

## South Warwickshire Literary Festival returns to Leamington

**Back for more -  
SWLF at The Fold**

We are so happy to bring you our fourth little festival with a big heart from The Fold this year. As Leamington's only literary festival we've worked hard to offer something for everyone - listen to our authors, be inspired in a workshop, soak up the ambience, buy some books and go home fired-up and ready to write!

**+ In brief**

**MEET WYPL 2024/2025**



**Full story on page 2**

**FULL FESTIVAL  
PROGRAMME INSIDE**

**See centre spread**

**WRITERS' GROUP  
ROUND UP**



A writer's life can be lonely if you don't go to festivals and don't have a network of connections. Check out our page of local groups for all kinds of writers and all kinds of writing.

Warwick  
**Words**  
History  
Festival

**29 September  
to 5 October 2025**

Special guests include:  
Nathen Amin, Tracy Borman,  
Helen Carr, Dan Cruickshank,  
Max Hastings, Joanne Paul,  
Sir Tony Robinson, Gareth Russell,  
Dermot Turing, Alison Weir  
and many more ...



Sign up to our mailing list and we'll keep you up to date with all the latest  
**Warwick Words History Festival** events: [www.warwickwords.co.uk](http://www.warwickwords.co.uk)

## Welcome everyone!

**Jacci Gooding** SWLF Founder & Director

And here we are for 2025, celebrating our fourth year of the festival and our local authors, here at The Fold.

Top slot this year goes to multi-million book selling author Mark Edwards. Mark writes psychological thrillers and to date has sold over 5 million books and topped the bestseller chart numerous times. Don't miss him!

We also have the super Alison May back with us, along with her writing buddy Janet Gover and they will be discussing Collaborative Writing - no mean feat, and we're looking forward to what they have to say. We are delighted to again be hosting the incumbent Warwickshire Young Poet Laureate, Ananditha Venkatramanan - stand by for some incredible poetry!

It's been a busy year behind the scenes for the team, kicking off in January with our writing competition which saw winners from South Africa, Dorset - and Leamington Spa! Not bad! Do have a read of our article about writing competitions in the back of this programme - some very wise words from festival co-director, competition judge, award-winning poet and all round good egg, Gwyneth Box.

We hope you find lots to enjoy at the festival whether you're here on a main hall ticket, attending a workshop, or treating yourself to one of our expert-led one-to-one sessions. And there are plenty of author book tables too, so you can take home a bit of the day. Enjoy! ■



# What happens when your publisher closes their doors?

## Interview with Shelley Wilson, author and writing mentor.



**When you found out your publisher was closing what was your reaction?**

I was on holiday when I spotted the email from my publisher saying ‘We’re Closing.’ My immediate reaction was panic, anger, sadness, and overwhelm. All the emotions hit me at once, and I have to admit that I spiralled into doom and gloom territory. I was told my books would be removed within thirty days. That would also mean losing all my reviews, and any author knows how hard it is to get readers to leave a book review!

**How has the closure affected your writing career and the availability of your books?**

My publisher laid out clearly what would happen next, so I knew there were no surprises, but it was still a lot to digest. The Reversion of Rights letter arrived in my inbox on June 30th meaning I was free to do whatever I wanted with my books. While that might sound fabulous, it was a lot to deal with. I had published thirteen titles across various genres and formats, including audio. Those thirteen books have now disappeared from all sales platforms. I’ve already received a few messages from readers asking why they can’t obtain certain titles.

One thought I had was did I want to republish all of those titles, and the surprising answer was, no! I’ll be republishing six. Some will be second editions, and others will be updated and then published.

**Where do you think this experience will take you in the months to come?**

There’s work to be done to fill in the gaps in my publishing skillset, but because I’m incredibly fortunate to have family and friends who support me I’ve decided to start my own imprint (publishing company) and republish independently. I’m also launching a video podcast. I figured that what I was going through and the steps I’m now taking might make good content and be helpful to other authors or new writers.

**Has this experience changed how you view the publishing industry or influenced your future goals?**

It’s a tough industry and I’m an advocate for self-publishing as I see the benefits of being in control of your own writing destiny. I opted for the independent route as there are no guarantees that this wouldn’t happen again with another publisher. My last novel, Floating Solo, was self-published, so I have at least one book to promote while I sort out the rest.

As a writing mentor, I draw on my experiences with independent and traditional publication to guide my clients.

**What advice would you give to other authors who might face a similar situation?**

First of all, know that you’re not alone. Allow yourself time to process the emotions. It’s okay to feel frustrated, disappointed, or even lost. But don’t stay stuck there. I talk about mindset more than the craft of writing with my clients, and this entire situation has certainly tested my own mindset.

The next step is to clarify your rights. Request a reversion letter for all your titles. Once the rights are officially yours, you have options. Ask yourself: Do I want to seek a new publisher? Do I want to self-publish under my own imprint? Do I want to update, rebrand, or relaunch my books?

Remember to speak with people in your writing community. Surround yourself with people who understand the industry and can help you make confident decisions.

I see this as a new chapter, not the end. If anything, this situation has reminded me that we are the constant in our creative careers. Publishers may come and go, but our words, our voice, and our power as authors remain. ■

## A word from WYPL Ananditha



Hi! I’m Ananditha Venkatramanan and I’m 16 years old. I love poetry, Maya Angelou, Taylor Swift and Dave. Poetry has always been a comforting presence throughout my life, starting out with silly rhymes and taking me to becoming the Warwickshire Young Poet Laureate!

When I applied for the WYPL, one of the things I was most passionate about was to be able to give everyone something to connect with in my poetry. Whether that may be a mood, or an expression, or setting, I’m so grateful to have met so many different people – all with a unique story to tell. Having had these experiences has only strengthened my belief that poetry is so unbelievably powerful in bridging gaps and in celebrating our beautiful differences within a community.

**“Poetry is unbelievably powerful in bridging gaps and celebrating differences”**

Some of the incredible things I’ve been able to do this year have included writing a poem for and performing at the Refugee Week Event, judging and performing at the Schools Poetry Slam, attending and conducting a workshop at Warwick Library Page Turner, performing at the School’s Library Service’s Book Awards and so much more! Every single experience has had something I’ve been proud of and something that I’ve learnt along the way.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would get the role when I applied but I’m so glad that I did. This experience has been the best thing I’ve ever had the privilege of being a part of. I can’t wait for the South Warwickshire Literary Festival and to see where poetry takes me next! ■

## Words To Live and Die By

Earlier this year, Specialist Palliative Care Nurse Betty Molyneaux contacted us to tell us about a Haiku competition organised by the Warwick Hospital Palliative Care Team as part of the Hospice UK’s annual ‘Dying Matters’ week. Here she tells a little more about the resulting book:

The book is an anthology of haikus titled *Words to Live and Die By* and is a guide for navigating the human experience through the language of others, specifically in times of loss.

Back in 2023 I attended the Facing Death Creatively conference at St. Christopher’s Hospice, London. There, a discussion that highlighted key themes for palliative care professionals on creating safe spaces for expression, fuelled my own search for further creative approaches in palliative care.

My idea for a haiku competition took shape during a meeting about Dying Matters Week. I’d love to say it was the result of deep brainstorming and soul-searching, but in truth, it was a spontaneous spark—nurtured by the realisation that poetry, particularly haiku, complemented Hospice UK’s theme for that year: the way we talk about dying matters. As we try to encourage conversations about death and grief, poetry, especially short forms, seems to have a unique power to console when words fail us.

**“A guide for navigating human experience”**

So, we launched the haiku competition on behalf of South Warwickshire University NHS Foundation Trust’s Acute Palliative Care team.

We were honoured that William Sieghart—writer, broadcaster, founder of The Forward Poetry Prizes, and author of The Poetry Pharmacy books—agreed to be to the judge.

Alongside the Haiku competition, we were delighted to be among the first Trusts to showcase the Poetry Pharmacy on the walls of Warwick Hospital. These poems served many purposes, as they distracted, passed time, decorated our space, enlightened young and old.

Through this journey I have come to appreciate how the words of others help us to understand, to grieve, and, in time, to heal. It has reaffirmed that life and death are not separate—they are intertwined.

*Words To Live and Die By* is available from the author table area at the back of the hall. ■

## Beat the blank page

### How often do you say, “I can’t think of anything to write”?

As a creative writer with no contractual deadline to meet, perhaps you can get away with this attitude – though it certainly isn’t the best way to hook an agent or a publisher! But if your editor’s waiting, a lack of ideas is no excuse. So what can you do?

Sometimes the solution is as simple as narrowing down the focus.

It’s a mistake to think that having the freedom to write about anything you want will make writing easier. Some topics and writing projects are just too big to tackle and when there are lots of possible ends we could pull, we end up in a tangle. Frequently, though, when we look closer and isolate each element in the bigger picture, we’ll find something worth saying.

If you’re writing a novel, try focusing on a single scene, what one character is doing and thinking, or on a single dialogue; if you’re writing creative non-fiction, maybe concentrate on one specific item that’s in the scene you want to describe; if you’re writing a poem about a forest in autumn, focus on one specific tree, or even just one leaf.

Think small and you may find your thoughts get clearer. ■



## NewWriters.org.uk

### Writing Competitions and Resources for Writers of Fiction and Poetry

Established in 2022, NewWriters.org.uk is a website aimed at writers from all walks of life who want to improve their craft and get their work published.

They typically run three main writing competitions each year and offer four-figure prize funds, all prize-winning entries (and some from the shortlists) are published in the New Writers Anthology. They also run regular free-to-enter competitions, with cash prizes, that are exclusive to recipients of their free monthly newsletter. To make their paid-entry competitions as inclusive and accessible as possible, they also offer many free entries to people on low incomes.

NewWriters.org.uk donates a proportion of the proceeds from their paid-entry competitions to good causes, splitting funds between two UK-registered charities: First Story (firststory.org.uk), and The Funzi and Bodo Trust (funzi.org.uk).

First Story is England’s leading creative writing charity that gives young writers chances to explore and enhance their creative writing skills through workshops, mentorships and other varied activities. The Funzi and Bodo Trust, meanwhile, runs a wide range of developmental and educational projects in the villages of Funzi and Bodo in Kenya.

NewWriters.org.uk also features other writing competitions from other trusted organisations (including the South Warwickshire Literary Festival). They only feature competitions they know to be legitimate, either because the editors have entered them in the past and had positive experiences, or after they’ve researched the organisation in question.

They also feature details of opportunities and resources for writers, including courses, workshops or other recommended websites or writing community groups, to help writers at all levels of experience improve their craft.

As NewWriters.org.uk grows in popularity, they hope to increase the prizes they offer in their three main competitions and also their free-to-enter writing contests. They will also continue to showcase new writing talent on their website and in their regular anthologies and highlight opportunities for writers.

For more details about the latest New Writers competitions, visit **NewWriters.org.uk**. ■

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Only £5 per entry.

[prize.parracombe.org.uk](http://prize.parracombe.org.uk)



# All you need to know

## Main Hall Activities

09:45 - 09:55	Open and welcome
10:00 - 10:30	Talk - Self-publish like a pro Speaker: <b>Sian Smith</b> (Sian Smith Editorial)
10:40 - 11:10	Performance - Poetry & competition winners WYPL <b>Ananditha Venkatramanan</b> , WYPL runners-up <b>Zoe &amp; Thalia</b> , and Competition Winners
11:30 - 12:00	Talk/interview - Romantasy/Fantasy Speakers: <b>Kerry Williams</b> & <b>Ellie Tilley</b>
12:00 - 13:15	Lunch break (includes 30 minutes Open Mic)
13:15 - 13:55	Talk - Co-writing Speakers: <b>Alison May</b> & <b>Janet Gover</b>
14:15 - 14:55	Talk/interview - Horror Speaker: <b>Gary Phelps</b>
15:20 - 16:00	Talk/interview - Thriller Speaker: <b>Mark Edwards</b>
16:00 - 16:25	Last chance to buy!
16:25 - 17:15	Author Q&A Panelists: <b>Gabrielle Mullarkey</b> , <b>Mark Edwards</b> , <b>Paul Gitsham</b> , <b>Gary Phelps</b>
17:15 - 17:30	Thank yous and goodbyes

## Workshops

MORNING	
10:00h - 12:00 noon	WS1 <b>Romance</b> – <b>Alison May</b> – Glassroom (Ground floor) WS2 <b>Crime</b> – <b>Paul Gitsham</b> – Boardroom (Ground floor)
AFTERNOON	
13:15h - 15:10h	WS6 <b>Poetry</b> – <b>Emilie Lauren Jones</b> – Boardroom (Ground floor) WS7 <b>Children's Writing</b> – <b>Kay Brophy</b> – Bunker (Basement) WS8 <b>Fiction</b> – <b>Gabrielle Mullarkey</b> – Green Room (Basement)

Socially Shared Book Events

MEET THE AUTHOR BOOKSALE & TEAROOM

Saturday 18th October  
11.00am – 3.00pm  
St Francis of Assisi, Kenilworth  
FREE ENTRY, OPEN TO THE PUBLIC  
Tickets sociallyshared.co.uk/events

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## Sharing success

Why other authors' success is good news for you

How do you feel when you hear that one of your writer friends has had a success? Maybe they've found an agent, had something published, won a competition, or are in talks with an editor. They're over the moon and can't stop talking about it. How does that make you feel?

So often our reaction is negative. Our inner voice starts to whine, "Oh, it's not fair. I work just as hard as they do. I submit my work just as often. I write just as well."

Don't forget, though, that being connected to people who are working with editors and agents puts you one step closer to those same professionals. And so much in the publishing world is dependent on connections.

What goes around comes around and maintaining a flow of goodwill around your network is a sure way to see it loop back to you eventually. That friend who just bagged an agent for her YA romance may end up in conversation with someone who would be a perfect connection to further your writing journey, or they may invite you to a launch party where you'll meet the publisher of your dreams. If you've snubbed them because you're envious of their success, that possible introduction is lost forever.

So the next time someone comes into your writer's group saying, "I bagged an agent" or "I'm talking to an editor next week," maybe you should remember that that's pushing you closer to that core group – it's connecting you to the right people.

Celebrate other people's wins and maybe you'll be next. ■

## Stop Press!

Watch for new books out this autumn from SWLF friends: "The ones who never left" by Gabrielle Mullarkey, "The Approval of Sheep" by Karen Storey, and "Paranormal Gloucestershire" by SC Skillman (Sheila Robinson).

Meet the authors here today! ■

# Speakers

## A big thank you to the writers and experts sharing their talent, insight, and passion

Our festival wouldn't exist without the generous authors and speakers who give their time and expertise. From inspiring talks and practical workshops to on-stage interviews and one-to-one advice sessions, they are here to share their knowledge, creativity, and enthusiasm.

We are delighted to welcome these talented individuals – familiar names and exciting new voices – whose contributions make this celebration of local authors and their writing truly unforgettable.



**Gwyneth Box**  
Poetry  
one-to-one



**Gary Phelps**  
Supernatural  
fiction speaker



**Mark Edwards**  
Thrillers  
speaker



**Kay Brophy**  
Children's  
writing  
workshop



**Beth Ferguson**  
Publishing  
one-to-one



**Paul Gitsham**  
Crime writing  
workshop



**Janet Gover**  
Collaborative  
writing  
speaker



**Gabrielle Mullarkey**  
Fiction  
workshop



**Ananditha Venkatramanan**  
WYPL



**Alison May**  
Collaborative  
writing  
speaker



**Emilie Lauren Jones**  
Poetry  
workshop



**Ellie Tilley**  
Romantasy  
speaker



**Kerry Williams**  
Romantasy  
speaker



**Siân Smith**  
Self-publishing  
speaker



**Shelley Wilson**  
Publishing  
one-to-one

## Take a deep breath

Being asked to read your work in public is a compliment – a tribute to your reputation as a writer. But not all writers are born performers. Many of us are afraid of public speaking and when we're anxious and stressed about performing we tend to say, "Take a deep breath."

Much better advice would be, "Breathe out slowly."

When you breathe in, you add tension. When you breathe out, your whole body relaxes a little. Breathing out slowly makes room for a new, focused, breath – and that's the breath with which you address your audience. ■

**Southam Book Festival**

**Book in a Window**  
**Flash Fiction**  
**Authors**

**Talks on**  
Self publishing  
A story of mistakes  
Tales of a junior doctor  
A Cubbington pear tree  
Becoming your true self

**Café**  
**Stalls**  
**Raffle**  
**Quiz**

**Graham Adams Centre**  
**12<sup>th</sup> Oct 11am-4pm**  
**entry FREE**

**Bookbinding**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Hand**

**Rugby Literary Festival**

8-6 October 2025

**Friday 3 to Sunday 5 October**  
**Rugby Town Centre**

**Family Entertainment | Storytelling**  
**Workshops | Book Fair | Authors**  
**Story Trail**

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# Writers' Group Round-up

## Banbury Writers' Cafe (N Oxfordshire)

BWC meet every other Thursday at The Old Town Cafe, Parsons Street, Banbury. This supportive group has been going for over a decade and encourages all forms of writing and ability. First two meetings free, £3 thereafter. For writers of any level.

## Chippy Writers (N. Oxfordshire)

CW are two groups of Creative Writers who meet on a Monday morning or afternoon for three ten-week terms during the year, at Chipping Norton Theatre, north Oxfordshire.

Contact: [contactus@chippywriters.org.uk](mailto:contactus@chippywriters.org.uk)

## Coventry Writers' Group

One of the longest running groups in the region. A friendly group for writers, poets, playwrights and dramatists. Members range from those who write for pleasure to multi-published authors. New members always welcome. Meetings: first Tuesday of the month. 7:30pm to 9:30pm, at SWS Offices, 8-10 Maudslay Road, Coventry.

## Global Online Stanza

Active online group for peer review, workshoping and general discussion of poetry, GOS is an international Poetry Society Stanza hosted by Gwyneth Box. Meetings on Zoom, first and third Mondays, 19:00h UK time. All levels of experience welcome. (Poetry Society membership not required.)

Contact: [globalonlinestanza@gmail.com](mailto:globalonlinestanza@gmail.com)

## Inkplotters Writers' Group Leamington

Inkplotters is a friendly and informal local writers' group who get together once a month to learn more about the craft; provide a platform for our work; offer constructive criticism and share opportunities. All levels of (non) experience welcome!

Contact: [Inkplotters@sandraeap.f9.co.uk](mailto:Inkplotters@sandraeap.f9.co.uk)

## Inspirational Writing Group - U3A

This new group offers the opportunity to join with others to develop your writing skills. They welcome all genres i.e. poetry, prose, short stories, song lyrics, nursery rhymes, spoken word, letter writing, etc. Monthly on Wednesday mornings 10:00-12:00.

Contact Ron Betts via online form: [https://warwickdistrict.u3asite.uk/u3a-contact-form/?contact\\_id=24674](https://warwickdistrict.u3asite.uk/u3a-contact-form/?contact_id=24674)

## Leamington Writers' Circle

Meet every Sunday, midday, at Temperance Cafe, Leamington. All are welcome, regardless of experience, genre or medium, and of course regardless of demographics.

## Rugby Cafe Writers

A friendly group of budding and experienced writers who meet in Rugby every fortnight and share their love of books and writing. They also publish their own anthologies. Beginners are most welcome.

## Stratford Scribes (Stratford upon Avon)

Group led by Cathy Whittaker, a creative writing tutor and former Warwick Poet Laureate. Meet on Wednesdays 10.45 am-12.45 pm at the Methodist Church, Old Town, Stratford-upon-Avon.

## The Bear Pit Theatre Writers' Workshop - Stratford upon Avon

Based in a busy working theatre, these free workshops are welcoming, supportive and creative sessions, where attendees explore writing techniques, experiment to see what works and showcase new, original writing. Meetings every fortnight on Monday evenings at the theatre.

Contact Nick: [nicklemesurier@icloud.com](mailto:nicklemesurier@icloud.com)

## The Society of Authors - Warwickshire Group

Regular creative writing coffee mornings on the last Friday of the month in Leamington. The group also organises occasional events in Kenilworth and Warwick and regular online sessions featuring discussions or talks and allowing members to make connections and share writing advice.

## The Studley Writing Group

A friendly group who come together 8 times a year (term-time only) to share their writing and encourage each other. Meetings held in the community library in Studley Village Hall on a Monday 9.30am – 11.30am.

Contact Julie: [julie.parry12@btopenworld.com](mailto:julie.parry12@btopenworld.com)

## Write Club Leamington

The Write Club welcomes committed writers looking for help to progress their work to the next level. You will find encouragement, new ideas and constructive criticism from peers in 12 weekly structured sessions.

## Writers Hub Coventry

For writers who want to improve and progress their writing as well as to be motivated, encouraged and challenged. A lively and mutually encouraging group who range from beginners to award winners. Meetings at Central Library every other Saturday, 10am-12noon.

Contact: [@11ampersands](https://twitter.com/11ampersands) on X

## Writing West Midlands

Supporting creative writers and creative writing in the West Midlands region. Please visit the website for information for writers across Warwickshire and the West Midlands, including the annual National Writers Conference held at Birmingham University in May. ■



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# Competition Focus

## SWLitFest Writing Competition

**A huge “thank you!” to all involved**

2025 was the third year of running the SLWF creative writing competition, and we introduced a new category – Flash Fiction – and an additional “commended” prize in each category.

Of course, more categories and more prizes mean more costs, but with nearly 600 entries from around the world this year, we were delighted that the competition added over £1,100 to the Lit Fest coffers. We are grateful to our reading team volunteers, to our judges who generously understand that we can only pay a small fee, and, of course, to everyone who entered the competition, whether or not their work was chosen by our judges. ■

## Judge's reports

### A few highlights

Our CNF judge, **Simon Whaley**, shared a “little secret” about judging competitions: “The first entry a judge reads is the one that sets the bar. Everything else afterwards is either better, or not quite as successful, or just as powerful. A writing competition is just that – a competition between the submitted entries. They have to fight it out between themselves, and let me tell you, it gets quite gladiatorial towards the end. For me, this is where spelling, punctuation, and grammar can deliver the final blows.”

**Gabrielle Mullarkey** quoted author George Saunders: ‘when you read a short story, you come out a little more aware and a little more in love with the world around you.’ She noted that in the Fiction category, “the best entries evoked a range of emotions in the reader: for example, it’s possible to write a story on a dark, emotive topic that will raise a smile as well as anxious recognition. The best writing that we all enjoy as readers will evoke more than one emotional response, reflecting human complexity.” ■

This year, Festival co-director, **Gwyneth Box**, judged the Poetry entries. She commented not only on the wide range of styles, forms and themes among the poetry entries, but also on “the mix of cultures and languages represented: images from Kenya, the Philippines, Bosnia, Gaza... tales of blending and binding, mapping borderless lands of a modern world. And in this mapping of a world in flux, the poems showed how we cling to the words of our ancestors, even when we write in a new tongue, and how we experiment with words picked from the strange new tongue although we write in our own.”

**Michael Loveday**, judge of our newest category, Flash Fiction, noted that a fair proportion of the entries dealt with “those well-worn topics that we writers of stories often instinctively reach for: break-ups, infidelity, bereavement, aging, and so on.” He warns that, “In a competition, submitting a story exploring one of these familiar subjects via a conventional literary mode can be a risk: the fundamental reality of fierce competition means that the story is going to have to do something extremely special to lift itself away from the general mass of papers the judge is poring through.” ■

## Poetry winner

We’re delighted to share here the winning entry in the poetry category. Congratulations to Tony Watts, and many thanks, too, to Tony, for donating the prize money back into SWLF coffers – very much appreciated!

### Invasion **Tony Watts**

Windows thrown open in vain –  
indoors and out  
the same breathless density of heat  
(nightfall bringing no relief) and then

the moths came –

flattening themselves on walls and ceilings  
like notes on a bulletin board, like poems  
intent on being read.

Buff Ermine, Blood Vein, Ruby Tiger –  
insect aristocrats  
in their silks and satins  
and powdered furs;

Rosy Footman, Carpet Moth –  
priests of the night, their dusty vestments  
looped and veined with glyphs.

## Three reasons to enter competitions

**Submitting your work to creative writing competitions can be an important way to further your writing career.**

### Get your name out there

Winning first prize in a prestigious creative-writing competition is a sure way to get your name out there, but smaller competitions have their place, too, and being short-listed or even long-listed for a prize can also garner good publicity. Any competition success also provides a useful writing credit to be cited when you submit your work to publishers later on.

### Share your work and get published

Some competitions include publication in an anthology for top-listed entries. Others offer a publishing package to the winner, or the chance to share a fuller manuscript with a publisher, editor, or agent. Winning work may also be published on a website or shared on social media. Even if there is no publication involved, you may be invited to appear at a festival or to give a reading at a literary event or on a local radio show, which can also be a great opportunity to put your work in front of potential readers.

### Extend your network

Whether a winner, runner-up, or just an entrant to a competition, there is often the chance to attend the awards ceremony where the results are announced. This is a great opportunity to network with writers, readers, and other people from the publishing industry, and to make useful contacts. Although your primary focus might be on finding a publisher, remember this is not the only possibility: be prepared to discuss collaborations or mentoring, and to hear about other projects, opportunities and support.

*Entering competitions is good discipline: you learn to follow publishers' guidelines, to meet deadlines, and to send work out into the world. And, whether you win or not, there's a lot to gain.* ■

I stalked the house with a camera, snapping  
with journalistic fervour,  
documenting  
the alien invasion.

Grass Emerald, Clouded Silver – names  
I scarcely knew at the time but would soon track down,  
poring over colour-plates, comparing;

Oak Eggar, Magpie, Lime-speck Pug –  
neighbours who call to introduce themselves  
and are never seen again.

They're out there now  
on buddleia and broom –  
on ragwort, sorrel and dock –  
in that parallel universe  
we call the night – each one  
silent as a ghost – but believed in

having once been seen. ■





**THE ARTS  
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ROYAL  
LEAMINGTON SPA**

**A big thank you to The Arts Society, Royal Leamington Spa (TASRLS), who generously supported our 2024 event and who have come up trumps again this year!**

The Arts Society is a leading arts education charity with a network of local Societies which bring people together through a shared interest in the arts.

Leamington Spa is one of the largest local Societies with over 600 members. We regularly host talks from renowned experts at the Royal Spa Centre. We arrange trips and events throughout the year, and provide opportunities to volunteer with local museums or galleries. As a charity, we also give grants to local artists, and arts or heritage related projects. Our website gives details of upcoming activities, and you are most welcome to attend a talk as a visitor to see what we offer.

Lectures are held on the first Wednesday of most months. Doors open at 10.00, with the talk at 11.00 and 14.00.

Find out more on our website: [www.tasrls.org.uk](http://www.tasrls.org.uk) ■

## New writers coffee morning in Leamington Spa

Did you know there is a writer's coffee morning every second Friday of the month, held at The Fold in Leamington Spa called 'Prose and Pastries'?

Organised by writer Jen Flannery of Secret Writing Retreats, the mornings offer an inspiring space to write and an opportunity to connect with others, whilst also enjoying unlimited tea, coffee and pastries. The sessions run from 10.30am-12pm and standard tickets cost £15.00. Tickets are available through the Secret Writing Retreats website.

Jen describes the mornings as 'a sweet bite size version of a secret writing retreat that aims to build a supportive writing community here in Leamington. Whether you are a seasoned writer or just getting started, everyone is welcome.'

Secret Writing Retreats also offers themed day writing retreats in inspiring locations across Warwickshire and the West Midlands with guest speakers. Previous events have included a crime writing day at an old Victorian lockup with guest author Natalie Marlow and a day of inspired writing at Guy's Cliffe House with contemporary writer Harriet Cummings. With lots of inspiring events planned for 2026, take a look at [secretwritingretreats.co.uk](http://secretwritingretreats.co.uk) to find out more. ■

## Banbury Writers' Café

BWC exists to encourage writers in their writing endeavours. Support comes in the form of feedback from readings and focused meetings on specific topics requested by the group. We are a friendly bunch with a wide variety of social backgrounds, interests, and skills, all aiming for the same thing: to improve our writing through talking to others as keen write as we are.

If you are a writer, or would like to be, then come along for a chat and a coffee and see if we can help you achieve your writing goals.

Banbury Writers' Café meets at: the Old Town Café and Gallery' at 21 Parson's Street, Banbury, OX16 5LY. Every two weeks on a Thursday evening. Meetings run from 6:30pm to 9:00pm (ish). The first meeting you attend is free, subsequent meetings cost £3 per person.

The organiser / facilitator at any meeting will remind anyone that needs it, that the code of conduct is: "be excellent to each other." People are responsible for themselves, their actions, and their own health. Anyone under 16yrs of age needs to be accompanied by an adult.

Contact Max: [max@radicalis.co.uk](mailto:max@radicalis.co.uk) or just come along. ■

## Rugby Literary Festival

**Friday 3 to Sunday 5 October – Rugby Town Centre**

Following the inaugural event last year Rugby Literary Festival is set to return to the town centre from Friday 3 till Sunday 5 October. Organisers Rugby First, in partnership with local author Lindsay Woodward and a variety of other groups and organisations, are planning to build on the success of last year by expanding the literary offer.

The festival promises a fun, informative, creative and educational packed programme of storytelling, workshops, book fairs, authors, discussion panels, competitions, street art, dressed windows, and much more! Whether you're an established writer or just have a love of books there is something for everyone!

Linda Lowne, Rugby First Business Director said: "Last year's festival proved extremely popular and attracted both local people and visitors from further afield. The festival is a great way to shine a light on the town as well as support local businesses through increased footfall, spend and awareness. A special thanks to Rugby Borough Council and all those businesses taking part. We look forward to welcoming everyone to this year's festival!"

For further information on the festival, to get involved or volunteer please visit [www.rugbyfirst.org](http://www.rugbyfirst.org), follow us on our socials or email [chris@ucltd.co.uk](mailto:chris@ucltd.co.uk). ■

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Why not have a word with Gwyneth today? She's the Assistant Festival Director and will be hosting the lunchtime Open Mic. Or give her a call on 0798 661 3437. ■

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