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## Poets celebrate home truths with verses voicing local pride on National Poetry Day

An elephant evacuee, the meaning of “croggy” and “siles”, and the secret missions of baby eels: an England-wide call-out to BBC Local Radio listeners for significant stories, observations and truths that illuminate the places we call home has inspired 13 new poems for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Poetry Day on October 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The new poems offer insights into the “hidden truths” of the towns and communities of England, juxtaposing local lore with football chants, slang and pub names to map the idiosyncratic sources of pride across the regions. Each poet has tackled stereotypes from the ground up, adapting and replacing tourist board clichés to powerful effect: though each poem is different, a strong sense of generosity and gratitude runs through them all.

The Tees poem singles out the hulking skyline of towers and chimneys that inspired Ridley Scott’s *Bladerunner*: in Shropshire, an elephant that spent the war billeted in the pub stables takes centre stage, while Somerset’s poem cheers on endangered elvers migrating to the Sargasso Sea.

As part of the award-winning #BBCLocalPoets initiative, inspired by National Poetry Day’s 2019 theme of Truth, BBC Local Radio stations from Derby to Devon, Lancashire to London, will broadcast the 13 poems today on Oct 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The 13 local poets, including Young People’s Laureate for London, **Theresa Lola**, the Grand Bard of Exeter, **Kimwei McCarthy** and the Derby County Football poet, **Jamie Thrasivoulou** have transformed listeners’ stories into resonant and memorable poems that express their pride in their regions, their dialects, their buried pasts and vivid presents.

**Susannah Herbert**, Executive Director, Forwards Arts Foundation says:

“National Poetry Day is a chance to put a collective ear to the ground, hear what really matters to people and share it in a form that everyone can enjoy – verse. BBC Local Radio’s listeners’ love of vivid, memorable language, their delight in their dialects, their pride in their traditions of welcome, are all honoured in this year’s #HomeTruths initiative. They say it takes a village to raise a child: maybe the same is true of poetry. It takes a county, a city, an entire country to create a poem.”

**Chris Burns - Head of Audio & Digital BBC England** says:

"I hope our audiences enjoy these fabulous poems created by our 13 poets. They've been working closely with our stations and taken inspiration from our listeners' comments and suggestions. This is great partnership with National Poetry Day - and another example of our radio stations' being the BBC's front door to talent".

**Poet Ian McMillan** says:

"The idea of Home Truths is vital to poetry because one of the things a poem can do best is give us a sense of place, an idea of home. A poem can hone truths until the home truths it tells get to the very essence of the different places we call home. After all, there's truth and then there's poetic truth, and that's the kind of truth our poets are exploring."

**BBC Radio Northampton poet Nairobi Thompson** celebrates the rich history of a county she sees as central in every way. "We're right in the middle of the country/ Middle earth if you will - we're no poor cousin/ We are Britain's bellybutton!"

"Our listeners were quick to text the pride they feel to live here. Many of the home truths contributed by them were about community and neighbourhoods; allotments and village greens all of which conveyed that sense of being safe and unhurried, and appreciating one's surroundings," she says.

**BBC Radio London Poet, Theresa Lola** wrote her poem "Despite the Noise" after noting the double-ness of London: a city so fast-paced that it threatens to leave people behind, but quick also to offer warm community support in the aftermath of devastation.

In "Because we have our roots", **BBC Radio Kent poet Alice Gretton** celebrates the county known as the Garden of England in the context of the struggles she has witnessed on its green verges, and the hope of new arrivals to its shores. "I have seen flower beds become mattresses/ For heads who had no choice"

Many poems celebrate the warmth of local communities: **BBC Radio Devon poet Kimwei McCarthy** in "Because You Invited Me" describes his county's abundance, not just of natural beauty but of hospitality. This theme is echoed by **BBC Radio Sheffield poet Warda Yassin**, whose love poem to her city lists its streets and parks with a tenderness that calls to mind a prayer. **BBC Radio Humberside poet Jodie Langford**, in "Howling of the Hullhounds", speaks of the city's generosity, tolerance and the family welcome extended to all-comers.

The friendliness of stones and earth is celebrated by **BBC Radio Oxford poet Timi Amusan** in his poem "Redemption", which speaks of the safety he's found in the city as a child immigrant from Nigeria. "Since the very first day the Oxford soil hugged my feet/ It smiled and welcomed me into the life of peace"

**BBC Radio Norfolk** poet **Molly Taylor** speaks warmly of the “boundless smallness” that she has experienced in her adopted city of Norwich.

Several poems focussed on a region’s pastoral heritage, its wealth of folklore, the splendour of its nature and its intangible “spirit”. Liv Torc’s poem for **BBC Somerset** fights against the image of her county as a “a patchwork blur” glimpsed by drivers speeding to Devon and Cornwall. To her, it’s a county steeped in magical folklore. For **BBC Radio Shropshire**, poet **Jean Atkin** harvests memories about an elephant that spent the war billeted in the pub stables of the village of Bishop’s Castle.

Other poets took pride in the industrialisation reflected in cityscapes, while resisting nostalgia. **BBC Tees** poet **Harry Gallagher** in “The Magic That Only Teesside Brings” celebrates the steel his forebears forged, and the places around the world where Teesside accents are welcomed as signs of skill and hard work. “Our lasses and lads have wings,/our own league of nations,/still building foundations.”

**BBC Radio Derby** poet **Jamie Thrasivoulou** in “Nowt But Pride”, champions a local dialect that requires newcomers to enter into real, often comical, conversation to find out where they are and where they’re going: “We've nowt but pride for this place me duck/ nowt but pride.”

In “If it were dry, the thread would snap” **BBC Radio Lancashire** poet **Jane Routh** uses local radio listeners’ phrases for wet weather – “Of course it rains: it siles” – to unpick the county’s industrial history and celebrate its 32 rivers, all named in a bravura final stanza.

This is the fourth year that National Poetry Day is partnering with BBC Local Radio, in an on-going initiative that has seen more than 70 new poems commissioned since 2015, on themes of Change (2018), Freedom (2017) and Messages (2016).

To share a truth about your region on social media use #HomeTruths #BBCLocalPoets

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**Notes to editors:-**

**How the initiative works:**

BBC Local Radio programmes called for distinctive, lesser-known truths about the BBC English regions in June. These were compiled and sorted by chosen by a team of BBC producers and given to a local poet to inspire a poem for broadcast on National Poetry Day.

**The 13 BBC Local Poets for 2019 by region are:**

BBC Radio Derby	Jamie Thrasivoulou
BBC Radio Devon	Kimwei McCarthy
BBC Radio Humberside	Jodie Langford
BBC Radio Kent	Alice Gretton
BBC Radio Lancashire	Jane Routh
BBC Radio London	Theresa Lola
BBC Radio Norfolk	Molly Naylor
BBC Radio Northampton	Nairobi Thompson
BBC Radio Oxford	Timi Amusan
BBC Radio Sheffield	Warda Yassin
BBC Radio Shropshire	Jean Atkin
BBC Somerset	Liv Torc
BBC Tees	Harry Gallagher

You can join in the conversation by following your local station on Twitter.

**National Poetry Day**, the nation's biggest one-day festival of UK languages and poetry, is co-ordinated annually on the first Thursday of October by the charity Forward Arts Foundation. It prompts the sharing of poetry in schools, libraries, hospitals and care-homes nationwide, encouraging and promoting locally-organised events in bookshops cafes, garden-centres and town squares, all celebrating poetry's power to bring people together. For the nations' 25,000 schools and 4,000 libraries, National Poetry Day has become the day on which language and creativity can be celebrated by everyone, whatever their age or background.

Within the booktrade, NPD has recently overtook Valentine's Day to become the biggest event in the poetry bookselling calendar: the market for poetry has increased by 12% between 2017 and 2018, and is up by almost 50% since 2014. (Nielsen BookScan).

National Poetry Day's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary – themed around Truth - is sponsored by UK booktrade wholesaler Gardners, Browns Books for Students and the ALCS. Forward Arts Foundation is supported by Arts Council England

For more information, see:

[www.nationalpoetryday.co.uk](http://www.nationalpoetryday.co.uk)

[www.forwardartsfoundation.org](http://www.forwardartsfoundation.org)

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## BBC LOCAL POETS 2019 Biogs:

### BBC Radio Devon - Kimwei McCarthy (1985)

Kimwei is the Grand Bard of Exeter - a position he will hold for the next 7 years. His poetry has featured on BBC Radio Devon, and at Exeter Poetry Festival, Exeter Arts Week and the Exeter Poetry Slam. His YouTube series of 14 Climate Change themed stories has just been released by Exeter University Television Channel (XTV), following his live performance of one such story from Extinction Rebellion's pink boat at Oxford Circus (London) this Easter. Kimwei explains: "When you become Bard you take an oath, a commitment to the land. The natural result of that commitment is climate activism - it's the only course of action that makes sense to me." Kimwei is a songwriter and storyteller as well as a poet: he lectures in music.

### BBC Radio Derby – Jamie Thrasivoulou (1984)

Jamie Thrasivoulou is an award-winning writer, poet, lyricist and workshop facilitator from Derby, where he is the official **Derby County Football Club** poet: his poem "**We Are Derby**" is played on the big-screen before every home game at Pride Park stadium. His first collection **The Best Of A Bad Situation** was released in May 2017 with **Silhouette Press**. In January 2019 he was part of the UNISLAM 2019 **winning** team with The University of Birmingham. He is currently the Writer-In-Residence at **HMP Foston Hall**, and the lead writer on the ACE funded **Man-Up** project with the Stoke based organisation **RESTOKE**. He was the shadow-writer-in-residence for the **Writing East Midlands: Write Here Sanctuary** project in 2016 working with refugees and asylum seekers, and one of the lead writers on their **Elder Tree Project** in 2019. He has been producing and hosting Derby's Premier Spoken Word and Poetry Event **Word Wise** since September 2016 and is a co-producer of Derby **Poetry Festival**.

### BBC Radio Kent – Alice Gretton (1999)

Alice Gretton is an award-winning spoken word artist from Canterbury, Kent. She has performed nationally ranging from UniSlam 2018 in Leicester, winner of the UKYA award for Nottingham City Takeover 2019, headlining SlamDunk in Hastings 2018 and performing in Raise the Bar in Bath 2018. Alice has a passion for her city and performs regularly with her fellow members of Rough Cut Collective: her Marlowe Theatre shows include A Poem for Canterbury alongside Lemn Sissay, and LicKitySpit. She hosts her event SPARK at her artist residency The Mooring, inspiring new talents to take the stage for a fun, monthly showcase. Alice is producing her first book with Whisky and Beards publishing.

### BBC Radio Humberside - Jodie Langford (1999)

Jodie Langford is a young Hull-based poet who began writing and performing as part of Arts Celebrating Equality at The Warren Youth Centre in 2016. Although she stumbled into the world of poetry "by accident", she has since become one of the most distinctive voices in Hull's burgeoning youth spoken word scene. She has performed at BBC Contains Strong Language festival, and her work has been featured on the BBC Arts and British Council website. She has appeared also at the Freedom Festival, at Canary Wharf and Langham Hotel with UK Youth, the Hull Trinity Festival, 53 Degrees North, British Science Festival,

Project Twist-It, and opened up for the rising punk band 'Life' and also The (Bootleg) Beatles.

#### BBC Radio Lancashire - Jane Routh (1945)

Jane Routh has published four collections and several poetry pamphlets. She won the Poetry Business Book and Pamphlet Competition with *Circumnavigation*, shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection. *Teach Yourself Mapmaking* was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. The title poem of *The Gift of Boats* won the Academi Cardiff International Poetry Competition, and in 2011 she won the Strokestown International Poetry Competition.

Jane contributes articles and reviews to several journals and has also published a prose book, *Falling into Place*, on wildlife, weather and work in the rural area where she lives in north Lancashire, managing ancient and new woodlands. Her latest collection is *Listening to the Night*.

#### BBC Radio London – Theresa Lola (1994)

Theresa Lola is the 2019 Young People's Laureate for London. A British-Nigerian writer and performer, she is an alumna of the Barbican Young Poets programme, and joint winner of the 2018 Brunel International African Poetry Prize. In April 2018 she was commissioned by the Mayor of London's Office to write a poem for the unveiling of Millicent Fawcett's statue at Parliament Square, which she read at the ceremony.

She has facilitated poetry workshops at St Mary's University, as well as primary and secondary schools. Her debut poetry collection *In Search of Equilibrium* (Nine Arches Press, 2019) is described as 'a glorious hymn to being alive and wounded'.

#### BBC Radio Norfolk - Molly Naylor (1982)

Molly Naylor is a poet, scriptwriter, performer and director who works across a range of mediums. She is the co-writer and creator of Sky One comedy, *After Hours*. Theatre credits include *Whenever I Get Blown Up I Think Of You* (writer/performer), *My Robot Heart* (writer/performer) and *LIGHTS! PLANETS! PEOPLE!* (writer/director). She has been commissioned by a range of organisations including BBC Radio 4, The RSC and the BFI. Her debut poetry collection *Badminton* is published by Burning Eye. She is the co-director of *True Stories Live*. Molly is currently working on a new live solo show, her first feature film and a graphic novel.

#### BBC Radio Northampton – Nairobi Thompson (1963)

Nairobi Thompson is a Northampton-born a writer, academic editor and performance poet, whose 2015 book *Bayonets, Mangoes and Beads* told the story of the two world wars in poetry, from the perspective of the African and Caribbean people involved.

A sought-after event host and workshop facilitator, she has written and performed for Baroness Doreen Lawrence, Carmen Munroe MBE and Lord Ouseley. She tours her one-woman show *An Evening with Nairobi*, and has produced seven short films, and a spoken word album, *Defiant*.

#### BBC Radio Oxford – Timi Amusan (2000)

Timi Amusan is 19 and came to Oxford from his birthplace Nigeria in 2016, after his family decided the violence, guns and gang crime made it too dangerous for him to stay there. He started writing poetry when he was 8, but has only recently started to show his work to others and to attend Poetry Club at his school Oxford Spires Academy: where the poet and teacher Kate Clanchy has encouraged him. In 2018 he performed his work live at London's King's Place, accompanied by the Oxford Sinfonietta, as part of the Displaced Voices project. He says that poetry is a way of expressing his feelings on having to move around from place to place: it also allows him to laugh and to make others laugh too. He used to play football in Nigeria, and now his passion is basketball. Oxford has also inspired him to study civil engineering: he has a place at Portsmouth University.

#### BBC Tees – Harry Gallagher (1963).

Harry Gallagher was born and raised in Middlesbrough and his work has been published worldwide. His 2017 book *Northern Lights* (Stairwell Books) received rave reviews and has been described as 'a collective love letter to the people of the north east - who they were, who they are now and who they could be'. He performs live across the UK and runs the North Shields Stanza Group of The Poetry Society.

#### BBC Radio Sheffield – Warda Yassin (1993)

Warda Yassin is a British-born Somali poet based in Sheffield. She was a winner of the 2018 New Poets Prize. Her work has been published in *The North*, *Oxford Poetry* and anthologised in *Verse Matters* (Valley Press), *Anthology X* (Smith I Doorstep) . Her pamphlet *Tea with Cardamom* (Poetry Business) is out in June.

#### BBC Radio Shropshire – Jean Atkin

Jean Atkin is a Shropshire-based poet, writer and educator, who provides workshops and readings to schools, festivals and community organisations. She is currently Ledbury Poetry Festival's Troubadour of the Hills, and Poet in Residence for Hargate Primary School in West Bromwich. She organises The Poetry Lounge, Ludlow's spoken word night and provides 'poetry-theatre' at festivals and events as The Spellwright, writing spells for every imaginable need: growing wings, opening locked doors, persuading an owl to speak, invisibility – and many more.

She mentors emerging poets and work regularly with children and young people, often through Writing West Midlands. Her second collection, *How Time is In Fields*, was published in April 2019 by Indigo Dreams.

#### BBC Somerset - Liv Torc (1979)

Liv Torc is a performance poet, Radio 4 Slam Winner, a former Bard of Exeter and current co-host of The Hip Yak Poetry Shack, Liv also runs the spoken word stage at WOMAD festival and the Hip Yak Poetry School. In 2019 she performed on the Poetry & Words Stage at Glastonbury Festival. Her first book *Show Me Life* was released by Burning Eye in 2015. She lives and works in Somerset and runs the poetry and mental health cabaret The Rainbow Fish Speak Easy in Yeovil and the Hip Yak Poetry Slam in Frome.

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