an unlikely stint as an 80s pop star he went on to co-present *Saturday Live* on BBC Radio 4 for twelve years and often appears on *QI* and *Have I Got News For You*. He writes regularly for *The Sunday Times*, and is the author of the number one bestselling Canon Clement Mysteries, as well as two best selling non-fiction titles, *Fathomless Riches* and *The Madness of Grief*.

In their conversation, Richard Coles and Mona Siddiqui will explore the place of ministry, music and media in his personal and professional life, and the challenges of holding onto faith in contemporary society.

Rev Richard Coles will preach at the service at Holy Trinity Church on Sunday morning at 10am.



Who Will Comfort Toffle? & The Book About Moomin, Mymble and Little My • Animated Shorts

Sunday 12 October, 4pm–4:30pm

Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks • £3

A magical blend of nostalgia and animation, capturing the gentle spirit and visual charm of Jansson's timeless Moomin world. Details as before (p21).



Berwick Writers' Forum

Berwick is a town of stories, and the Forum exists to keep those stories flowing. We host friendly, low-pressure gatherings where writers at every stage – from published authors to notebook scribblers – can share work, swap advice and spark ideas. Over the coming year we'll roll out more regular events and resources, so if words are your thing, we'd love for you to join us.

berwickliteraryfestival.com/berwick-writers-forum

Stay in the Loop
Scan and sign up for
news & opportunities for
writers in the North-East



Cabaret of Words

Tuesday 7 October, 7pm–10:30pm

The Straw Yard • FREE

Step into the Festival's warm-hearted open-mic night, where poets, flash-fictioneers, script-writers and storytellers bring original work to life. Ten-minute pre-booked slots are followed by two five-minute wild-card spots for those struck by last-minute inspiration (or courage). Relax with a drink, cheer on local talent or take to the stage yourself. You may also nominate someone to read your work for you.

Free, but seats and performance places must be booked: thestrawayard.co.uk

Writing the Stories that Make Us, with Sabrin Hasbun

**Online course in three evenings:
11, 18 & 25 September • £120**

Prize-winning author Sabrin Hasbun leads a workshop series exploring writing as a tool for change. Each session blends short readings, guided exercises and group discussion. Optional one-to-one feedback follows the course. Open to prose writers and poets of any genre and level of experience.

A Palestinian-Italian writer and Cardiff Met lecturer, Hasbun's work bridges cultures and champions collaborative creation. Her family memoir, *Crossing* traces love, loss and the search for belonging across borders.

sabrinasbun.com

Get Involved

Volunteer your skills to help us grow Berwick Writers' Forum and tell us what events or support you'd like next year.

Email hello@berwickwritersforum.com



Fringe Events



Make Mine Manga Exhibition

Monday 1 September – Friday 19 September

Berwick Library • FREE

Make Mine Manga is a free exhibition for anyone curious about manga, as well as the avid fan. It has been specially created by comics expert Paul Gravett, author of *Manga: 60 Years of Japanese Comics*. Explore how these comics first evolved in Japan and how their brilliant creators continue to expand the medium. Then move on to discover today's generation of award-winning talents and how they are interpreting the medium in their own way, into a truly global language.



Caroline Jupp: Sci-Fi Scriptorium

Berwick Shines Residency

From 6 August, Wed – Fri, 12 noon–3pm

Following her training in Printmaking and Public Art, Caroline Jupp has focused on DIY publishing, often using out-of-print books, cult novels and films as inspiration for her many participatory projects. The Sci-fi Scriptorium will be a space for writing and imagining in the town centre of Berwick, hosting workshops and inviting the public in to explore speculative forms of writing inspired by objects from the KOSB collection and Record Office. More info: maltingsberwick.co.uk/in-berwick/berwick-shines



The Spy in a Berwick Garden

Lindsay Allason-Jones and P Rowett

Thursday 16 October, 7:30pm

The Guildhall • FREE, no pre-booking

The Spy in a Berwick Garden (published by Berwick Record Office) will be launched on Thursday 16 October in the Guildhall. There will be a talk on how the story of Gibson Ferrier Steven's contribution to World War 2 emerged from a desire to get rid of an air raid shelter. The talk will be followed by a reception sponsored by the Border Archaeological Society and Berwick Record Office.

A Poet's Journey 1914–17: Song-Cycle

Lyndon Gardner and Anthony Wilson

Saturday 18 October, 7pm

St Cuthbert's Church, Norham

Tickets £15 via ticketebo.co.uk or on the door

Join tenor Lyndon Gardner and pianist Anthony Wilson for a moving performance of *A Poet's Journey*, a song cycle inspired by the poetry of Edward Thomas – killed in action in 1917 during the Battle of Arras. Set to music by composer John Middleton, the cycle captures the quiet intensity and emotional depth of Thomas' work. Middleton describes the piece as "a kind of English Winterreise," reflecting its haunting beauty and lyrical melancholy.

The concert takes place at St Cuthbert's Church in Norham, a short drive from Berwick-upon-Tweed.



The Singing Bones

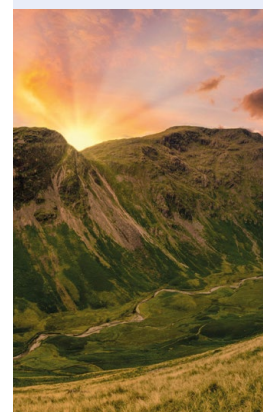
Saturday 1 November, 4pm

Cheviot Centre, Wooler

highlightsnorth.co.uk / The Cheviot Centre (01668 232123)

A three-person musical storytelling feast set in the Cumbrian wilderness which mirrors the current ongoing environmental debate.

JP Worsfold and Anne-Marie Sanderson are two Cumbrian musicians whose haunting lyrics and shimmering harmonies weave visions of the wildlife that the Borrowdale Yews have witnessed being pushed to the brink of extinction. Threading between the songs come shadows of a wilder past. Well-known local legends of the last wolf in Westmorland and the last wild boar in Cumbria are re-imagined by storyteller Jessie McMeekin.



Tasneim Zyada Residency with Berwick Shines

As part of Berwick Shines, Palestinian-British poet Tasneim Zyada will be undertaking a residency in conjunction with Berwick Literary Festival. Zyada will be exploring Berwick-upon-Tweed and the surrounding area in the context of histories of struggle and how these echo in peacetime.

As well as delivering workshops and performance as part of Berwick Literary Festival, Zyada will be supported by Berwick Shines to access the Berwick Record Office and The King's Own Scottish Borderers collection, developing her creative practice through an exploration of this unique borderland area.

Berwick Shines is the Living Barracks Cultural Engagement programme delivered by The Maltings (Berwick) Trust and supported by the Cultural Development Fund, a Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) fund administered by Arts Council England.

**BERWICK
SHINES**

Schools' & Young People's Programme

The SYP has been a fundamental part of Berwick Literary Festival since its inception. We offer events in Berwick library, local schools and the Guildhall to young people from toddlers to sixth formers. All our events are completely free of charge. This year our exciting programme includes Moomin themed Puppet shows and talks, Manga and football based topics, poetry workshops, Adventure Babies and a visit from peace campaigner Jo Berry.

We will also continue our successful Literary Conversations event, where students from two different High Schools link up to exchange book reviews.

Thanks are due to the six hard working members of the Young People's committee who plan and bring together these ambitious programmes.

Judy Crow

Convenor, SYP Berwick Literary Festival

Rotary Competition Awards

Since the first Festival in 2014, Berwick Rotary has invited all pupils at local schools to submit a short story on a particular theme. Shortlisted pupils are invited to an award ceremony in the Guildhall, where excerpts are read and prizewinners announced. (Attendance at the event is so high from pupils and parents that it is not possible to accommodate members of the public).

First, Primary & Grove Schools Moominvalley Puppet Show

Based on the much-loved Moominland novels by Tove Jansson, this gentle heart-warming show tells the story of a year in Moominvalley, bringing the characters to life with puppets. The show uses beautiful original music and songs, and pre-recorded narration.

The show was created in consultation with Sophia Jansson, Tove's niece, and echoes the books' themes: the love of nature, the value of friendship, the pain of separation and the acceptance of difference.



Middle Schools

Tom Palmer: Football Reading Game

A quiz about all the different things you can read about football (with non-football content for the non-football fans). Followed by a penalty shoot out.

Tom Palmer was a very reluctant reader as a child, but reading about football changed all that and made him a reader, then a writer, all through his passion for the game. This is a celebration of reading for pleasure and the impact it can have on your life.

John Osborne: To Make People Happy

A writing workshop for schools, created by writer and theatre maker John Osborne. Listen to advice about how to be happy and fill your pages with poems and stories that will make people happy. A session with EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) students is sponsored by the North Northumberland branch of the National Autism Society.

High School Events

New to the SYP programme this year is a **Poetry Workshop** hosted by Berwick Academy, with their own Year 9 pupils, but also including Year 8s from the feeder Middle schools. As well as being an enriching experience for the students, it's hoped early familiarisation with the Academy will help ease the transition for the younger students later in the year. Three published poets will talk about their craft and encourage the pupils to experiment with the poetic forms.

Other workshops taking place at Berwick Academy, Longridge Towers, Eyemouth and Berwickshire High schools include:

Why We Love Manga! with Paul Gravett

You have to read them 'back-to-front', so right-to-left, and they're almost entirely in black-and-white. So why have comics made in Japan proved so captivating to several generations of British readers? Tying in with the touring exhibition 'Make Mine Manga!' (see p26), curator and comics brainiac Paul Gravett reveals more about what makes the Japanese approach to the medium so revolutionary and riveting.

Building Bridges, Healing and Empathy with Jo Berry

Jo shares her extraordinary journey of meeting the man responsible for her father's death in an IRA bombing. She explores the transformative power of unbounded empathy to break cycles of violence, build bridges across deep divides, and open the door to healing and peace. She will share her work with young people and how she sees them as change makers.

English Mind, Arab Heart with Omar Sabbagh

The Beirut-based poet, writer and critic talks about his work and inspirations, as well as reading from his last two books of poetry.

High School Collaborations

For a second year, Berwick Academy will participate in 'A Literary Conversation' when students will create postcard-sized recommendations of books to share with Longridge Towers School. Both schools will display the recommendations, along with Berwick Library. Last year's project was highly successful: all the books were borrowed in a very short space of time.

Meanwhile students at Eyemouth and Berwickshire High Schools will send each other prompts on the theme of peace to stimulate writing which will be displayed by the Festival and in the schools.

Students' work will be on display at the Festival Hub in St Cuthbert's Parish Centre, Walkergate on Friday 10, Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 October.

Festival Cafe & Box Office

For the first time, the Festival is opening its own cafe, provided by The Cornerhouse Cafe, housed within St Cuthbert's Parish Centre on Walkergate. Tickets for events can also be purchased at the Box Office situated here. Box Office details on p32.

Sit and relax with refreshments and enjoy the the Festival vibe, take time to chat to other festival goers and take a look at the work produced by the students during our workshops.

CAFE (cash only)

Serving soup and a selection of cakes, tray bakes & scones. Hot and cold drinks.

Opening times

Fri 11:00am–3:30pm

Sat / Sun 10:30am–3:30pm

BOOKS

Books featured during the Festival will be available to buy and have signed by the author at most events.

They can also be bought from

Geo. C. Grieve (Stationer & Bookseller)
1 Church Street (nr Guildhall),
Berwick-upon-Tweed · 01289 306051
info@grieve-stationers.co.uk

Details correct at time of printing. We may need to change details due to circumstances beyond our control, in which case we will try to advise ticket holders as soon as possible.

Our Venues

- 1 Berwick Library**
Walkergate, TD15 1DB
- 2 Berwick Parish Centre**
Parade, TD15 1DF
- 3 Holy Trinity Church**
Parade, TD15 1DF
- 4 Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks**
TD15 1DQ
- 5 Martins the Printers**
Seaview Works, Main St, Spittal, TD15 1RS
- 6 Salvation Army Hall**
Church Street, TD15 1EE
- 7 St Andrew's Church**
Wallace Green, TD15 1EB
- 8 St Cuthbert's Parish Centre**
Walkergate, TD15 1DS
- 9 The Guildhall**
Marygate, TD15 1BN
- 10 The Straw Yard**
Parade, TD15 1DF

Beyond the Town

Ad Gefrin

South Road, Wooler, NE71 6NJ

Duns Volunteer Hall

Duns, TD11 3AF

Fogo Kirk

Scottish Borders, TD11 3RA

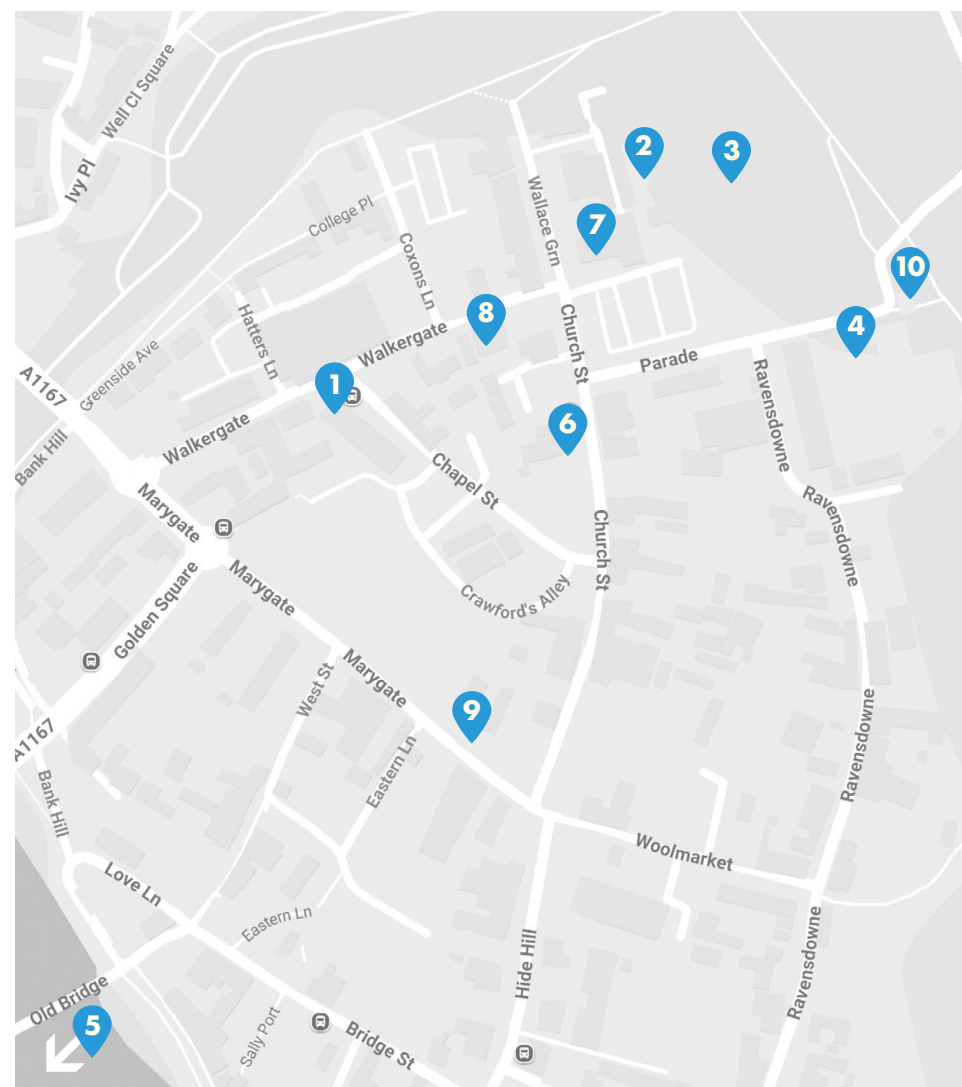
Horncliffe Memorial Hall

Main Street, Horncliffe, TD15 2XW

Wooler Library

Cheviot Centre, Wooler, NE71 6BL

Berwick Map



All our venues are wheelchair accessible; for the Guildhall, arrangements must be made in advance with the custodian: 01289 330900.

For more information about our town, where to park, where to eat and stay and other local attractions and events, see visitberwick.com

How to Book

Online

Click the link in each event listing in this brochure, or book directly via the Maltings: maltingsberwick.co.uk

By Phone

01289 330999 (Staffed intermittently; leave a message for a call back)

In person at

Maltings Cinema at Berwick Barracks
when open for film screenings (see schedule at maltingsberwick.co.uk)

Festival Box Office at St Cuthbert's

During the Festival weekend there will also be a Box Office in St Cuthbert's Parish Centre, Walkergate, where tickets can be purchased by cash or card for events that are not sold out:

Fri 10 October, 11am – 4pm

Sat 11 October, 9:30am – 4pm

Sun 12 October, 9:30am – 4pm

At the door if the event is not at capacity (cash only). Over the Festival weekend if in doubt about how full the event might be, please use the Festival Box Office at St Cuthbert's, as above.

The following events need to be booked with the individual venues:

- Border Readers, Tue 7 Oct:
via Wooler Library on 01668 282123
- Cabaret of Words, Tue 7 Oct:
via thestrawayard.co.uk
- Pre-festival and Festival Fringe events
(see individual listings)

Contact Us

Berwick Literary Festival

Berwick Community Trust,
56-58 Castlegate,
Berwick-upon-Tweed,
Northumberland TD15 1JT

info@berwickliteraryfestival.com
berwickliteraryfestival.com



@berwicklitfest #berwicklitfest

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