

# ESSEX BOOK FESTIVAL

28 May – 28 June 2026  
[essexbookfestival.org.uk](https://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



100 Events | 40 Venues | 200 Writers & Artists

## Welcome to the 2026 Essex Book Festival

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## How To Book Your Ticket

To book tickets please visit [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or where shown, tickets can be booked via Mercury Theatre Box Office, 10am to 8pm Tuesday to Saturday, (these are standard hours and are subject to change) in person or by telephone 01206 573948. Email tickets@mercurytheatre.co.uk for ticket enquiries. All booking links are shown on the website, this can direct you to the online booking platforms being used to deliver Essex Book Festival 2026. Bookings will be taken up to 3 hours prior to the event commencing. If there is capacity, tickets will be available on the door.

### Refunds

The festival cannot refund money or exchange tickets except if an event is cancelled. In the event of a cancellation the Box Office will contact you and issue a refund within 30 days.

### Concessions

We offer concessions for students, under 27s and unwaged.

### Accessibility

Information about access at participating venues is posted on the Essex Book Festival website. We also have a Roger Pen hearing system, so please let us know in advance if you would like to book this by emailing us at: [hello@essexbookfestival.org.uk](mailto:hello@essexbookfestival.org.uk)

Essex Book Festival gratefully acknowledges the support of these key partners



Front cover by Katie Kennedy Design

## Welcome to Essex Book Festival 2026

In these turbulent times, we can't think of a better way to bring everyone together than a month-long celebration of storytelling in all its forms. Whether it's on the page or stage; on foot or under sail.

What better way to 'kick off' than our launch event with leading sports writers Jonathan Wilson and Simon Kuper, who will be discussing the 'Beautiful Game' at Colchester Community Stadium. Swiftly followed by Guardian sketch-writer John Grace at Anglia Ruskin University who doubtless will have more than a thing or two to say about the current state of play at Westminster.

Read on for more about Traitors' 'Faithful' crime-writer Harriet Tyce at Foakes Hall in Great Dunmow, Maggi Hambling at The Gibberd Garden, Vaseem Khan at Colchester Library, Kes Gray at the Museum of Chelmsford, The Cabinet of Living Cinema at Lakeside Theatre, Sarah Perry at Colchester Samaritans, Gyles Brandreth at Chelmsford Cathedral, amongst many others...

We can't fit everything in the brochure, so please visit [www.essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://www.essexbookfestival.org.uk) to find out everything that's going on this June.

See you all soon,  
Ros Green & Claire Buskin  
Festival Team



### LAUNCH EVENT

THU 28 MAY, 7.00PM

LAUNCH EVENT

SPORT

## Jonathan Wilson in conversation with Simon Kuper Festival Launch

Ahead of the FIFA World Cup 2026, we are thrilled to be launching this year's Essex Book Festival at Colchester Community Stadium with two masters of football writing. Author, sports journalist and broadcaster Jonathan Wilson's *The Power and the Glory* is the definitive history of the World Cup, for the first time exploring the tournament's socio-political impact across the globe as well as the goals and scandals that keep us all gripped. Award-winning columnist and podcaster Simon Kuper is among the vanishingly small number of writers who have attended every World Cup since 1990. In *World Cup Fever* he shares what he has learned about the 'Beautiful Game' from nine consecutive World Cups.

Join us for a highly entertaining and illuminating discussion about the most watched sporting event on the planet.

Venue: Colchester United JobServe Community Stadium, United Way, Colchester, CO4 5UP

Tickets: £12 / £10

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



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© Leila Kuper



FRI 29 MAY, 7.00PM POLITICAL SATIRE

**John Crace** The Bonfire of the Insanities

Best-selling author and beloved parliamentary sketch writer John Crace returns to the festival for his latest serving of satire. Selected from Crace's much-loved Guardian column, *The Bonfire of the Insanities*, lights up a new chapter of governmental absurdity with mordant wit and caustic humour.

Venue: Anglia Ruskin University, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, CM1 1SQ

Tickets: £12 / £10

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



SAT 30 MAY, 11.00AM – 4.00PM WALK POETRY PARTNER EVENT

**Purfleet Poems in the Garden with Rachel Morgan**

Join poet and gardener Rachel Morgan for a relaxed walk from Purfleet Station to the Kinetika Community Natural Dye Garden. Along the way, we'll pause to share poems inspired by the local area, noticing the small details and everyday stories that shape this part of Thurrock. In the garden, discover the plants used to create natural dyes and spend time writing, listening and reflecting together. The afternoon includes welcoming, easy-to-join poetry activities, open to everyone, with space to explore ideas of place, language and home at your own pace.

Meeting point: Purfleet Station Car park. London Road, RM19 1PP

End point: Kinetika Natural Dye Garden Purfleet-on-Thames, Purfleet RM19 1RX

Also don't miss the celebratory finale of T100 2026 - *A Place at the Table: Celebrating Our Community* – an afternoon of making, performance, food and conversation in the heart of Purfleet on Saturday 6 June.

Tickets: Free, booking essential

Box Office: Via Eventbrite, see [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) for details



© Rachel Morgan



03 – 24 JUNE EXHIBITION FREE

**Harlow College Photography Students**  
Common Grounds

Harlow College present their work on the theme of 'Common Grounds', exploring what brings people and communities together. Their creative collection of work ranges from Social Documentary and Fine Art to Product and Advertising.

Venue: Harlow Library, Cross Street, Harlow, CM20 1HA

Tickets: Free, no booking required



© Kane-Luis Peck



## Oi Chelmsford!

**Saturday 30 May**  
**Museum of Chelmsford**

Oaklands Park, Moulsham Street, Chelmsford, CM2 9AQ

Join us for a day of family storytelling, and artist and writing workshops at the Museum of Chelmsford set against the fabulous backdrop of the exhibition *Oi Chelmsford! Kes Gray: Chelmsford Born and Read*. A celebration of the work and life of Essex-born multi-award-winning children's author, Kes Gray. All event tickets include free entry to the Museum.



SAT 30 MAY, 11.00AM YOUNG ESSEX

**Kes Gray** Oi Chelmsford! Meet the Author

The man himself, author Kes Gray, will be joining us for this family event as he talks about his books, and how growing up in Chelmsford inspired them. Get ready for a delightfully quirky fun time with all the family.

Tickets: £6 includes entry to Museum of Chelmsford

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



© Paul Starr



SAT 30 MAY, 1.30PM – 3.00PM WORKSHOP FOR WRITERS

**Sade Fadipe** The Art of Playfulness

A writing workshop for aspiring children's authors inspired by Kes Gray's *Oi Chelmsford!* exhibition. Come along to a hands-on workshop that will inspire you to craft your own stories for children. Sade's narrative and unusual journey into authorship is enough to motivate anyone with dreams of one day becoming published!

Tickets: £20 / £15 includes entry to Museum of Chelmsford

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



SAT 30 MAY, 2.00PM – 4.00PM WORKSHOP YOUNG ESSEX

**Kev F Sutherland** Comic Art Masterclass

Kev F Sutherland writes and draws for *Beano*, *Doctor Who* and *Marvel* comics, and makes graphic novels adapted from Shakespeare. Now he'll teach you how easy it is. Learn everything he knows, so you could leave school and steal his job! For ages 7+

Tickets: £6 per child includes entry to Museum of Chelmsford

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



SUN 31 MAY, 2.00PM – 5.00PM RADICAL WALK AUTHOR TALK

**Charles Holland** How to Enjoy Architecture

Renowned architect Charles Holland challenges us to look beyond the day-to-day familiarity of buildings to rediscover the pleasure of experiencing architecture. The talk will be followed by a walk to the magical and iconic A House for Essex designed by FAT Architecture and Grayson Perry to explore the unique qualities of Essex.

Venue: Wrabness Community Shop & Bar, next to the Train Station, Wrabness, Manningtree, CO11 2TL

Tickets: £15 / £12 includes both author talk and guided walk

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



© Living Architecture and Jack Hobhouse

Radical ESSEX

TUE 02 JUN, 7.00PM THRILLER

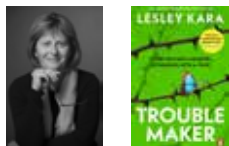
**Lesley Kara** Troublemaker

Best-selling author of *The Rumour*, Lesley Kara, will be talking about her sharp, incisive and claustrophobic new novel. *Troublemaker* is a masterful psychological thriller which asks how do you solve a murder when no one believes it took place?

Venue: Grays Library, Thameside Complex, Orsett Road, Grays, RM17 5DX

Tickets: £10 / £8

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



© Christian Davies

thurrock.gov.uk

WED 03 JUN, 7.00PM GEOPOLITICS

**Tim Marshall** Prisoners of Geography

Author and geopolitics expert Tim Marshall will lead a fascinating, interactive session on his recently updated phenomenal international bestseller, *Prisoners of Geography: Ten maps that tell you everything you need to know about global politics*. Don't miss this chance to experience Tim's clarity, wit and razor-sharp analysis of the changing global geopolitical landscape.

Venue: Waltham Abbey Library, 37 Sun Street, Waltham Abbey, EN9 1EL

Tickets: £10 / £8

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



© Nick Gregan

Essex County Council Libraries

THU 04 JUN, 7.00PM THRILLER

**B. A. Paris** When I Kill You

The Sunday Times and New York Times bestseller and global phenomenon B. A. Paris joins us to talk about writing twisty and nail-biting thrillers, including her latest chilling and unsettling book, *When I Kill You*.

Venue: South Woodham Ferrers Library, Trinity Square, South Woodham Ferrers, CM3 5JU

Tickets: £10 / £8

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



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Essex County Council Libraries

Love & Loss

**Saturday 06 June**  
**Colchester Samaritans**

Walsingham Road Community Hall, 34 Walsingham Road, Colchester, CO2 7BN

SAT 06 JUN, 10.30AM WORKSHOP FOR WRITERS

**James McDermott** Grief Writing Workshop

Drawing on his new collection, *Father Myself*, James McDermott will lead a special writing workshop to help you to re-see bereavement, grief and emotional loss. This inclusive and interactive workshop is designed for writers of all abilities – all welcome.

Tickets: £20 / £15

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



© Louis Catliff

SAT 06 JUN, 12.45PM MEMOIR

**A Celebration of Dave Monk with Brian Southall**

Join us as we celebrate the Essex life of 'BBC legend' and festival patron, Dave Monk, who sadly died last year. We will be sharing fond and funny memories, talking about his memoir, *Whatever Happened to Dave Monk?* and the contribution he made to Essex.

Tickets: Donation to Kids Inspire or Farleigh Hospice

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



SAT 06 JUN, 2.00PM MEMOIR

**Sarah Perry** Death of An Ordinary Man

Festival Patron Sarah Perry's *Death of an Ordinary Man* is a deeply moving, unstinting account of death by cancer, a reportage into the daily experience of caring, and most importantly a testament to her father-in-law David's life, that of an ordinary man.

Tickets: £10 / £8

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



© Sophie Davidson

SAT 06 JUN, 4.00PM FICTION

**Siân Hughes** No Such Thing As Monday

Booker Prize longlisted author Siân Hughes joins us to discuss her latest novel, *No Such Thing As Monday*. Raw, exhilarating, and full of heart it confirms Hughes as a masterful chronicler of life lived on the edge, and people at their most vulnerable.

Tickets: £10 / £8

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



© Stretton Studios

**SUN 07 JUN, 11.00AM – 1.00PM** **FREE** **YOUNG ESSEX** **PARTNER EVENT**

**The Wild Space – Sketching & Story Adventure**

Join us at The Wild Space, where nature reminds us that everyone is a storyteller. Families will search for natural treasures and transform their finds into imaginative characters. A joyful, creative session for all ages set in a hidden community Foraging Garden in Maldon.

Venue: The Wild Space, Washington Close, Maldon, CM9 6JD  
 Tickets: Free, donation to OWLS (Our Wild Local Space) welcome  
 Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



**SUN 07 JUN, TIME TBC** **RADICAL WALK**

**Michael J. Warren** In the Steps of J.A. Baker

Join Essex author, Michael J. Warren, for a Radical Islands walk retracing the steps of pioneering nature-writer J.A. Baker. We will explore Northey Island, the site of the Battle of Maldon and erstwhile home of Nobel Peace Prize Winner Norman Angell, to discover what makes this saltmarsh coast so distinctive and inspirational.

Meeting point: Heybridge Basin (also the end point)  
 Terrain: Paths are a mix of solid and potentially muddy sections  
 Tickets: £15 / £12  
 Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



© Ginny Warren



**TUE 09 JUN, 11.00AM** **HISTORICAL FICTION**

**Louise Hare** The House of Fallen Sisters

From the brothels of Covent Garden to the oppressive society of the eighteenth century, acclaimed author Louise Hare's enthralling historical masterpiece paints a vivid picture of London's underbelly and shows how, even in the darkest of times, there is always hope.

Venue: Belhus Library, South Ockendon Centre, 57 Derry Avenue, South Ockendon, RM15 5DX  
 Tickets: £10 / £8  
 Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



© Charlotte Knee Photography



**WED 10 JUN, 6.30PM** **SCIENCE AND NATURE**

**Giles Smith and Hana Loftus** Common Treasures

Giles Smith, founding partner of the architecture and design collective Assemble, Winner of the 2015 Turner Prize, will be discussing the Common Treasures project and accompanying books with writer, designer, and Essex-based planner Hana Loftus.

Venue: The Commons Café at The Minories, 74 High Street, Colchester, CO1 1UE  
 Tickets: £10 / £8  
 Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



© Hannah Thual



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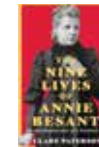


**THU 11 JUN, 7.00PM** **BIOGRAPHY**

**Clare Paterson** The Nine Lives of Annie Besant

Award-winning British TV producer and author Clare Paterson joins us for a fascinating conversation about her latest book. *The Nine Lives of Annie Besant* charts the extraordinary – and largely untold – story of a pioneering Victorian feminist - a rebel with a thousand causes, and a thorn in the side of power across two continents.

Venue: WI Centre, Whitelands, Terling Road, Hatfield Peverel, CM3 2AG  
 Tickets: £10 / £8  
 Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



**Great Dunmow BookFest Launch – A Criminally Good Night**

**Friday 12 June**  
**Foakes Hall**

Foakes House, 47 Stortford Road, Dunmow, CM6 1DG

**FRI 12 JUN, 6.30PM** **THRILLER**

**Nicci French in conversation with Linda Stratmann**  
**What Happened That Night**

We are delighted to be launching the Great Dunmow BookFest (more details over the page) with a Criminally Good Night commencing with best-selling crime-writing duo Nicci French, who will be discussing their 27th novel, a new psychological thriller, *What Happened That Night*, with fellow crime-writer Linda Stratmann. This event is sponsored by The Happy Ladder.

Tickets: £12 / £10 or both events £20 / £17  
 Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



**FRI 12 JUN, 8.15PM** **THRILLER**

**Harriet Tyce in conversation with Samantha Lee Howe**  
**Witch Trial**

Continuing our Criminally Good Night we have Traitors' Faithful and best-selling author of *Blood Orange*, Harriet Tyce, discussing her page-turning extra-ordinary new novel, *Witch Trial*. Two teenage girls. One murdered classmate. And a modern-day witch trial that will divide the nation. This event is sponsored by The Happy Ladder.

Tickets: £12 / £10 or both events £20 / £17  
 Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



© Charlotte Knee



**Make an evening of it – both events for £20 / £17**

## Great Dunmow BookFest

**Saturday 13 June, 12 – 5pm**

For one day only, Great Dunmow, the town without a bookshop, will be transformed into the Essex Book Town with author events, writing workshops and other bookish delights taking place in shops and other venues along the closed-off High Street. Don't miss this new, unique and magical event celebrating books, reading and the local community.

Visit [talliston.com/great-dunmow-bookfest](http://talliston.com/great-dunmow-bookfest) for details.



**SAT 13 JUN, 10.00AM FREE**

### Thurrock Local Authors Fair

Discover the rich wealth of local writing as Thurrock Libraries celebrates authors and poets from across the borough. Discuss writing, discover author stories, learn creative writing tips, and browse their books to buy and take home.

Venue: Grays Central Library, Orsett Road, Grays, RM17 5DX

Box Office: Free, no booking required. Email [libraries@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:libraries@thurrock.gov.uk) for further details



[thurrock.gov.uk](http://thurrock.gov.uk)

## The Writers Room

**Saturday 13 June  
University of Essex**

Colchester, CO4 3SQ



We are hosting an exciting 1-day programme of writers' events including author talks, workshops, panel discussions, and The Pitch. Plus, an opportunity to explore the J.A. Baker archive. Kindly supported by The Bean Trust. Visit [www.essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://www.essexbookfestival.org.uk) for updates.

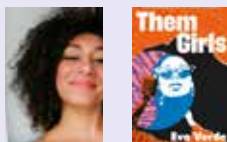
**SAT 13 JUN, 11.00AM – 12.00PM IN CONVERSATION**

### Eva Verde in conversation with Sabah Khan What it takes to Make a Book

Identity, class and female rage are recurring themes in Eva Verde's work. She has published three novels including *Them Girls*, and will be discussing with Sabah Khan, publicity director at Simon & Schuster Books, what it takes to write and publish a book.

Tickets: £8 / £5

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



**SAT 13 JUN, 12.30PM – 2.30PM WORKSHOP FOR WRITERS**

### Andrew Burton Writing the Archive Workshop

Ignite your creative imagination. Join us for a practical writing workshop using the J.A. Baker Special Collection as a catalyst. Everyone welcome – no experience necessary.

Tickets: £20 / £15

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)

**SAT 13 JUN, 1.00PM – 2.00PM PANEL DISCUSSION**

### James Canton Nature Memoir: What Next?

In the last decade, from *H is for Hawk* to *Raising Hare* via *The Salt Path*, nature memoir has witnessed a meteoric rise. Join our panel, chaired by author James Canton, to discuss what the future holds for this compelling genre.

Tickets: £8 / £5

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



© Lawrence Cawley

**SAT 13 JUN, 2.30PM – 3.30PM PANEL DISCUSSION**

### Holly Pester, Ben Pester, Rebecca Perry Breaking the Mould

Granta Books is renowned for championing challenging and innovative ground-breaking literature. Join three acclaimed Granta authors Holly Pester, Ben Pester, and Rebecca Perry as they discuss their individual and shared writing processes.

Tickets: £8 / £5

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



© Eleanor Vonne Brown



© Caitlin Mogridge

GRANTA



© Robin Christian

**SAT 13 JUN, 4.00PM – 5.00PM PANEL DISCUSSION**

### English PEN Freedom to Write, Freedom to Read

Join English PEN, in partnership with Essex Book Festival, for a conversation between writers on the relationships between literature, place, and movement. How do experiences of home, migration, diaspora, and safety inform and shape what, how, and why we write? And how do they shape what, how, and why we read?

Tickets: £8 / £5

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



**SAT 13 JUN, 6.30PM – 8.00PM FILM PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION**

### The Cabinet of Living Cinema How to Become a Peregrine

Join the Cabinet of Living Cinema for the world premiere of its new film *How to Become a Peregrine* inspired by J.A. Baker's *The Peregrine*, and accompanied by a soaring and immersive live soundscape by composer Kieran Chissick. Followed by a panel discussion.

Tickets: £8 / £5

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



## Essex Writers House 2026

**01 – 30 June 2026**  
**Metal, Chalkwell Hall**

Chalkwell Park, Southend-on-Sea, SS0 8NB

A collaboration between Essex Book Festival and Metal Southend

Essex Writers House is a month-long programme hosted by Metal, based in Southend, as part of Essex Book Festival. Chalkwell Hall opens its doors through June as a creative hub, offering a range of events from talks, open advice sessions and workshops to collaborative workspaces for writers, story tellers and book lovers of all levels

### Writing routes

This year's Essex Writers House celebrates the messy and circuitous paths writers take. It highlights the challenges and surprises they encounter, from global political contexts and rejection to the friendships and collaborations that shape and champion their work.

Follow guest writers, poets and creatives as they take you on a journey into the Essex landscape along the estuary mudflats, coastline, footpaths and into the wilderness. Keep an eye on the website for a full list of outdoor events taking place across June in South Essex.



© Mark Massey

### At Chalkwell Hall

#### Writers' Hot Desks

Take time and space from everyday life by booking yourself a writer's hot desk. Tucked away on the top floor of Chalkwell Hall, each writing desk offers views overlooking the Thames Estuary. A space perfect for sinking into ideas and shaping new projects.

#### Wild Writing Desk

The Wild Writing Desk is back. Take a seat outside (weather permitting) in the Peacock Garden, next door to Chalkwell Hall. Based within the park, find yourself writing to the pace of nature and co-working with the resident robin in the yew tree. An inspirational space to let your writing go wild.

#### Co-Working Spaces

Chalkwell Hall will open as a co-working space for writing and a quiet space for reading, with moments for sharing, creating and connecting with others from the local writing community. Drop in through June (Monday – Friday 10.00–16.00).



© Mark Massey



Metal

### Open Advice Sessions 3/10/17/24 June

Book a 1:1 slot with the Metal Team and a special guest panellist to gain valuable feedback, advice and support. These sessions are free and welcome writers at any stage of their journey, whether you're starting out or refining a manuscript. This space is dedicated to you, your writing needs and your development.

#### Special guest Open Advice panellists include:

**Dean Atta** is an award-winning Black British writer whose heartfelt storytelling draws on his Greek Cypriot and Jamaican heritage as well as his queer identity. He writes poetry, fiction, and nonfiction for all ages. Dean Atta has published award winning novels for young adults and younger readers as well as his memoir *Person Unlimited: An Ode to My Black Queer Body*.



© Josimar Senior

**Saira Niazi** is a writer, renegade guide and founder of Living London. Creative and Life Writing MA Graduate from Goldsmiths College, Saira was shortlisted for the Art Foundation Futures Award for Place Writing and published multiple publications including *Renegade Guides: the places we go, the stories we share* and *On Belonging, Reflections of a Renegade Guide* out now.



© Saira Niazi

**Lora Aziz** is an interdisciplinary artist, storyteller, land-based cultural producer, and creative strategist. Her work weaves together ecology, memory, and storytelling through workshops, residencies, foraging walks, and community rituals. Some of Lora's most recent work has been published in *Thirst: In search of Fresh Water*, which accompanied her collaborative community-based projects in the Wellcome Collection exhibition *Thirst* from 2025-2026.



© Marley Karazimba

**Camilla Balshaw** is an award-winning author. She has been published in numerous journals, and her essays have featured in the *Guardian*, *Therapy Today* and the *Observer*. Camilla's debut memoir, *Named: A Story Of Names And Reclaiming Who We Are (2025)* won the best Memoir & Biography category in the East Anglian Book Awards.



#### Meet our Writers-in-Residence

We will be joined by Writers-in-Residence from near and far, including partnerships with the British Council, The Caine Prize for African Writing and English PEN. Keep an eye on the website for announcements.



For full Essex Writers House event listings visit  
[metalculture.com/projects/essex-writers-house-2026-programme-coming-soon/](https://metalculture.com/projects/essex-writers-house-2026-programme-coming-soon/)



## Essex Writers House (Cont.)

A series of walks, talks, and workshops as part of Essex Book Festival's ongoing Radical Islands project, celebrating the rich heritage, exquisite nature and wildlife, and communities that make up this island county.

**SAT 13 JUN RADICAL WALK**

### Southend Wandering with Saira Niazi

Explore Southend's hidden gems and stories on this social neighbourhood wandering. Starting from Southend Forum we'll walk towards Southchurch Park, stopping off at various spaces along the way, from secret gardens to beaches. Document your journey through words and pictures as you go. Saira Niazi is a writer, author and renegade guide, passionate about discovering new places, collecting stories and connecting communities.



© Saira Niazi

Meeting point: Southend Forum, Elmer Ave, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 1NS

Tickets: Free, spaces limited so booking essential. Includes packed lunch

Box Office: Via Eventbrite, see [essexbookfestival.org.uk](https://essexbookfestival.org.uk) for details

**SUN 14 JUN RADICAL WALK WORKSHOP FOR WRITERS**

### Intertidal Walking and Writing Workshop with J.R. Carpenter and Sylak Ravenspine

Join artist, writer, fossil hunter, and Port of London Authority (PLA) licensed mudlark J. R. Carpenter with local Essex based eco-artist Sylak Ravenspine for an intertidal walking and writing workshop in the Thames Estuary. As we move between high and low tide, mud flats and marshland, fresh and salt water, we will navigate the creative space between noticing and noting, where writing happens.



© Amber Merry 2025



© J. R. Carpenter © Niki Cornish

Meeting point: TBC

Tickets: £25, includes packed lunch and transport.

Box Office: Via Eventbrite, see [essexbookfestival.org.uk](https://essexbookfestival.org.uk) for details

**SAT 20 JUN RADICAL WALK**

### Walk and Explore Prittlewell Greenway with Lora Aziz

Join artist Lora Aziz exploring the Prittlewell Greenway through landscape, observation and language. How can we pull inspiration from the backstreet places and welcome in wonders we might pass every day? Through guided prompts, gentle conversation and nature journalling, we'll explore how memory, ecology and imagination intertwine through sensory mapping and writing, letting language and symbols move as freely as the landscape itself.



© Marley Karzimba

Meeting point: TBC

Tickets: Free, spaces limited so booking essential. Includes packed lunch and transport.

Box Office: Via Eventbrite, see [essexbookfestival.org.uk](https://essexbookfestival.org.uk) for details

**SAT 20 JUN, 7.00PM FILM**

### The Essex Ways: Film screening at Chalkwell Hall

Discover the many ways of Essex with a screening of *The Essex Ways*, a feature length documentary by filmmaker Thomas Winward.

The film follows Essex-born storyteller James Lawrence on an epic 400km walking journey around the county to discover its places, people and stories. Over 21 days, James adventures through rural Essex from Epping to Harwich, and then down the coast to Tilbury Docks. Along the way, he explores the many beautiful natural landscapes of Essex, while delving into the history, folklore and stereotypes that make Essex the fascinating county it is today. Expect thrills, chills, myths, modern retellings of 2000 years of history, and a lot of love for trees and mud.

After the film, there will be an open Q&A with James Lawrence, who will answer questions about the walk and project.

Venue: Chalkwell Hall, Southend-on-Sea, SS0 8NB

Tickets: TBC

Box Office: Via Eventbrite, see [essexbookfestival.org.uk](https://essexbookfestival.org.uk) for details

**SUN 21 JUN, TIME TBC RADICAL WALK**

### Walk and Talk around Canvey Wick with Man About Country

Join James Lawrence, AKA Man About Country, for a special guided walk around Canvey Wick, one of Essex's (and England's) most fascinating nature reserves. In this brownfield rainforest you'll discover wildlife, hear stories from over 2,000 years of Canvey Island history, and explore how these incredible places can supercharge your creative practice in unexpected ways.

Meeting point: TBC

Tickets: £10. Includes packed lunch.

Box Office: Via Eventbrite, see [essexbookfestival.org.uk](https://essexbookfestival.org.uk) for details

© James Lawrence



For full Essex Writers House event listings visit  
[metalculture.com/projects/essex-writers-house-2026-programme-coming-soon/](https://metalculture.com/projects/essex-writers-house-2026-programme-coming-soon/)



## Essex Writers House (Cont.)

WED 24 JUN, 7.00PM IN CONVERSATION

### Writing and the Power of Language: Camilla Balshaw, Emily Addeni-Holman and Boakye D. Alpha

#### In partnership with National Centre for Writing

Join us for an evening with the National Centre for Writing's Escalator Writers Emily Abdeni-Holman and Boakye D. Alpha, in conversation with award-winning author Camilla Balshaw about writing and the power of language, with discussion rooted in cultural histories, oppression and identity.



© Amber Merry



Tickets: Free, booking essential  
Venue: Chalkwell Hall, Southend-on-Sea, SS0 8NB /  
Box Office: Via Eventbrite, see [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) for details

27 – 28 JUN POETRY

### A Poet in Every Port

Metal are working in partnership with Southbank Centre to welcome the mobile National Poetry Library to Chalkwell Hall as part of Essex Writers House 2026. Be prepared for a mini programme of weekend activity for all ages to enjoy, with the opportunity to contribute prose, poetry and words to the Mobile Poetry Library. Local artist and poet Maddi Crease will be helping us to celebrate Essex's unique coastal stories.



© Maddi Crease

A Poet in Every Port is a Southbank Centre initiative which aims to celebrate the UK's diverse dialects and languages by telling the stories of our coastal communities and showing that poetry is for everyone. It marks Southbank Centre's 75th anniversary.

Venue: Chalkwell Hall, Southend-on-Sea, SS0 8NB

#### Hosted At events

Throughout June, we will be hosting a series of events including talks, screenings, socials and workshop activity connecting to writing and reading led by local creatives and special guests. Look out for the release of our Hosted At programme at Essex Writers House via our website soon.

For full Essex Writers House event listings visit  
[metalculture.com/projects/essex-writers-house-2026-programme-coming-soon/](http://metalculture.com/projects/essex-writers-house-2026-programme-coming-soon/)



## Midsummer Madness Family Fun

Sunday 14 June

### The Minories

74 High Street, Colchester, CO1 1UE

A day of other worldly storytelling and creative mayhem in the enchanted setting of The Minories, Colchester's oldest art gallery and garden. Our Midsummer Madness Family Day is the perfect place to get crafty and messy with our delectable range of free hands-on drop-in workshops, and much, much more. Visit [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) for full details.



SUN 14 JUN, 11.00AM PERFORMANCE

### The Enchanted Cinema Where the Wild Rumpus Is

The wild rumpus begins! Hands, voices, and instruments from around the world create a live soundtrack as forests rustle, monsters roar, and oceans swell. Featuring live narration of Sendak's book and led by professional musician Kieron Chissik on electric viola and keyboard, this screen-free, immersive experience invites children and grown-ups to become the orchestra for a cinematic book. For ages 5+.



Tickets: £6  
Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)

SUN 14 JUN, 2.00PM YOUNG ESSEX

### Kes Gray Oi Dinosaurs!

Join in this hilarious interactive event with multi-award-winning author Kes Gray who will be reading from the latest Oi title, *Oi Dinosaurs!* Meet your favourite characters Frog, Cat and Dog for oodles of prehistoric rhyming fun. Guaranteed to get everyone giggling. For ages 3+.



© Paul Starr

Tickets: £6  
Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



WED 17 JUN, 7.00PM FICTION

### Ellie Levenson Room 706

*Room 706* is a heart-stopping, deeply suspenseful, original debut novel about an ordinary woman caught somewhere she shouldn't be when the worst happens. One that will linger long after you've turned the final page. *'Poignant, immersive, and utterly human, I adored Room 706'* - Sarah Jessica Parker



Venue: Manningtree Library, High Street, Manningtree, Essex, CO11 1AD  
Tickets: £10 / £8  
Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948

**THU 18 JUN, 7.00PM FICTION**

**Sally Magnusson** The Shapeshifter's Daughter

Celebrate the joy of reclaiming our stories with best-selling author, journalist and broadcaster Sally Magnusson. *The Shapeshifter's Daughter* is a spellbinding feminist retelling of the Norse myth of Hel, the Goddess of the Underworld, set in the magical landscape of Orkney.



© Derek Prescott



Venue: Rayleigh Library, 132/4 High Street, Rayleigh, SS6 7BX

Tickets: £10 / £8

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948

**FRI 19 JUN, 2.30PM BIOGRAPHY**

**Gyles Brandreth** Somewhere, a Boy and a Bear

2026 marks the centenary of the publication of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Best-selling biographer Gyles Brandreth knew the real Christopher Robin, and his new book is both an intimate and revealing biography of A A Milne (to whom there was so much more than Pooh) and a fascinating exploration of fathers and sons, children and their parents and the nature of childhood itself.



Venue: Chelmsford Cathedral, New Street, Chelmsford, CM1 1TY

Tickets: £15 / £12

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948

**Clacton Rocks!**

**Saturday 20 June**

Essex Book Festival is teaming up with Essex Cultural Diversity Project and Clacton Arts Centre to host CLACTON ROCKS: a 1-day (and night) programme of events, including Stand up For Diversity; Performance poet Atila the Stockbroker; Art:Up Poetry Open Mic; Storytelling and Workshops. More information to follow on [www.essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://www.essexbookfestival.org.uk)



**4.00PM – 6.00PM POETRY OPEN MIC**

**Art:Up! Homecoming**

The final instalment of the Art:Up! This collaborative poetry project has seen more than fifty poets get together and share new poetry since launching at the 2025 Essex Book Festival. Come along to the finale event and support diverse voices from around the county.

Venue: Reuby's Salt Beef and Cheesecake Bar, 66-68 Rosemary Rd, Clacton-on-Sea CO15 1TE

Tickets: Free, booking recommended

Box Office: Via Eventbrite, see [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) for details



**6.30PM – 8.30PM FREE**

**Stand Up For Diversity**

An evening of mini-talks and short soap-box shout-outs bringing together people who want to champion and celebrate diversity in the arts and in our communities, share the work they do with others, and collectively celebrate strong diverse voices. All welcome.

**SAT 20 JUN, 2.00PM BIOGRAPHY**

**Nicola Kelly** Anywhere But Here

From an award-winning journalist comes the hugely timely story of Britain's broken asylum system and the search for belonging in Britain today. With unique and unparalleled access, former Home Office insider Nicola Kelly takes us behind the scenes at what happens when you arrive here in the UK, from boat to shore to holding room and beyond.



©Alice Zoo



Venue: Chelmsford Cathedral, New Street, Chelmsford, CM1 1TY

Tickets: £15 / £12

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948

**TUE 23 JUN, 7.00PM HISTORICAL FICTION**

**Alison Weir** The Boleyn Secret

Sunday Times best-selling historical novelist Alison Weir gives a talk about her spellbinding new novel, *The Boleyn Secret*. At twelve years old, Kate Carey attends her aunt, Queen Anne Boleyn, to the scaffold. Weir explores in fiction the lasting impact of this event as well as the likelihood that Kate Carey was Henry VIII's child.



Venue: Essex Record Office, Wharf Road, Chelmsford, CM2 6YT

Tickets: £12 / £10

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948

**TUE 23 JUN, 7.00PM THRILLER**

**Sarah Vaughan** Based on a True Story

Sarah Vaughan, million copy best-selling author of *Anatomy of a Scandal*, talks about her latest 'utterly addictive' thriller, *Based on a True Story* - a compelling novel about power, money and lies. A famed children's author summons her family and friends to her exquisite manor house on the cliffs but on the eve of a lavish party someone threatens to expose the lie she's kept up for over half a century.



©Johnny Ring



Venue: Chelmsford Library, County Hall, Market Road, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH

Tickets: £10 / £8

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948

**WED 24 JUN**

**TriggerBliss** Spoken Word Workshop

Artist and facilitator TriggerBliss leads a dynamic creative well-being workshop filled with colour, community, and conversation. Workshops and events at the prison provide a platform for prisoners to connect with the outside world.



© Nicola Parry

Venue: HMP & YOI Chelmsford, Prison Library

**WED 24 JUN, 7.30PM THRILLER**

**Vaseem Khan** From Bombay to Bond, via a Small Town Killing

Best-selling crime writer Vaseem Khan takes us on an exhilarating journey from the post-Independence complexities of his Malabar House novels to contemporary Britain's MI6 and the exploits of James Bond. His new series, beginning with *Quantum of Menace*, brings to life one of spy fiction's most iconic characters - but who was the real Q?



Venue: Colchester Library, Trinity Square, Colchester, CO1 1JB  
 Tickets: £10 / £8  
 Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948

**THU 25 JUN, 11.00AM FICTION**

**Wendy Erskine** The Benefactors

Virtuoso short story writer, Wendy Erskine will be discussing her astounding novel, *The Benefactors* - a blazingly funny and astute portrait of modern-day Northern Ireland that deftly mines issues of class, money and parenthood. In partnership with Red Lion Books.

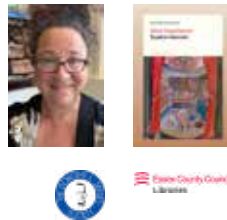


Venue: Colchester Arts Centre, Church Street, Colchester, CO1 1NF  
 Tickets: £16 includes paperback copy of book or £8 ticket only  
 Box Office: [redlionbooks.co.uk](http://redlionbooks.co.uk)

**THU 25 JUN, 7.00PM FICTION**

**Sophie Hannah** DLS Lecture – The Murder Mystery

This year's DLS Lecture marks the 50th anniversary of the Dorothy L Sayers Society. Best-selling author Sophie Hannah will discuss the ever popular murder mystery genre with reference to Sayers' first Lord Peter Wimsey mystery, *Whose Body?* and will also talk about her latest book *Work Experience: New Poems and Two Plays*.

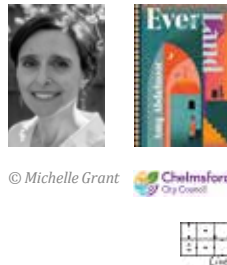


Venue: Witham Library, 18 Newland Street, Witham, Essex, CM8 2AQ  
 Tickets: £10 / £8  
 Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948

**THU 25 JUN, 7.00PM FICTION**

**Amy Abdelnoor in conversation with Rachel Holmes**  
 Ever Land

Debut novelist Amy Abdelnoor lived and worked in the West Bank and in refugee camps in Lebanon which inspired *Ever Land*, a powerful story set in 2000s Palestine. A tale of belonging and identity, of devastation and displacement and – ultimately – of the enduring universality of humanity and love.



Venue: Hot Box, 28, 29 Viaduct Rd, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1TS  
 Tickets: £11 (includes £1 booking fee)  
 Box Office: Via [hotboxlive.co.uk](http://hotboxlive.co.uk), see [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) for details

**Saturday 27 June**  
**Harlow Museum & Walled Gardens**

Muskham Road, Harlow, CM20 2LF



**SAT 27 JUN, 10.30AM – 12.30PM WORKSHOP FOR WRITERS**

**Syd Moore** Writing the Archive

Join best-selling author Syd Moore for a special writing workshop using objects from the archives of Harlow Museum to inspire your work.

Tickets: £20 / £15  
 Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk)



© JMoore photos

**SAT 27 JUN, 1.30PM FICTION**

**Syd Moore** The Great Deception

Enter a world of mystery, espionage and illusion with author Syd Moore as she discusses the second in her thrilling new series about Britain's secret wartime history. *The Great Deception*, set in Iceland, explores deceiving occultists, age-old magic and a war-torn world.

Tickets: £10 / £8  
 Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



© JMoore photos

**SAT 27 JUN, 12.00PM – 3.00PM FREE YOUNG ESSEX PARTNER EVENT**

**Family Storytelling & Games**

Harlow Museum's Walled Gardens are alive with stories. Come one, come all, gather round and listen to storyteller Dave Tonge, the Yarnsmith of Norwich, as he transports you back to long, long ago. Enjoy silly stories and mind mangling riddles, tall tales and dark legends. Bring a picnic and create your own stories, craft new characters and play fun-filled games.



Tickets: Free, drop-in, no booking required

**SAT 27 JUN, 3.30PM POETRY PARTNER EVENT**

**Rebecca Leek** Ditty Bag on the Road

Harlow-born writer Rebecca Leek will be hosting a showcase of poetry in Harlow Museum's Walled Gardens, inviting other poets to collaborate in a mixed session. Expect different voices, a celebration of words, and fresh poems to enjoy.

Tickets: £5  
 Box Office: [harlowmuseum.com](http://harlowmuseum.com)



## Sunday 28 June The Gibberd Garden

Marsh Lane, Harlow, Essex, CM17 0NA

Join us for a fascinating afternoon of artist talks in The Gibberd Garden, an inspirational 9-acre garden with over 80 sculptures and architectural pieces set in a series of enchanting spaces.



Make an afternoon of it with our ticket deal – both events for £25 / £18

SUN 28 JUN, 2.00PM ART

### Maggi Hambling in conversation with James Cahill

Maggi Hambling, one of the most influential artists of her generation, will be talking with author, writer and art critic James Cahill about a new monograph of her work recently published by Rizzoli New York. Join us for an afternoon to celebrate and shine a light on Hambling's fearless spirit and trailblazing art.

Tickets: £15 / £12 or both events for £25 / £18

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



© Laura Bailey



SUN 28 JUN, 4.00PM BIOGRAPHY

### Darren Coffield Hen, Mistress of Mayhem

Darren Coffield will be exploring his book, *Hen Mistress of Mayhem: A Portrait of Henrietta Moraes*, providing a unique insight into 1950-60s Bohemia and the key players of the fashion, music and art scene. Uniquely told from the viewpoint of the women who knew her, including Maggi Hambling, not the famous male artists who painted her.

Tickets: £15 / £12 or both events for £25 / £18

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948

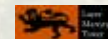


© Darren Coffield



## The History Books

Background image:  
© Red Carpet Video



### Sunday 28 June Layer Marney Tower

Layer Marney, Near Colchester, Essex, CO5 9US

Event tickets include free entry to Layer Marney Tower and gardens

Make a day of it! Ticket Deal: All three events for £36

SUN 28 JUN, 12.00PM HISTORY

### Tony McMahon Downfall of the Templars

Why were the Knights Templar brutally crushed after years of courageous service in the Crusades? Were they framed for being heretics, sorcerers and traitors? Do the Templars still exist today? Broadcaster and author Tony McMahon investigates the links between the trials of the Templars and the witch hunt mania that was about to grip Europe.

Tickets: £14 (includes entrance to Layer Marney Tower and gardens)

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



© Tony McMahon



SUN 28 JUN, 2.00PM HISTORY

### Emily Hauser Mythica

Award-winning classicist and historian, Emily Hauser, will explore the extraordinary stories of the real women behind some of the western world's greatest legends – and the real heroes of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

*'Bold and intellectually thrilling . . . rigorous scholarship and dazzling feats of imagination.'* - Tom Holland, historian and co-host of *The Rest is History* podcast

Tickets: £14 (includes entrance to Layer Marney Tower and gardens)

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



© Faye Thomas



SUN 28 JUN, 4.00PM HISTORY

### Jonathan Freedland The Traitor's Circle

Prize-winning journalist and acclaimed author of *The Escape Artist* Jonathan Freedland tells the thrilling true story of one of the most dramatic episodes of the second world war. With deep moral resonance for our own time, he asks what kind of person it takes to risk everything and stand up to tyranny.

Tickets: £14 (includes entrance to Layer Marney Tower and gardens)

Box Office: [essexbookfestival.org.uk](http://essexbookfestival.org.uk) or Mercury Theatre 01206 573948



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## Key partners



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