National Poetry Day and BBC Local Radio commission 13 new #HomeTruths poems challenging clichés about regional distinctiveness

National Poetry Day and BBC Local Radio have joined forces to challenge stereotypes and celebrate the delights of the different regions that together compose the United Kingdom.

From today, leading with National Poetry Day’s 2019 theme of Truth, BBC Local Radio stations from Derby to Devon, Lancashire to London are inviting listeners to honour the hidden truths about the places and communities where they live and work. The aim is to get beyond the off the peg clichés and ask those who live there how to reflect the glory of Britain’s distinctive regions.

The best of these insights – highlighting perceptions, local lore and even in-jokes too often overlooked by tourist brochures – will inspire new poems by 13 local poets in England to be broadcast by the BBC on National Poetry Day, 3rd October 2019.

Across BBC Local Radio, on social media and in interviews and discussions, people are invited to identify phrases, incidents, landmarks and stories, and bring them to the attention of their nearest BBC Local Poet with the hashtag #HomeTruths.

Each BBC Local Poet will transform these stories into a resonant and memorable poem, to be filmed and broadcast as a central part of the 25th anniversary celebrations. While several of the poets - including Young Poet Laureate for London, Theresa Lola, the Grand Bard of Exeter, Kimwei McCarthy and the Derby County Football poet, Jamie Thrasivoulou – have been immersed in their regions for years, others, including 19-year-old, Timi Amusan, who fled his Nigerian birthplace for safety in Oxford, bring fresh eyes and ears to the places that have welcomed them.

Alice Gretton, one of the 13 BBC Local Poets who is matched up with BBC Radio Kent comments: “This project is beyond words for me. As a young artist, this opportunity has offered me an honest voice in such an incredible way. I look forward to sharing and celebrating the truth of the garden that is my home, whilst also dispelling the myths of young people stereotypes.”
Susannah Herbert, Executive Director, Forwards Arts Foundation says:

“Poetry’s a great way of taking on clichés and stereotypes: we’re suddenly seeing real competition between regions to call themselves “most poetic city” or “places of poetry”. Stonehenge, Hadrian’s Wall and Bath’s Roman Baths are among the heritage sites freshly turning to poets to change their profiles, while the new poet laureate, Simon Armitage, has put his Yorkshire birthplace, Marsden, on the map as “the Poetry Village”, and Nottingham claims to be the city of 1,000 poets. Sheffield, and Birmingham boast of their festivals and spoken word scenes with the enthusiasm once reserved for sports teams. ”

Chris Burns Senior Head of Local Radio Commissioning, said: “I’m delighted that our collaboration with the Forward Arts Foundation has once again resulted in a fantastic line-up of poets, all of whom will be working alongside our BBC Local Radio listeners to uncover new and surprising aspects of their local areas. I hope the results of #BBCLocalPoets – 13 poems about different places in England – will deepen and enhance our understanding of what it means to live in this gloriously diverse country today.”

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). Participating poets include Hollie McNish, Luke Wright, Caleb Femi and Liz Berry, with the greatest reach attained in 2017 when Oxford University Press drew on listeners’ nominations of cherished local words (from “cheeselog” to “ginnel”) to build a detailed picture of the UK’s changing language.

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

Media Contacts:

National Poetry Day PR contact: Tatti de Jersey, SP-Agency.
Tel: 07796571569  tatti@sp-agency.co.uk

BBC Local Radio PR contact: Hollie Druce  hollie.druce@bbc.co.uk
Notes to editors:-

BBC LOCAL POETS AND NATIONAL POETRY DAY

#HomeTruths

BBC Local Radio programmes will be calling for distinctive, lesser-known truths about where you live throughout June and early July. These will be compiled and sorted by chosen by a team of BBC producers and given to your 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 London – Theresa Lola
BBC Radio Kent – Alice Gretton
BBC Radio Norfolk – Molly Naylor
BBC Radio Northampton – Nairobi Thompson
BBC Radio Oxford – Timileyin Amusan
BBC Radio Sheffield – Warda Yassin
BBC Radio Shropshire - Jean Atkin
BBC Radio Somerset – Liv Torc
BBC Tees – Harry Gallagher

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

National Poetry Day, the UK’s biggest annual poetry celebration, is the highpoint of a year-round campaign to increase public enjoyment of poems. It was founded in 1994 by the Forward Arts Foundation, a cultural and education charity supported by the BBC, Arts Council England and leading literary organisations including the Scottish Poetry Library and Literature Wales. National Poetry Day’s 25th anniversary – themed around Truth - is sponsored by UK book trade wholesaler Gardners, Browns Books for Students and the ALCS.

For more information, see:  www.nationalpoetryday.co.uk  www.forwardartsfoundation.org

Twitter: @PoetryDayUK #NationalPoetryDay
Facebook: www.facebook.com/poetrydayuk
Instagram: @nationalpoetryday
BBC LOCAL POETS 2019

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.


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 forthcoming 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

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 new collection (November 2018) is *Listening to the Night*.


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, Feb 2019) is described as ‘a glorious hymn to being alive and wounded’.

Photo credit: Hayley Madden for Spread The Word
**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.

Photo credit: Jess Morgan

**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*.


Timileyin 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 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 is performing on the Poetry & Words Stage at Glastonbury Festival. Her first published 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.

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.