

PRESS RELEASE

BBC AND NATIONAL POETRY DAY TO CELEBRATE LISTENERS' LOCAL WORDS

News for release: 00.01 Thursday 10 August 2017: Cheeselog (a woodlouse), **to geg in** (to butt in) and **fam** (a familiar form of address for a friend) are among the distinctive local words that will be immortalised in 12 specially commissioned poems for this year's National Poetry Day.

These examples of regional dialect are among hundreds nominated by BBC Local Radio listeners as part of the #freetheword project, which takes its cue from National Poetry Day's 2017 theme - freedom. A partnership between BBC English Regions, National Poetry Day and the Oxford English Dictionary, #freetheword has been searching for unrecorded words used in everyday speech in different locations across the country.

12 poets, including spoken word artist **Holly McNish** and Forward Prize-winner **Liz Berry**, have now each chosen a word from a shortlist drawn up by experts at the Oxford English Dictionary. Each word represents a different BBC English region and illuminates its culture, habits and geography in unexpected ways: they include resonant phrases for creepy-crawlies, terms describing a particular time or place, words of complaint or praise, all of which identify their users immediately as belonging to a distinct community.

The poets, all with a link to the region they are writing for, will perform their finished poems for broadcast on the BBC on **National Poetry Day on Thursday 28 September**. Additionally, a poem featuring all 12 words will be performed by 19-year-old poet and spoken word artist **Isaiah Hull** as part of a major new poetry festival, **Contains Strong Language**, produced by the BBC in partnership with Hull UK City of Culture 2017, Hull City Council, Humber Mouth, National Poetry Day and a number of poetry organisations. The individual words will also be displayed at locations around the city - using templates created by Jackie Goodman, Associate Dean, Hull School of Art and Design, with a special spray paint visible only when it rains.

Among the word selections are **cheeselog**, nominated by **BBC Radio Berkshire** listeners, and **bobowler** from the West Midlands - meaning a woodlouse and large moth, respectively - which have been adopted as the subjects of new poems by Reading-born **Hollie McNish** and the Black Country's **Liz Berry**.

BBC Radio Humberside listeners, and their poet-in-residence **Dean Wilson** chose to celebrate a **didlum** (a community savings scheme).

Elsewhere, characteristically local words for universal habits won out. **BBC Radio Cumbria** listeners have nominated **to twine** (to complain) for their local poet, Cumbrian-born Kate Hale, whilst **BBC Radio Merseyside** listeners wanted Liverpoolian poet **Chris McCabe** to write a poem featuring **to geg in** (to butt in).

BBC Radio Leicester listeners championed **mardy** (moody) for poetry slammer **Toby Champion**, while **BBC Radio Bristol** asked poet, burlesque artist, and writer **Vanessa Kisuule** to get creative with **gurt** (great or very) and **BBC Radio Suffolk** listeners chose on **the huh** (lopsided, wonky) for local poet **Rebecca Watts**.

BBC Radio Leeds poet, **Vidyan Ravinthiran**, will take a poetic walk down a **ginnel** (alleyway), which is known by BBC Sussex listeners and their poet, **James Brookes**, as a **twitten**.

BBC Radio Devon's listeners chose an evocative word to describe twilight - **dimpsy** - for local poet **Chrissy Williams** and BBC London is working with the capital's first Young People's Laureate **Caleb Femi** whose poem riffs on **fam**, a familiar form of address for a friend, increasingly heard on London streets.

The broadcaster and lexicographer **Susie Dent**, who helped launch the search for great local words, commented on the selection:

"Our local words and expressions are very much part of an oral tradition, and printed records are often hard to find. This is why the collaboration between the Oxford English Dictionary and National Poetry Day is so exciting: it will shine a light into a lexicon that's too often overlooked. The shortlist of words reflects some of the verve and vibrancy of our local tongues. I'm probably not allowed to be biased, but Devon's 'dimpsy' has long been a favourite of mine."

Susannah Herbert, Executive Director, National Poetry Day, said: "From 'fam' to 'didlum' the #freetheword project has kickstarted a conversation about the poetry locked away in distinctive local words: for the millions involved, National Poetry Day on September 28 will be an expression of regional, as well as national, pride. In celebrating characteristic expressions chosen by listeners and the OED, these contemporary poets add richness and humour to our sense of ourselves."

James Stewart, Editor GNS Programmes for BBC English Regions, said: "We were inundated with suggestions of great local words from our listeners. Not only will the 12 chosen words make fantastic poems by some of the country's finest contemporary poets, they'll generate much debate and discussion across BBC Local Radio. We're also delighted that we're building on the success of last year's #BBCLocalpoets initiative with another rewarding partnership with National Poetry Day."

Eleanor Maier, Associate Editor, Oxford English Dictionary, said: "We at the OED were delighted at the number of local words that were suggested for this campaign, underlining how the kind of crowdsourcing that OED pioneered (long before the word 'crowdsourcing' existed) remains a vital part of the dictionary's work. Not only were we reminded of the breadth and vitality of the country's dialects, but we were also able to identify and research a large number of new words for future inclusion in the OED, as well as gain valuable information about the currency of local words included in the first edition of the dictionary. Indeed, all the chosen words not currently in the OED will be drafted in the coming months."

The #Freetheword selections in full are:

Leeds - Vidyan Ravinthiran - **GINNEL** (an alleyway)
Humberide - Dean Wilson - **DIDLUM** (a community savings scheme)
WM (Birmingham) - Liz Berry - **BOBOWLER** (a large moth)
Sussex - James Brookes - **TWITTEN** (an alleyway)
Berkshire - Hollie McNish - **CHEESELOG** (a woodlouse)
Cumbria - Katie Hale - **TO TWINE** (to complain)
Merseyside - Chris McCabe - **TO GEG IN** (to butt in)
Suffolk - Rebecca Watts - **ON THE HUH** (lopsided, wonky)
Devon - Chrissy Williams - **DIMPSY** (twilight)

Leicester - Toby Campion - **MARDY** (moody)
Bristol - Vanessa Kisuule - **GURT** (great or very)
London - Caleb Femi - **FAM** (a familiar form of address for a friend)

Read the first in a series of blog posts exploring each of the words selected from OED Associate Editor, Eleanor Maier: blog.oxforddictionaries.com/free-the-word-1 will go live at 00.01 on Thursday 10 August.

For further information, visit <http://nationalpoetryday.co.uk>
Follow on social media using #FreeTheWord

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Notes to editors

The 12 poets:

Liz Berry (BBC Radio WM) was born in the Black Country and now lives in Birmingham. Her debut collection *Black Country* (Chatto & Windus, 2014), was described as "a sooty, soaring hymn to her native West Midlands, scattered with words of dialect that light up the lines like lamps" (*Guardian*). It was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, and winner of the Somerset Maugham Award, the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Award and the Forward Prize for Best First Collection 2014; and chosen as a book of the year by *The Guardian*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *the Big Issue* and *the Morning Star*. Liz's poems have been broadcast on BBC Radio, television and recorded for the Poetry Archive.

James Brookes (BBC Radio Sussex) was born in 1986 and grew up in rural Sussex, five minutes' walk from Percy Shelley's boyhood home. He was an Eric Gregory Award winner in 2009 and held a Hawthornden Fellowship in 2010. His first full poetry collection, *Sins of the Leopard* (Salt, 2012), was shortlisted for the Dylan Thomas Prize and the Michael Murphy Memorial Prize. His latest pamphlet *Nine Worthies* is available from Eyewear publishing and his second collection, *Spoils*, is forthcoming from Offord Road Books in 2018.

Toby Campion (BBC Radio Leicester) is the current UK Poetry Slam Champion. Described by BBC Sunday Politics as "the voice of a generation", Toby's unapologetic words and wit have captured audiences from the Royal Albert Hall to Glastonbury festival, Washington DC's poetry cafes to street festivals across Europe. An award-winning playwright and poet, his poetry has featured on national networks including BBC1, BBC Radio 2 and Channel 4, and he has represented the UK in a number of international poetry summits. His debut poetry collection will be released with Burning Eye Books in October 2017 and his first play, *WRECK*, is being produced at the Nottingham Playhouse in September 2017.

Caleb Femi (BBC Radio London) is the Young People's Laureate for London. He is also an English teacher, filmmaker and photographer - and has been featured on the Dazed 100 list of the next generation shaping youth culture. His commissions include the Tate Modern, The Royal Society for Literature and St Paul's Cathedral, and he's graced major stages such as the Barbican, British Library and Royal Festival Hall, as well as appearing at festivals. Caleb has won the Roundhouse Poetry Slam and Genesis Poetry Slam.

Katie Hale (BBC Radio Cumbria) was born in Cumbria, where she currently lives. Her debut pamphlet, *Breaking the Surface*, was published by Flipped Eye in 2017. She's the winner of the Jane Martin Poetry Prize and the Ware Poetry Prize, and was shortlisted for the Ballymaloe International Poetry Prize. Her poetry has been published in *Poetry Review*, *The North* and *Interpreter's House*, among others. Katie also writes fiction, and is currently being mentored for her first novel, *My Name is Monster*, by Penguin Random House on their inaugural WriteNow scheme. Her musical, *The Inevitable Quiet of the Crash*, co-written with composer Stephen Hyde, premieres at Edinburgh Fringe in August 2017.

Vanessa Kisuule (BBC Radio Bristol) is a writer, performer and burlesque artist based in Bristol. She has won over ten poetry slam titles including The Roundhouse Slam 2014, Hammer and Tongue National Slam 2014 and the Nuyorican Poetry Slam. She has featured on BBC Radio 1, BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour, CBBC Blue Peter, Sky News; and in *The Guardian*. She has also performed at Don't Flop, Glastonbury Festival, TEDx and internationally in Vienna, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, Bangladesh, Barcelona, Oslo, Finland and New York. Her debut poetry collection *Joyriding The Storm* was published in 2014. She was the recipient of The Jerwood Micro Arts Bursary and The Leverhulme Arts Scholarship in 2017 and her one woman show *SEXY* is currently under development with the support of Arts Council England, Bristol Old Vic and Camden People's Theatre.

Chris McCabe (BBC Radio Merseyside), a published poet, author and playwright, was born in Liverpool in 1977, where he still lives. He has read his poetry at a number of major venues (including the Southbank Centre, the British Library and BFI in London, and the Bluecoat and Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool). His plays, including the Northern Arts Award winning *Mudflaps*, have been performed in London and Liverpool. In 2013, Chris was shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Award along with Maria Vlotides for their collaborative book, *Pharmapoetica*.

Hollie McNish (BBC Radio Berkshire) was born in Reading to two Glaswegian parents, who moved for the warmer Southern English weather and a business offer on Slough Trading Estate. She has published three collections (*Papers*, *Cherry Pie* and *Plum*) and one poetic memoir (*Nobody Told Me*), for which she won the Ted Hughes Award. In 2016 she co-wrote a play *Offside*, relating to the history of UK women's football, as well as collaborating on her second poetry album *Versus*, with Metropole Orkest. Hollie tours continuously across the UK and her online poetry videos have attracted millions of views worldwide

Vidyan Ravinthiran (BBC Radio Leeds) was born in Leeds to Sri Lankan Tamil parents. He studied at Oxford and Cambridge Universities before returning north. His family still lives in Leeds - in Holt Park - a 'mixed area' rich, in his eyes, in what Thomas Hardy called the 'beauty of association'. A speech-impediment, and immigrant aspirations towards Received Pronunciation, sent Vidyan to speech-classes as a child: so his voice doesn't sound Sri Lankan, or Leodensian. Vidyan is the author of *Grun-tu-molani* (Bloodaxe, 2014) and *Elizabeth Bishop's Prosaic* (Bucknell, 2015), winner of both the Warren-Brooks Award for Literary Criticism and the University English Prize. He is currently working on a novel, and has received a Northern Writers' Award for his second collection, *The Million-Petalled Flower of Being Here*.

Rebecca Watts (BBC Radio Suffolk) was born in Suffolk in 1983 and grew up in Sudbury. After studying English at Cambridge and Oxford Universities, and living briefly in London and the Lake District, she moved to Cambridge where she now works in a library and as a freelance editor. In 2014 Rebecca took part in The Poetry Trust's Aldeburgh Eight scheme for developing poets, and the following year a selection of her work was included in Carcanet's *New Poetries VI* anthology. Her debut collection, *The Met Office Advises Caution* (Carcanet, 2016), is a Poetry Book Society Recommendation and featured in the *Guardian* and *Financial Times* 'Best Books of 2016' lists, as well as being shortlisted for the 2017 Seamus Heaney Centre First Collection Prize.

Chrissy Williams (BBC Radio Devon) is a poet and editor who grew up in Devon. After studying poetry at university, she has worked as an editor for a range of publishers, currently working as a comics editor in London. She also helped found the annual Free Verse: Poetry Book Fair ("almost a comic-con for poets"). Her poems and essays, including her first collection *BEAR*, have been published widely, and she has performed at the Royal Albert Hall, the Southbank Centre and BBC Radio 3.

Dean Wilson (BBC Radio Humberside) was born in Hull where he still lives. At 17 he worked as a porter at Hull University library where Philip Larkin was his boss and then as a postman for twenty years. He is currently poet in residence at BBC Radio Humberside as part of the Hull City of Culture celebrations. His chapbook *There Are Worse Things I Could Do Than Write A Poem Or Two* is published by Dancing Sisters. His first full collection *Sometimes I'm So Happy I'm Not Safe On The Streets* is published by Wrecking Ball Press.

Isaiah Hull: an established name on the Manchester spoken word scene, 19 year-old Hull has supported Kate Tempest, Lemn Sissay and Skepta at major events for the BBC. Inspired by poets Saul Williams and Philip Larkin and classical Greek tragedies, the Old Trafford writer and spoken word artist is one of the Roundhouse and BBC Radio 1Xtra's Words First finalists. He is a member of the young writers collective Young Identity, which was formed in Moss Side to encourage young adults and teenagers to express themselves and tackle world issues through poetry. His first slam poetry performance was at WORDCUP by Apples and Snakes, where he competed alongside artists from London, Leeds and Birmingham.

He is one of the Hull 17, an ensemble of 17 artists, commissioned to create new work for Contains Strong Language, a major new poetry and spoken word festival produced by the BBC in partnership with Hull UK City of Culture 2017, Hull City Council, Humber Mouth, National Poetry Day and a number of poetry organisations.

About National Poetry Day

National Poetry Day is a mass participation campaign that inspires people to enjoy, discover and share poems. The celebrations fall this year [on 28 September](#) and everyone is invited to join in, whether by organising an event or simply posting a line of poetry on social media with #NationalPoetryDay. National Poetry Day is co-ordinated by Forward Arts Foundation and enjoys the support of the BBC, Arts Council England, the Royal Mail and leading literary and cultural organisations, alongside booksellers, publishers, libraries and schools. Last year the campaign's reach exceeded 520 million. <http://nationalpoetryday.co.uk>

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OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

The *OED* is an unsurpassed guide to the meaning, history, and pronunciation of over 829,000 words, senses, and compounds - past and present - from across the English-speaking world. As a historical dictionary, the *OED* is very different from those of current English, in which the focus is on present-day meanings. You'll still find these in the *OED*, but you'll also find the history of individual words, and of the language - traced through over 3.3 million quotations, from classic literature and specialist periodicals to film scripts and cookery books. [View OED FAQs here.](#)

CONTAINS STRONG LANGUAGE

From National Poetry Day on 28 September to 1 October, Contains Strong Language is the biggest poetry and spoken word festival in the UK devoted to new work. Taking place in Hull, as part of its City of Culture celebrations, the festival will bring together spoken word and page poets. It will be accompanied by a season of programmes across BBC TV, Radio and Online which will celebrate poetry past and present, in all its forms.

Produced by BBC Radio in partnership with Hull UK City of Culture 2017, Hull City Council, Humber Mouth, The British Council, BBC Learning, Wrecking Ball Press and a number of poetry organisations, Contains Strong Language celebrates both new and existing work, with over 50 events across eight venues in Hull - including world premieres, concerts, workshops and outreach activity.

More information on Contains Strong Language is available at: www.bbc.co.uk/containsstronglanguage
Tickets for events taking place during the festival are available from: <http://hull2017.co.uk/containsstronglanguage>