

Clifton LitFest

November 13th-15th 2026

*A weekend of ideas,
discussion and stories with:*

Mary Portas • Baroness Brenda Hale

Michael Gove • Jonathon Porritt

Guy Standing • Andrew Graham-Dixon

Michael Crick with Thangam Debbonaire

John Kampfner • Zahra Joya

and many others



Presented by Friends of Clifton Centre and Library (FoCCaL)

Tickets: www.foccal.com and Clifton Library

On sale from 16th September

Chair's Welcome



Dear Reader,

I am very pleased to welcome you to the seventh Clifton LitFest, and to my second festival as Chair. We have another wonderful weekend of ideas, discussion and stories to share with you.

So, what's new for 2026?

We are delighted to welcome **Jonathan Dimpleby** as the new Patron of Clifton LitFest. A distinguished author, broadcaster, journalist and historian, Jonathan has been a

wonderful supporter of the Festival since its very beginning. A familiar and much-loved voice on radio and television, and the author of acclaimed books, including *The Battle of the Atlantic and Barbarossa*, he brings an extraordinary breadth of knowledge, curiosity and storytelling to the role. We are particularly thrilled that one of Bristol's own is lending his name and support to Clifton LitFest.

Also new this year is a third full day, with a programme of events at the Clifton Club on Friday. We have added some new elements to familiar formats too: coffee, cheese and wine tastings; talks that include the opportunity to explore an historic building; and a chance to discover the wider Clifton area on a tour with our 'story-walker', **Clare Reddaway**.

And what remains the same? The high calibre of our speakers and the rich, varied subjects they bring to life and debate.

When we began curating this year's programme back in February, we wanted to explore the idea of positivity and happiness. There is no shortage of dark and difficult subjects in our daily lives, so we thought the Festival could offer a welcome retreat from the daily grind, while still engaging with the world around us. We actively sought writers and thinkers who can help us see where there is hope and possibility.

John Kampfner's Braver New World, subtitled *What's Going Right in a World Going Wrong*, is a great example. **Baroness Hale** encourages us to believe that the law is on our side, while **Mary Portas** speaks up for high street regeneration. **Bruce Hood** and **Daisy Fancourt** explore the science and possibilities of happiness, while **Julian Baggini** brings together coffee, philosophy and the good life. MasterChef winner **Brin Pirathapan** offers us a very different kind of joy, with a taste of his Tamil-influenced cooking.

There is a strong spiritual thread too. We contrast the Pope's shepherding with Trump's more bellicose leadership in **Michael Kelly's** biography of Pope Leo XIV, while **Bijan Omrani** asks the intriguing question: *Is God an Englishman?*

But we certainly haven't abandoned the wider, secular world. There are plenty of opportunities to engage with the more troubling questions that affect our lives. *Can Education Fix Society?* puts **Michael Gove** and **Guy Standing** head-to-head, while **Michael Crick** and **Thangam Debbonaire** examine how Nigel Farage has changed British politics. We are pleased to have **Zahra Joya** tell us about her escape from Afghanistan in August 2021.



And this is just a taste of the programme. More than 70 speakers will contribute to the weekend. Whether your interests are poetry or fiction, the natural world or cooking, art or music, history or politics, we hope you will find something to intrigue, challenge and delight you.

Clifton LitFest is entirely run by volunteers from the **Friends of Clifton Centre and Library (FoCCaL)**, which has recently become a **registered charity**. Our small organising team works throughout the year. Ros Olsen, a founder member and the stalwart of the festival, remains our main administrator, alongside Beri Hare, Gareth Hoskins and Phil Leonard. This year we were pleased to welcome Nick Campion, Helen Gilks and Katy Grant to the team.

At festival time, more than 70 volunteers step forward to sell tickets, host speakers, manage venues, sell wine and take on the countless jobs that make the festival possible.

A huge thank you to all of them - and to you, our audience, for supporting us.

I hope you enjoy a stimulating, invigorating and ultimately uplifting weekend at Clifton LitFest.

Paula O'Rourke, Chair of Clifton LitFest

YOUR TICKET HELPS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Clifton LitFest is about more than bringing brilliant writers and audiences together. It is also about what happens beyond the Festival itself.

Run entirely by volunteers and without commercial sponsorship, the Festival reinvests its proceeds in projects that encourage a love of reading and support for our local community. The proceeds from Clifton LitFest 2025 enabled the Friends of Clifton Centre and Library (FoCCaL) to support reading initiatives across Bristol.

A £5,000 donation to Bristol Libraries helped launch Book Bingo, an adult reading challenge encouraging people to discover books across a wide range of genres. As Leon from Bristol's Library Service said: "We are extremely grateful to FoCCaL for their generous support. The Book Bingo challenge will engage people throughout the summer, encouraging them to discover new books and enjoy the many benefits of reading."

We also donated £500 each to Hotwells Primary School and Christ Church C of E

Primary School, supporting their purchase of books and end-of-term performances. Further donations helped improve the children's area at Clifton Library and supported a prison library book club, using reading to promote wellbeing and rehabilitation.

And £2,500 helped make possible the inaugural **Children's LitFest**, bringing authors, books and literary events to younger audiences.

So, whether you are a long-standing supporter or joining us for the first time, your ticket helps make all this possible. Every ticket contributes to keeping books, reading and the joy of literature at the heart of our community.

Photo: Anya Shrimpton



Friday 13th November

Friday



For the first time, **Clifton LitFest** opens with a full day of events on Friday, bringing together an exciting mix of local and national voices.

At the Clifton Club, we celebrate the wealth of writing talent on our doorstep, with a programme devoted to authors from Bristol and the surrounding area. The day reaches its major opening at Christ Church, where we welcome **JOHN DAVIDSON** and **ABBI ROSS**, before turning to a powerful and timely debate between **MICHAEL GOVE** and **GUY STANDING**.

It is a bold start to the Festival, moving from local voices to national and international questions.



MIKE JAY in conversation with Katy Grant
FREE RADICALS: Politics, Poetry and Laughing Gas at the Pneumatic Institution

10.30 - 11.30 • Clifton Club

£14 / 12

Few people realise that, in the 1790s, Clifton and Hotwells were home to one of the most remarkable gatherings of thinkers Britain has ever seen. The radical doctor Thomas Beddoes attracted an extraordinary circle that included poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey, Tom Wedgwood of the famous pottery family, Peter Mark Roget, whose Thesaurus is still in use today, and the young Humphry Davy, destined to become one of Britain's greatest scientists.

Discover how experiments with laughing gas sparked scientific breakthroughs, inspired poets and fuelled radical political debate. Rich in colourful characters and surprising stories, this talk uncovers the forgotten Bristol network that changed the course of science, literature and ideas.

TOUR OF THE PNEUMATIC INSTITUTION

Following the talk, stroll down to Hotwells to join Mike Jay for a tour of the Pneumatic Institution in Dowry Square; follow in Thomas Beddoes' footsteps and see where young chemist Humphry Davy discovered the intoxicating effects of nitrous oxide. **Approx. 1 hour, including Q&A**

This is a separate event; please book directly via their website: www.davyshouse.co.uk/events



AMY FLETCHER
The Irrepressible Mary Jeune

12 - 1pm • Clifton Club

£14 / 12

Who was Mary Jeune – and why has almost everyone forgotten her?

A journalist, social reformer and society hostess, Mary Jeune was once so famous that the press followed her every move, on both sides of the Atlantic. Oscar Wilde, Thomas Hardy and Winston Churchill sought her advice – as did people on the margins of society. She had strong opinions and was never afraid to express them, moving effortlessly between privilege and poverty, sometimes with hilarious consequences. Yet she vanished from history. With no personal papers to guide her, it took a

determined great-granddaughter to uncover her extraordinary story.

Mary Jeune's world encompassed the Irish Question, American civil rights, slum clearance, the New Woman, mad aristocrats and the arrival of the motor car. Come and meet the woman who refused to fit into any box.



PATRICK CHARNLEY talks with Helen Taylor
This, My Second Life

1.30 - 2.30pm • Clifton Club

£14 / 12

After a near-death experience, twenty-year-old Jago Trevarno retreats to his uncle's remote, off-grid farm in West Cornwall, where life follows the rhythms of the natural world. As he tends the land and animals, he begins to recover a sense of wonder, renewal and connection; but when a local villain threatens the farm, Jago must find the strength to protect his second life.

Join Patrick Charnley in conversation with Helen Taylor, about his critically acclaimed debut novel, **This, My Second Life**.

Drawing on Patrick's own experience of cardiac arrest and a life-changing brain injury, this moving exploration of recovery and resilience also marks the arrival of a new literary voice from a family with deep Clifton roots.

Patrick grew up in Bristol, and is the son of celebrated novelist and poet, the late Helen Dunmore.



JULIAN EVANS
Ukraine: Birth of a Nation

3 - 4pm • Clifton Club

£14 / 12

Join Julian Evans, author of the acclaimed memoir **Undefeatable: Odesa in Love and War**, for a deeply personal and compelling account of Ukraine's struggle for survival. After falling in love with Odesa in the 1990s, Julian married a Ukrainian artist there and made the city part of his family's life.

Following Russia's seizure of Crimea and the Donbas, he travelled to the frontline to witness events firsthand, returning to live in Odesa during the full-scale invasion, under bombardment and blackouts.

Blending memoir, reportage and history, **Undefeatable** tells the story of a nation that refused to surrender. It offers a rare insider's perspective on Ukraine's remarkable transformation, its resilience in the face of aggression, and what its future could mean for Europe.

Photo: Yevhen Titarenko



JOHN DAVIDSON & ABBIE ROSS *I Swear*

4.30 - 5.30pm • Christ Church

£17 / 15

John Davidson is an activist, campaigner and powerful advocate for people living with Tourette's. His candid and compelling memoir, *I Swear*, tells the story of a life shaped by Tourette's and a determination to challenge the assumptions and prejudices surrounding the condition. The book is an account of John's actual life story, which informed the BAFTA Award-winning film *I Swear*, bringing John's remarkable story to a much wider audience.

In this special conversation, John is joined by his co-author Abbie Ross, author of *Hippy Dinners*, to explore the experiences behind the book

- from growing up with Tourette's and confronting misunderstanding and stigma, to finding his voice as a campaigner and using his experiences to make a difference to others.

Expect honesty, humour and extraordinary stories, as John talks about the realities of living with Tourette's, the people and experiences that have shaped him, and why speaking openly about the condition matters. A moving and often surprising conversation about Tourette's, identity and finding the confidence to be yourself.



MICHAEL GOVE & GUY STANDING *in conversation with Andrew Kelly* *How Can Education Fix Society?*

7 - 9pm • Christ Church

£17 / 15

How should we educate the next generation for a world changing faster than ever before?

As Artificial Intelligence, automation and new technologies reshape work and society, what knowledge and skills will young people need, not just to earn a living, but to lead creative, fulfilling lives?

Few politicians have had a greater influence on England's education system than Baron Michael Gove. As Secretary of State for Education (2010-2014), he introduced sweeping reforms, including the expansion of academies and free schools, changes to A-levels and the national curriculum, and the English Baccalaureate. His reforms continue to shape schools today.

Joining him is Professor Guy Standing, internationally renowned economist, social thinker and author of *Human Capital: The Tragedy of the Education Commons*. He argues that education has become too focused on producing productive workers rather than independent, critical thinkers, capable of shaping a better society.

This opening debate launches the **Clifton LitFest** with a lively exchange of ideas on one of the biggest questions of our time. Expect challenge, disagreement - and the chance to contribute your own views about the future of education.



Saturday 14th November



Today, the whole Village becomes the Festival - a day to wander from place to place, dipping into conversations, ideas and discoveries along the way.

At **Christ Church**, discover how the law is on your side; in the **Rose Theatre**, consider how an American Pope might navigate the age of Trump; or head down to **The Crypt** for a journey through historical fiction.

Then perhaps back to **Christ Church** to discover how one of Britain's best-known retailers was transformed, or to **Clifton Library** to ask a question that has puzzled historians for centuries: who really discovered America?

Art lovers can uncover newly revealed material about Vermeer, while elsewhere in the **Library** the *Lives of Others* offers a glimpse into very different worlds. Upstairs in the **Meeting Room**, discover how press and police corruption changed one woman's life.

And when the day draws to a close, return to **Christ Church** for an evening of music, poetry and prosecco - by candlelight.

Choose your starting point and see where the day takes you.



JONATHON PORRITT *talks with Nick Campion* *Climate Breakdown: Getting Real?* *Opting Out? Still On the Fence?*

10.30 - 11.30am • Christ Church

£14 / 12

Jonathon Porritt has spent decades at the forefront of environmental thinking and public debate. In this urgent and provocative talk, he asks why the gap between what Nature is telling us about a rapidly changing climate and what politicians, pundits and much of the mainstream media are saying, seems wider than it was in the 1990s.

Beyond the familiar explanations - fossil fuel interests, short-term political thinking, the cost-of-living crisis and hostility to climate action - Porritt argues that we need to look more deeply at the assumptions shaping our society. He identifies three powerful ideas holding us back: our obsession with economic growth at any cost; the belief that humans stand apart from the rest of life on Earth; and a narrow definition of progress based on competition and self-interest.

Drawing on a lifetime of experience in policy, activism and 'systems thinking', Porritt challenges us to reconsider what progress means. Can we build prosperity for all within the Earth's limits and rediscover a more hopeful understanding of human nature, grounded in cooperation, empathy and responsibility to future generations?



JACQUI FURNEAUX 7 Years on the Road on a Dinosaur Motorbike

10.30 - 11.30am • Christ Church Crypt £14 / 12

Hit the Road, Jac! What would you do if, at 50, your marriage ended and you suddenly found yourself free to start again? Jacqui Furneaux bought herself a 500cc Enfield Bullet motorcycle and hit the road! Her remarkable journey began with solo backpacking through Thailand, South-East Asia, Pakistan and India. Then, swapping her Lonely Planet guidebook for road maps, she set off on a motorcycle adventure that changed her life.

In *Hit the Road, Jac*, Jacqui tells a story of courage, curiosity, mishaps and the sheer exhilaration of discovering that it's never too late for a new adventure.

Come and hear Jacqui talk about the places she travelled, the people she met, the challenges she faced and what happened when an ordinary woman decided to take an extraordinary chance. Buy the book and take the journey home with you.



JENNY CHANDLER The Capsule Kitchen

10.30 - 11.30am • The Library £14 / 12

Jenny Chandler will be sharing her latest book, **The Capsule Kitchen: 12 Core Ingredients, Endless Combinations**.

Jenny's culinary career has taken her from cheffing on Italian sailing boats to running a cookery school and catering company, as well as working as a food writer and campaigning with the UN's FAO on the importance of pulses in the modern diet.

She is an ambassador for the Soil Association and works with chefs across the food

sector to get more plants on our plates. In this lively talk and demonstration, Jenny will show how one pot of beans or grains can become the bedrock of your cooking for the week ahead - with no sense of repetition and no compromise on flavour. Expect practical tips, fabulous tasters and plenty of inspiration to re-energise your kitchen.



MICHAEL KELLY Soft Power in a World of Hard Men

10.30 - 11.30am • The Rose Theatre £14 / 12

Joseph Stalin is widely attributed with the dismissive remark, "The Pope? How many divisions has he got?" Yet, in the first decades of the 21st century, the Papacy is demonstrating that power need not rest on armies. Through moral authority, persuasion and global influence, it is emerging as a strong voice for a shared world order.

Michael Kelly, a leading Catholic commentator and writer, brings his experience and insight to this timely discussion, drawing on his new

book, **In Christ We Are One: Pope Leo XIV at the Service of Humanity**.

In a world where it often seems that the one who shouts the loudest is the one to be heard, the quiet leadership of Pope Leo contrasts the noisy and ostentatious power of the politician with the gentle leadership of the Shepherd. From climate change to calls for a more peaceful world, the Vatican is often referenced as the voice of reason. But what are the implications for the Church in a secular age, and how does the Pope stay true to his spiritual mission to point people towards God when so many who welcome his political interventions have little interest in spirituality?



GUY STANDING Reviving the Commons

12 - 1pm • Christ Church £14 / 12

"As Artificial Intelligence transforms the world of work and wealth, we need to ensure that technological progress benefits everyone rather than deepening inequality," says economist and social justice campaigner Guy Standing, author of **The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class**, **Basic Income: And How We Can Make It Happen** and **Plunder of the Commons**, argues that the economy must be restructured. He calls for a revival of the "commons" - the shared resources on which we all depend, while giving 'the precariat' greater security and freedom.

Besides preparing for the existential challenge of AI, such an agenda is essential in the fight against global burning and the breakdown of the income distribution system, which is leaving 'the precariat' bereft of hope. Drawing on decades of research, Standing will explore why a Basic Income is an imperative. Rather than a welfare proposal, he sees it as a matter of common justice: a way to encourage creativity, strengthen communities, reduce insecurity and give people the confidence and quality time to adapt to rapid technological change, while helping combat the ecological destruction accelerated by rapacious finance.



Photo: Sandy Cole

BIJAN OMRANI in conversation with Madeleine Thiele God is an Englishman: Christianity and the Creation of England

12 - 1pm • Christ Church Crypt £14 / 12

Christianity in England is declining. What does that really mean for a country whose history, culture and identity have been shaped by Christianity for more than 1,700 years? Join Bijan Omrani for a fascinating and provocative exploration of what happens when a religion that once stood at the heart of English life begins to disappear. He'll explore its influence on our laws and morality, government and kingship, architecture and literature - even our landscape, language and everyday customs. But this isn't simply a history lesson. Bijan argues that we should not lightly abandon a tradition that has shaped England so profoundly and, at its best, offered powerful answers to the enduring questions of human life. He will make the case for retaining Christianity as part of our national heritage, and as a resource for confronting some of the challenges of modern life. Come and hear his argument - and decide for yourself.



Photo: Liz Miall

CHRIS CHAPMAN in conversation with David Parker A photographic friendship: James Ravilious and Chris Chapman

12 - 1pm • The Library £14 / 12

Celebrating the remarkable artistic partnership and shared vision of two of Devon's most significant documentary photographers, we are delighted to welcome author and photographer Chris Chapman.

James Ravilious and Chris Chapman both began their photographic careers in Devon in 1972; Ravilious documenting rural North Devon for the Beaford Archive, while Chapman photographed life on Dartmoor. Over the following decades, both created extraordinary records of Devon's landscapes, communities and changing way of life.

Chris will illustrate his talk with a selection of paired photographs that he and James took over the course of their friendship, revealing striking connections between their work and their shared affection for rural Devon.



ANDREW MILLER *in conversation with Helen Taylor* *The Land in Winter*

12 - 1pm • Rose Theatre

£14 / 12

The winter of 1962–63 was one of the harshest Britain had experienced for centuries, but in Booker Prize short-listed Andrew Miller's **The Land in Winter**, the 'Big Freeze' becomes much more than a dramatic backdrop. Through the lives of two young couples in a rural West Country community, Miller captures a society still shaped by the Second World War, traditional class divisions and rigid expectations of marriage

and family, yet already on the brink of profound change.

This is social history brought vividly to life, a Britain where old certainties are beginning to crumble, but where the freedoms and possibilities of the 1960s have not yet arrived. Miller's finely observed characters reveal the tensions beneath apparently ordinary lives, from changing attitudes to class and gender to the lingering shadows of war and mental illness.



BARONESS HALE OF RICHMOND *Spider Woman* *talks with Paula O'Rourke*

1.30 - 2.30pm • Christ Church

£14 / 12

How does the law shape our everyday lives, and how can we better understand a legal system that can often seem remote or bewildering? In **The Law on Your Side**, Baroness Brenda Hale of Richmond, Britain's first woman President of the Supreme Court, draws on her distinguished career to illuminate the workings of the law through cases she encountered across the courts and tribunals in which she served and observed proceedings. These compelling real-life cases reveal the human stories behind legal principles and demonstrate how the law touches every aspect of our lives,

from family and home to rights, responsibilities and relationships.

Baroness Hale will also reflect on her remarkable life and career, chronicled in her memoir **Spider Woman**.

From growing up in Yorkshire to becoming one of Britain's most distinguished judges, her career has been characterised by intellectual rigour, principle and a determination to open new paths.

An opportunity to hear Baroness Hale discuss the law, the cases that have shaped her thinking, and a career at the heart of the British justice system.



ROSANNA PIKE *in conversation with Franny Moyle* *Writing Historical Fiction*

1.30 - 2.30pm • Christ Church Crypt

£14 / 12

In **A Little Trickerie**, Rosanna Pike brings to life the extraordinary true story of a woman in early Tudor England who claimed to be an angel and attracted an entire community of believers. Through Tibb Ingleby's audacious hoax, Pike reveals a world far beyond royal courts - the overlooked lives, ambitions, and ingenuity of early Tudor women.

As Tibb sets out to exploit the credulity of Tudor England, Pike turns history's attention to ordinary people and to the women too often left at its margins. The result is history with an unexpected twist: **A Little Trickerie** won the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize for Comic Fiction.

Join Rosanna in conversation with acclaimed cultural non-fiction writer Franny Moyle as they explore the real history behind the novel, the forgotten women of the period, and the art of bringing the past vividly to life.



IAN HUDSON *Who Discovered America?* *Rethinking the History of Global Exploration*

1.30 - 2.30pm • The Library

£14 / 12

You've heard the rhyme: "In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." But what if global exploration began centuries, even millennia, earlier? Ian Hudson, Founder of the Gavin Menzies Research Foundation and co-author of **Who Discovered America**, invites you to explore evidence that challenges one of history's most familiar narratives. From ancient maps and Ming-dynasty shipwrecks,

to enigmatic stone anchors off California and archaeological discoveries around the world, Hudson follows clues suggesting that civilisations were crossing the oceans long before the traditional Age of Exploration.

But this is not about simply replacing one historical narrative with another. It is about examining the evidence, asking questions and seeing where it leads.

Expect controversy and a fresh perspective on who really discovered America, and how connected the ancient world may have been.



KATE BRADBURY *in conversation with Helen Gilks* *One Garden Against the World*

1.30 - 2.30pm • The Rose Theatre

£14 / 12

In her latest memoir, **One Garden Against the World**, Kate Bradbury takes us through a year in her garden, introducing the creatures that live there and revealing the often surprising drama of their everyday lives.

But this is more than a celebration of one garden: it is an inspiring look at how our gardens can become vital refuges for wildlife as the climate crisis deepens.

Kate will share what she has learned from caring for her own garden and its inhabitants, from creating the right conditions for wildlife to making small changes that can have a big impact.

Come and discover how you can make your own garden a better place for the wild creatures that share it.



MARY PORTAS *talks with Harriet Robinson* *I Shop, Therefore I Am*

3 - 4pm • Christ Church

£14 / 12

It's the 1990s: Britpop is dominating the charts, Kate Moss and Naomi Campbell are on the cover of every glossy magazine and British fashion is ripe for reinvention.

Leading the charge is a twenty-something Mary Portas who has been brought in to revitalise the department store Harvey Nichols, at the time more likely to be associated with dowagers than daring designers.

With two babies at home, a sceptical, all-male senior management team

to impress, and pressure to bring in new brands and customers, Mary steps into a world she doesn't fully understand. At first it shows, but that vulnerability quickly reveals itself as vision. By the Millennium, the store would be renowned for its outrageous, headline-grabbing, traffic-stopping window displays; patronised by style icon Lady Di and bolly-swigging duo Patsy and Edina of the iconic sitcom *Ab Fab* - no longer fusty old Harvey Nicols but Harvey Nicks, daaarlring!

Part memoir, part manifesto for business as a creative act, **I Shop, Therefore I Am** is the story of how she did it. Join BBC journalist Harriet Robinson to hear about Mary's rich and varied life.



ADAM SISMAN *in conversation with David Parker* *The Lives of Others*

3 - 4pm • The Library

£14 / 12

What can we learn about people, and about ourselves, by spending years immersed in the lives of others? Noted local biographer Adam Sisman has spent much of his career finding out. His subjects have ranged from Wordsworth and Coleridge to John le Carré, James Boswell and the extraordinary con man Robert Peters, as well as the popular historians A.J.P. Taylor, Hugh Trevor-Roper and Asa Briggs.

In conversation with David Parker, Adam looks back over a lifetime of researching and writing biography, sharing what these very different lives have taught him about ambition, character, friendship and deceit. He will also reveal what happens behind the scenes when a biographer tries to uncover the truth about another person - and how our understanding of the past can change as new evidence emerges.



KATE NOAKES, ESMÉ ALLMAN and LIZ BERRY *Body Poetics*

3 - 4.30pm • Christ Church Crypt

£16 / 14

Join three distinctive poets for an afternoon of readings and conversation exploring the body, in sickness and in health. Discover what poetry reveals about the body; its pleasures, vulnerabilities, histories and transformations. Liz Berry's acclaimed poetry collection *The Home Child* is a novel in verse. A recipient of the Somerset Maugham Award, Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize and two Forward Prizes, she is also the poet behind 'Homings', now on the GCSE English syllabus.

Clifton-based poet and non-fiction writer Kate Noakes's new collection *Sublime Lungs* explores the body and its landscapes. She also leads the Lyra Festival's Clifton poetry walk.

Esme Allman's debut collection *Sweet Bone Girl* explores history, imagined worlds and desire through the lens of Black femininity. Together, they will read from their work and discuss how poetry can make the body newly visible.



GUY SHRUBSOLE *Bringing back the Lost Rainforests of Britain*

3 - 4pm • The Rose Theatre

£14 / 12

Temperate rainforest may once have covered up to one-fifth of Britain, inspiring Celtic druids, Welsh wizards, Romantic poets and Arthur Conan Doyle's most loved creations.

Though only fragments now remain, they are home to a dazzling variety of luminous life-forms - from lush lichens and mosses to rare birds and weird fungi.

Guy Shrubsole is an environmental campaigner, writer and author of *The Lost Rainforests of Britain*, which helped bring these forgotten landscapes to public attention.

In this richly illustrated talk, he takes us on a journey around some of Britain's lost rainforests and explores the campaigns now underway to restore them, including recent victories on Dartmoor to expand the ancient rainforests of Wistman's Wood and Black Tor Copse.



MICHAEL LEWIS & DAVID MUSGROVE *Story behind the story of the Bayeux Tapestry*

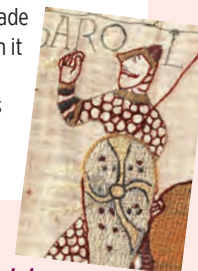
4.30 - 5.30pm • Christ Church

£14 / 12

The Bayeux Tapestry has arrived in England, bringing one of the most unique objects of the medieval world back into the spotlight. Whether you have seen it before, are planning to see it in London, or simply want to understand this remarkable work, come and hear two of the people best placed to tell its story.

Michael Lewis, Curator of the Bayeux Tapestry Exhibition at the British Museum and a leading authority on the Tapestry, joins historian and History Extra editor David Musgrove to explore its extraordinary story and the world in which it was created. Political intrigue and treachery, heroism and brutal violence, kings, soldiers, ships and everyday life unfold across its astonishing embroidered scenes. But what really lies behind them? Who made the Tapestry, when and where, and for what purpose? What can it tell us about 1066 - and what might it conceal?

Drawing on years of research, Michael and David will unravel its mysteries and offer fresh insights into one of history's most fascinating survivors.



LEAH BROAD *How Women Challenged the Musical World*

5 - 6pm • Christ Church Crypt

£14 / 12

Women have been celebrity musicians for centuries. They've been composers, singers, and performers. They have written popular music and pioneered creative careers, but today they are mostly remembered as ghostly presences, surviving only as muses and footnotes to their male contemporaries.

Biographer Leah Broad resurrects these forgotten voices, rediscovers their music, and writes new stories about music history that put women's work at the centre. She will be speaking about her first book *Quartet: How Four Women Challenged the Musical World* - a group biography of British composers Ethel Smyth, Rebecca Clarke, Dorothy Howell and Doreen Carwithen - and her forthcoming book about women musicians of the Second World War.



JENNY EVANS *in conversation with Paula O'Rourke* *Don't Let It Break You, Honey*

4.30 - 5.30pm • The Library Meeting Room

£14 / 12

Bristol-based investigative journalist and filmmaker Jenny Evans discusses her book, *Don't Let It Break You, Honey: A Memoir About Saving Yourself*, longlisted for the 2026 Women's Prize for Non-Fiction.

Weaving memoir with investigation, Jenny traces how one act of violence can ripple through a life, and through the institutions meant to offer protection. What began as

a search for answers after private details she gave to the police appeared in a newspaper became a wider exploration of power, shame, survival and accountability.

In this frank and wide-ranging conversation, Jenny will discuss telling a personal story, investigating her life, and what it means to reclaim the shame imposed on us by powerful people and institutions.



YOUNG WRITERS AWARDS

Young Writers Competition and Prize Giving

4.30 - 5.30pm • Clifton Library

Join us at Clifton Literary Festival as we celebrate the imagination, originality and talent of Bristol's young writers. Our 2026 **Young Writers Competition** invited pupils in Years 9 to 13 to explore the theme "The Voice" or "Voices" through fiction and non-fiction. From voices that inspire, challenge and unite to those that question, remember or create change, the entries reveal how a new generation sees itself and the world around it.

FREE EVENT

YOUNG ADULT
LitFest



On Saturday 14 November, we announce the winners and runners-up in each age group and category, with prizes of **£100** and **£50** respectively. Award-winning actor Paul McGann will bring the winning words to life by reading extracts aloud, giving our young authors the unique experience of hearing their work performed by a celebrated professional. Come and meet the finalists and celebrate Bristol's emerging writers.



TOM OVERTON talks with Michael Malay
New Ways of Seeing: John Berger today

4.30 - 5.30pm • The Rose Theatre £14 / 12

What can John Berger still teach us about the world we live in?

Tom Overton, who first got to know Berger after cataloguing his archive at the British Library, spent fifteen years following the extraordinary traces of his life and work from Moscow to Texas, the Alps to Istanbul.

In **John Berger: From Life**, he reveals a writer, broadcaster and thinker who transformed the way we look at art, technology, migration and politics, and whose passionate engagement with questions

of war, inequality and Palestine remains strikingly relevant.

Drawing on personal memories and previously unseen material, Overton cuts through the mythology to offer a vivid, intimate portrait of Berger and the ideas that shaped him, and us.

He is joined by writer Michael Malay, currently working on a book about Berger.



Photo: Aliona Adrianova

ANDREW GRAHAM-DIXON
Vermeer: A Life Lost and Found

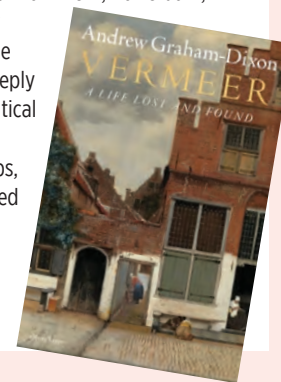
6 - 7pm • Christ Church

£14 / 12

Join acclaimed art historian Andrew Graham-Dixon for a revelatory talk on his groundbreaking new biography, **Vermeer: A Life Lost and Found**. Drawing on newly uncovered archival material from Delft, Rotterdam, and beyond, Graham-Dixon offers a dramatic reassessment of Johannes Vermeer, not as the isolated genius of legend, but as a painter deeply embedded in the radical, intellectual and political

life of the Dutch Golden Age.

In this richly illustrated talk, he will reveal Vermeer's hitherto unknown friendships, his ties to a radical underground movement, and the powerful women who shaped both his private life and career. Alongside these startling biographical insights, Graham-Dixon presents fresh interpretations of beloved masterpieces, including *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, *A View of Delft*, *The Milkmaid*, and *Woman Reading a Letter*, recasting them in a bold new light.



CLARE REDDAWAY *Which eight short stories would you take to your desert island?*

6 - 7pm • The Library

£14 / 12

A good short story can deliver an adrenaline punch similar to a strong espresso or a spicy ginger shot. They are perfectly suited to busy contemporary life. In China, short fiction is called 'smoke-long', as it can be read in the time it takes to smoke a cigarette. But stories are much more than just 'short'. They illuminate the world.

The stories that Clare has chosen are wise and enlightening, imaginative and surprising.

They might be political or transgressive, heart-breaking or hilarious. They will make you think and make you feel. They are all worth your time.

Join Clare for a fun gallop through her desert island choices, so you can start compiling a list of your own.

Clare Reddaway's award-winning stories and plays are widely published, broadcast and performed. Her debut novel, **Dancing in the Shallows**, was published in 2024.



LINDA O'BYRNE *in conversation with Nick Campion*
Jane Austen's very, very 'BAD BOYS'

6 - 7pm • The Rose Theatre

£14 / 12

Jane Austen's heroes may have won the hearts of generations of readers, but what if her most memorable men are actually the 'bad boys'?

In this lively and light-hearted talk, the author of the *Ladies of Pemberley* series explores Austen's fascination with her charismatic rogues: Wickham, Willoughby, Crawford and Churchill. Looking beyond Colin Firth and Matthew Macfadyen to

Austen's original text, she asks why these men were considered wicked in their own time, whether their behaviour would be condemned today, and whether any of them have been unfairly maligned. Were Austen's respectable heroes really as attractive as we think - or did she secretly prefer her charming villains?

With wit, affection and plenty of strong opinions, this is a chance to look at some of Austen's most intriguing characters afresh and decide who is the worst of the lot.

Saturday



MARC BENNETTS in conversation with Phil Leonard *Witnessing Russia's Spiral into Madness under Putin*

6.30 - 7.30pm • Christ Church Crypt

£14 / 12

What does it feel like to watch a country change from the inside, and to witness its descent into war?

Marc Bennetts, The Times's former Russia correspondent, offers a rare first-hand account of Russia's transformation over 25 years, from the chaotic final years of Yeltsin to Putin's increasingly repressive regime.

Living in Moscow from 1997, Bennetts witnessed the rise of propaganda, the crushing of dissent and the growing hostility towards the West. Arrested at a protest against the war in Ukraine, he was eventually pulled out of Russia by The Times over concerns for his safety. He then travelled repeatedly to war-torn Ukraine, narrowly escaping death under fire.

In **The Descent**, he asks how a society can be reshaped by fear, propaganda and power - and what this means for us.

SATURDAY EVENING MUSIC



LAURIE LEE & THE FOUR SEASONS with David Parker and members of the *Metropolitan Ensemble* Includes a glass of Prosecco

7.30 - 9.30pm • Christ Church

£18 / 16

'I have tried to describe this valley through the four seasons, and how its personality changed so that from spring to summer and summer to winter it was a different place.'

So said the great West Country writer and poet Laurie Lee in a series of conversations with David Parker, recorded for television in the 1990s.

Join us for a special evening celebrating Lee's life, writing and extraordinary imagination, presented by Laurie Lee expert David Parker. Through archive

film, poetry, prose and music, David brings to life the Gloucestershire landscapes that shaped one of Britain's most loved writers.

Drawing on unique television interviews with Lee, we hear him talk about his childhood, his love of music and the violin, and the changing character of the Cotswold countryside.

His words and poetry are accompanied by evocative archive film and live music from the Bristol Metropolitan Ensemble, including Vivaldi's ever-popular **The Four Seasons**.

With candlelight, music and a glass of Prosecco, this promises to be an atmospheric and intimate evening - a chance to experience the world that inspired Laurie Lee.



David Parker

Sunday 15th November



Welcome to Uplifting Sunday!

Today we offer a wonderfully varied programme of talks and activities celebrating ideas, stories and the things that bring us joy.

There is history aplenty - from Evelyn Welch on the pleasures of Renaissance shopping to Gareth Williams on the remarkable British project that helped pave the way for the Manhattan Project. There's also poetry, a reading workshop and two opportunities to get outside and explore Clifton on foot.

Promenades and Panoramas:

A Story Walk on Clifton Down Start: 9.45am

Join story-walker **Clare Reddaway** as she tells stories, real and imagined, inspired by the landscape around us. Be a local tourist: experience a familiar place through the wide and curious eyes of a newcomer.

Stroll along a tree-lined promenade to find a snuff mill and an Iron Age fort, a masterpiece of Victorian engineering and a hermit's cave. Wonder at the flickering images of early photography, marvel at some mighty mansions and you might even encounter the odd runaway monkey as you go. Expect spectacular views!

The walk lasts around 1 hour 50 minutes, beginning and ending at Clifton Library. There is a gentle climb to Clifton Down and one short steep slope to the Observatory. Created in 2026, this is its first **Clifton LitFest** outing.

Rubies and Remembrance: A Story Walk through Victorian Clifton Start: 12.30pm

On Clare's second walk, explore Victorian Clifton - a world of jewels and cedar trees, major generals and lady novelists, conventional and unconventional living. Originally created for **Clifton LitFest** in 2022, it's another chance to experience Clifton through Clare's curious and captivating eyes.

The walk starts at Clifton Library and crosses Regent Street to Clifton Arcade, Victoria Square and Birdcage Walk. It lasts around 1½ hours and is mainly on level ground. Walkers have described Clare's walks as '*spellbinding*', '*engaging and informative*', '*captivating*' and '*an absolute joy*'. See if you agree! **Each Walk: £12**



LIZ BERRY

Autumn Enchantments: Poetry Workshop

10 - 12 noon • The Library Meeting Room

£25

As November deepens, join acclaimed poet Liz Berry for a warm and imaginative poetry workshop inspired by the enchantments of autumn.

Through a series of prompts and exercises, you will explore the season through colour, sound, memory and imagination; mixing an autumn palette with words, daydreaming about the wishes falling leaves might carry, and finding poems in the small changes

that mark the turning of the year. There will be plenty of opportunity to experiment, play with language and discover where your imagination takes you.

No previous experience is needed - whether you're an experienced poet or have never written a poem before - come and enjoy a gentle, creative afternoon in good company. Writers of all stages are warmly welcomed to this small group session. *Limited to 15 places, so book early.*



JULIAN BAGGINI *talks with Nick Campion* **Coffee, Philosophy and the Good Life**

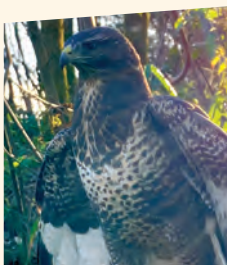
10.30 - 11.30am • CHS School Hall £14 / 12

In 1906, Kakuzō Okakura published an extraordinary short book, *The Book of Tea*, which beautifully expressed the core ideas of the Japanese blend of Zen and Daoist thought. A century later, Julian Baggini has updated the book for the 21st Century, with coffee at its centre, showing “Coffee’s capacity to awaken within us a proper sense of the world and our place in it.”

Baggini will argue that a proper appreciation of coffee can guide us towards a proper appreciation of life, where there is no distinction between the big and the small, the important and the trivial, the sacred and the profane.

As Okakura said, it is an example of the importance of finding “beauty among the sordid facts of everyday life” in which we are reconciled to the transient, impermanent nature of being.

Julian will be joined by local speciality coffee roasters Clifton Coffee, anchoring the philosophical reflections in their deep knowledge of coffee making. Whether you are a coffee lover or not, this talk will make you look at the small daily pleasures of food and drink in a new way.



PETE BROWNLEE **Prytherch - The Buzzard Man: A film by Pete Brownlee**

10.30 - 11.30am • The Library £14 / 12

A special screening of Pete Brownlee’s film **Robin Prytherch - The Buzzard Man**, celebrating the life of the Clifton naturalist who became a respected member of the BBC’s Natural History Unit and a world-renowned expert on buzzards.

Through interviews with those who knew him, alongside archive film, photographs and Robin’s own drawings, the film traces how a boyhood passion for birdwatching

became his profession and, after retirement, a lifelong fascination with buzzards.

A trained draughtsman and accomplished artist, Robin left a remarkable legacy of detailed drawings of individual birds, many reproduced in **A Life With Buzzards** by Lyndon Roberts, published by Bristol Books.

Pete Brownlee, who knew Robin at the BBC, was inspired to make the film after reading Lyndon’s book.

The screening will be followed by a Q&A with friends and experts who knew Robin.



PAUL CLAMMER *in conversation with Phil Leonard* **The King of Haiti (and how one Bristolian helped defend a slave revolution)**

10.30 - 11.30am • The Rose Theatre £14 / 12

How did a man born enslaved on a plantation defeat Napoleon’s invading troops and become king of the first free Black nation in the Americas? Writer Paul Clammer explores the extraordinary story of Henry Christophe in **Black Crown**.

Christophe fought as a child soldier in the American War of Independence, became

one of Toussaint Louverture’s leading generals during the Haitian Revolution and, after independence, crowned himself King Henry I. His ambition to build a modern Black state won support from British abolitionists - and even a Bristolian who served as admiral in his navy. A Black Enlightenment leader, he commissioned literary works, epic fortresses and opulent palaces while resisting French plots against him.

Bristol-based Paul Clammer has lived and worked in Haiti and is the author of **Bradt Travel Guides’ Haiti** and more than forty Lonely Planet guidebooks.



GARETH WILLIAMS **The Impossible Bomb**

10.30 - 11.30am • Pavey House £14 / 12

Before the Manhattan Project, Britain had its own top-secret race to build the atomic bomb. In **The Impossible Bomb**, Gareth Williams uncovers the extraordinary story of ‘Tube Alloys’, the British nuclear programme established in 1940, and the brilliant scientists at its heart.

Six physicists drove this remarkable effort: two Nobel Prize winners, three Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany and a hot-tempered Australian. Their names may now be largely forgotten, but their pioneering work changed the course of history. Without Tube Alloys, the American Manhattan Project could never have succeeded and no atomic bombs could have been produced during the Second World War.

Blending meticulous research with the pace of a thriller, Williams reveals the crucial British contribution to the birth of nuclear weapons - and why it was subsequently written out of history.



Photo: ©EXPeditions

DAISY FANCOURT *talks with Phil Leonard* **Art Cure: The Science of How the Arts Transform Our Health**

12 - 1pm • CHS School Hall £14 / 12

Professor Daisy Fancourt, an award-winning scientist and world-leading expert on the relationship between the arts and health, discusses the life-enhancing power of creativity. Her recent Sunday Times bestselling book, **Art Cure: The Science of How the Arts Transform Our Health**, was shortlisted for the Women’s Prize for Non-Fiction.

Drawing on decades of research, Fancourt reveals how something as simple as listening to music, visiting a gallery, reading a novel, singing, dancing or making art can have profound effects on our physical and mental

wellbeing. The evidence suggests that engaging with the arts can reduce stress and anxiety, strengthen social connections, improve our mood and resilience, and may even help us live longer.

In **Art Cure**, Fancourt argues that the arts should be recognised alongside diet, sleep, exercise and nature as a vital, but often overlooked, fifth pillar of health. She explores how we can incorporate more creativity into everyday life and gives us the tools to write our own ‘arts prescription’.



BRIN PIRATHAPAN *talks with Jenny Chandler* **Elevate: Bristol MasterChef winner shares his story**

12 - 1pm • The Library £14 / 12

Bristol-based chef Brin Pirathapan is one of the most exciting new voices in British food. Winner of MasterChef in 2024, he combines his Tamil Sri Lankan heritage with his British upbringing to create bold, inventive dishes full of flavour, warmth and personality. A former veterinary surgeon, Brin made the leap into food full-time and has quickly built a devoted following through television and social media. His new

book, **Elevate**, shows how everyday ingredients can be transformed into delicious, budget-friendly meals, from sticky pork rice bowls and warming curries to zingy salads and inventive desserts.

Brin believes great cooking should be accessible and joyful. Expect practical tips, clever techniques and plenty of inspiration for turning the ordinary into something extraordinary, as he shares his passion for big flavours, clever cooking and bringing people together around food.



ADAM HART *Operation Pimento: My Great-Grandfather's Great Escape*

12 - 1pm • The Rose Theatre

£14 / 12

Seventy-nine years after his great-grandfather was shot down behind enemy lines, 22-year-old Adam Hart set out to follow in his footsteps. Retracing Frank Griffiths's extraordinary escape across France, Switzerland and Spain, Adam was determined to discover what had happened to the man he had never met, but had always known as a hero.

In August 1943, Frank was the sole survivor when his aircraft was shot down near Annecy during a secret SOE mission. Seriously injured, he nevertheless embarked on a perilous 1,200-mile journey home, hiding in a brothel attic, escaping through a Frenchwoman's chimney and enduring

a Spanish prison cell. His survival depended not only on his own courage and ingenuity, but on the extraordinary bravery of strangers who risked their lives to help him.

As Adam retraces the route, his encounters with the descendants of those who sheltered Frank bring the past vividly to life. **Operation Pimento** is a gripping story of adventure, family, courage and sacrifice - and a young man's remarkable journey into his own family history.



JON DOYLE *in conversation with Eleanor Grant* **Communion**

12 - 1pm • Pavey House

£14 / 12

Jon Doyle's debut novel, **Communion**, is a powerful and atmospheric story of loyalty, morality and the possibility of redemption, set against the backdrop of a changing Port Talbot steelworks.

Mack O'Brien left home as a teenager for the seminary, but returns a decade later, unordained, and uncertain about the life he should lead. Working as a security guard

at the steelworks, he becomes caught up in an unprecedented strike against job cuts - and unexpectedly encounters Siwan Roderick, the woman whose secret confession he once promised to keep. As the strike approaches and Siwan's intentions become clear, Mack must confront a difficult question: can violence ever be justified?

Jon Doyle is a prize-winning Welsh writer and former Literature Wales Representing Wales participant.

Communion has been widely praised and nominated by the Observer as 'one of the best debut novels of 2026'.



READING WORKSHOP *A Deep Dive into Jane Gardam's Old Filth*

1 - 2.30pm • The Library Meeting Room

FREE

Love reading but want to explore a novel in greater depth than a traditional book club allows? Join us for an engaging discussion of Jane Gardam's acclaimed novel **Old Filth**, widely regarded as her masterpiece and celebrated as one of the greatest British novels of modern times.

Together, we'll delve into the novel's characters, themes, language and hidden complexities, exploring a range of interpretations and perspectives in a friendly, collaborative setting. You'll also gain practical tools for close reading and literary analysis that can enrich all your future reading.

Attendance is FREE but needs to be booked.

Simply bring your curiosity and a willingness to read Old Filth in advance.



EVELYN WELCH *Wig-Wearing Men and High-Haired Women in the Seventeenth-Century*

1.30 - 2.30pm • The Library

£14 / 12

Why did men in seventeenth-century Europe suddenly decide that wearing someone else's hair was a good idea? And why did women construct increasingly elaborate towers of hair, wire and lace on their heads? By 1700, wigs had become essential markers of status for all but the poorest men, while women's extravagant hairstyles were equally loaded with meaning.

In this fascinating talk, Evelyn Welch, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bristol and author of **Skin** and **Shopping in the Renaissance**, explores how these extraordinary fashions became normal - and what they tell us about the societies that embraced them. She reveals the surprising economic world created by Europe's obsession with hair, from the people who produced and sold it to those who wore it to signal wealth, power and respectability. What looks like an eccentric fashion craze opens a window onto class, commerce, identity and changing ideas of appearance.

MICHAEL CRICK & THANGAM DEBBONAIRE *Nigel Farage: How has he Changed British Politics?*

1.30 - 2.30pm • CHS School Hall

£14 / 12

What has Nigel Farage actually done to British politics?

Michael Crick, one of Britain's best-known political journalists, explores that question in **One Party After Another: The Disruptive Life of Nigel Farage**, his closely researched account of Farage's remarkable political career and influence.

He is joined by Baroness Thangam Debbonaire, member of the House of Lords and cultural strategist, former MP and member of the Labour Shadow Cabinet. Together, they will examine how Farage has changed the political landscape - from the rise of UKIP and the Brexit campaign to the emergence of Reform UK - and why the established parties have struggled to respond.

Crick brings his detailed research and long perspective on British politics; Debbonaire brings first-hand experience of Westminster and of Bristol, where traditional political loyalties have been dramatically unsettled. Expect a rigorous, lively and challenging conversation about Farage's impact on the political mainstream, the forces that have enabled his success, and what his rise tells us about the future of British politics.



DEAN WILSON *in conversation with Tim Wye* *In Syd's Voice: The extraordinary life of Dave Lawrence*

1.30 - 2.30pm • Pavey House

£14 / 12

Journalist, sports media professional and co-author, Dean Wilson, joins us to celebrate the extraordinary life of Dave 'Syd' Lawrence, former England and Gloucestershire fast bowler and the first British-born Black man to play Test cricket for England.

From his remarkable cricket career to owning a much-loved Bristol nightclub and winning the West of England amateur bodybuilding title three times, Syd lived a life of

determination, achievement and adventure.

Following his diagnosis with Motor Neurone Disease in 2024, Syd was determined to tell his story before he lost his voice. In **Syd's Voice**, published shortly before his death in June 2025, brings together memories of his 61 years, alongside the final months of his life.

Dean will share the story behind the book and the extraordinary man whose voice inspired it.

Sunday



NED PALMER talks with Julian Baggini
A Cheesemonger's History of the British Isles Cheese, Wine and Cheesy History

1.30 - 2.30pm • The Rose Theatre £17 / 15

Bestselling author and freelance cheesemonger Ned Palmer began his career twenty-five years ago at London's Borough Market before moving on to the great British cheese shop Neal's Yard Dairy. He set up The Cheese Tasting Company in 2014 to champion 'proper good cheese'. His first book, **A Cheesemonger's History of the British Isles** was a Sunday Times bestseller and his latest, **A Cheesemonger's Tour de France** won the John Avery prize at the André Simon awards in 2024.

At **Clifton LitFest**, Ned will be telling stories about the history and culture

of over six thousand years of British cheesemaking, with the help of a selection of delicious artisan and farmhouse cheeses from **Cotham Cheese Co** and wine from **DBM Wines**.



JAMES BAILEY *What gives life meaning? And how do we find purpose when life doesn't go according to plan?*

3 - 4pm • The Library £14 / 12

After finding himself unemployed, heartbroken and questioning his own purpose, Bristol-born author James Bailey began writing to extraordinary people from every walk of life with one simple question: What is the meaning of life?

Over the next decade, responses arrived from presidents and prime ministers, astronauts and adventurers, scientists, philosophers, bestselling authors and world-famous musicians.

The remarkable responses are brought together in James's latest book, **The Meaning of Life**. Drawing on insights from contributors including Dame Jane Goodall, Yusuf / Cat Stevens, Dame Hilary Mantel and President Jimmy Carter, this conversation will explore purpose, resilience, happiness and what truly matters in our brief time on earth.



KATHERINE DENKINSON talks with Eleanor Grant
Angry Young Men: Understanding and Challenging the Manosphere's Influence on our Sons

3 - 4pm • The Library Meeting Room £14 / 12

Katherine Denkinson is an investigative journalist whose work focuses on misinformation, the far-right, and online culture. Prior to journalism, she spent fifteen years working in mental health and education with both vulnerable young people, learning disabled adults, and convicted sex offenders. Many of the young men she

encountered held disturbing opinions of women but, while the online world dismissed them as 'incels', it was her job to listen and to challenge those beliefs in a way which they could understand.

Those experiences, coupled with years of research and interviews culminated in her book, **Incel: The Weaponisation of Misogyny**, which offers a new understanding of what draws young men into the manosphere, why the media can sometimes do more harm than good, and how to effectively challenge these beliefs in our sons.

Sunday



BRUCE HOOD talks with Andrew Kelly
The Science of Happiness: How your mind makes sense of the world

3 - 4pm • CHS School Hall £14 / 12

In his new book, **The Science of Happiness**, Bruce Hood asks what really makes us happy - and why do we so often get it wrong? He draws on more than four decades as an experimental developmental psychologist to explore what really makes for a happier life, and explores ways we can change the way we think and behave to achieve happiness.

In conversation with Andrew Kelly, Bruce will reveal why the things we often believe will make us happy - possessions, status and success - can leave us wanting more, and how our childhood ways of thinking continue

to influence our adult lives. He explores why changing our sense of self, our relationships with others and the way we see the world can make a real difference to our happiness.

Bruce is Professor of Developmental Psychology at the University of Bristol and has held academic positions at Cambridge, UCL, MIT and Harvard. He is the author of five popular science books.



OCEANS with Tom Appleby
Panellists: Doina Cornell & Deborah Tomkins

3 - 4pm • The Rose Theatre £14 / 12

Tom Appleby speaks to writers Doina Cornell and Deborah Tomkins about oceans, climate change and the power of writing to explore our relationship with the natural world.

Tom is Head of Governance and Legal Affairs at the Blue Marine Foundation in Bristol and an associate professor at UWE. He will explore with Doina her two memoirs of sailing with her family to the Arctic and Pacific, journeys almost fifty years apart. Her 2024 book, **The Ocean's Broken Heart**, examines the changing landscapes of the sea in the context of climate change and other threats.

Deborah Tomkins founded Bristol Climate Writers in 2017, a network for writers of all genres. She will discuss **The Wilder Path**, her novel about climate change, nature, loss and love. Its protagonist, Rosalie, is trapped in a Cornish cliff cave during a storm, confronting grief, climate anguish and her own survival.

Three distinctive voices meet at the intersection of writing, the sea and our fragile environment.



Sunday

Photo: Lucy Thompson



JOHN KAMPFNER talks with Paula O'Rourke *Braver New World: What's Going Right in a World Going Wrong*

4.30 - 5.30pm • CHS School Hall £14 / 12

Can societies really solve the biggest challenges of our age? Award-winning journalist, broadcaster and bestselling author John Kampfner argues that they can - if we are prepared to look beyond our own borders.

In **Braver New World**, Kampfner travels from Japan to Taiwan, Finland, Austria and Morocco to discover how different countries are tackling issues that affect us all: housing, healthcare, education, ageing populations and climate change. These are not idealised utopias, but places where practical,

imaginative solutions are already making a difference. Along the way he asks why Britain so often overlooks ideas that have proved successful elsewhere.

Drawing on decades of experience reporting from around the world, Kampfner combines compelling storytelling with sharp political insight to offer a refreshingly hopeful perspective. At a time when public debate can feel dominated by division and pessimism, he makes the case for curiosity, courage and a willingness to learn from others. This thought-provoking event will explore what works, what doesn't, and whether Britain has the confidence to embrace new ideas. It is an inspiring conversation about how we might build a braver future.



DAVID PARKER *Narrow Boat: The book that changed Britain*

4.30 - 5.30pm • The Library £14 / 12

Narrow Boat is the story of Tom Rolt's journey through the lost world of England's canals. Spending the first months of wartime Britain on Cressy, his converted working narrow boat, he documented everything he witnessed about the decline of England's inland waterways, a network that had driven the country's first industrial revolution.

Published during the War (1944), the book found a growing readership in the post-war

years, when its vision of a lost landscape resonated with a new sense of hope and optimism. It was a sensation and has never since been out of print.

In this **illustrated talk**, using archive film clips from the period, David Parker will show how 'Narrow Boat' came to be written, its astonishing reception, and just how the book and its author changed the face of Britain's canals.



IMOGEN ROBERTSON talks with Nick Campion *What's in a name? Co-writing, Ghosting and Pseudonyms*

4.30 - 5.30pm • The Library Meeting Room £14 / 12

Imogen Robertson, AKA Marina Palmer, offers a peek behind the curtain to discuss the pleasures and pressures of ghost-writing and co-writing.

After publishing six historical novels under her own name, Imogen was invited to work with the legendary Wilbur Smith on the international best sellers, *King of Kings*

and *Fire on the Horizon*. Since then she's co-written and ghostwritten with a variety of writers and celebrities, as well as publishing contemporary thrillers as Marina Palmer.

Imogen is delighted to share all the stories she's legally allowed to tell with **Clifton LitFest**. Find out how it all works in a fun, informative discussion about the business of making stuff up for a living, in the ever changing world of modern publishing.

Sunday

Photo: Bill Knight



ZAHRA JOYA in conversation with Katy Grant *The Vanishing Girl of Kabul*

4.30 - 5.30pm • The Rose Theatre £14 / 12

Zahra Joya is an Afghan journalist now living in exile in London and the founder of Rukhshana Media, one of Afghanistan's first news agencies dedicated to women's stories. Her courageous journalism has earned international recognition, including the Marie Colvin Award, the Louis M. Lyons Award and the Foreign Press Award. She was named a TIME Woman of the Year in 2022 and included in the BBC's 100 Women.

She is now a Fellow at Hughes Hall, Cambridge.

In **The Vanishing Girl of Kabul**, Zahra tells the extraordinary story of growing up female in Afghanistan, from disguising herself as a boy to attend school under the first Taliban regime, to becoming a journalist and establishing her own media company. In August 2021, as the Taliban closed in on Kabul, she was forced to flee in the chaotic mass exodus from Afghanistan, leaving behind the life she had built.

Co-written with award-winning journalist Amie Ferris-Rotman, the book is an intimate memoir of courage, survival and resistance, and a powerful warning about the fragility of women's rights.

SUNDAY EVENING MUSIC



THE SHRINKS *Where the Mississippi Meets the Avon*

7.30 - 9.30pm • The Library £12 / 10

We are delighted to end the 2026 LitFest with an evening with the ever-popular Shrinks - our much-loved local legends and England's foremost exponents of Avonicanana, that unique musical genre born where the mighty Mississippi finally gets acquainted with the muddy Avon. Part Delta blues, part Bristol bounce, with perhaps a little Clifton rock 'n' roll thrown in, **The Shrinks** prove that you don't need to be anywhere near New Orleans to find the blues - although you may need to cross the Suspension Bridge to get to them.

So, after three days of books, ideas and serious conversation, it's time to let our hair down, raise a glass and have a bit of a dance. It's our traditional **LitFest** thank-you to all our wonderful volunteers, speakers, supporters and audiences - and there's no better way to end than with a band who bring a little Mississippi magic to the Avon.

"One of Bristol's best-kept musical secrets - as long as there are bands like *The Shrinks*, the world is a better place."

Doors and bar open at 7pm; music starts at 7.30pm.

Pathways

plan your journey through Clifton LitFest



Celebrating nature at its best

Celebrate nature at its very best on Saturday morning starting with **CHRIS CHAPMAN**'s glorious photographs of rural Devon showing his affection for that beautiful county. Later, **GUY SHRUBSOLE** will take you on a journey around some of Britain's lost rainforests. And closer to home, **KATE BRADBURY** shows how to make your own garden a better place for the wild creatures that share it.

Or why not start your uplifting Sunday by popping into the library to see **PETE BROWNLEE**'s film celebrating world-renowned expert on buzzards "Robin Prytherch – The Buzzard Man"; a must for all wildlife enthusiasts.



A journey through time

Clifton audiences are keen historians, as attendance at past events has shown. This year we range across the centuries and continents: from **PAUL CLAMMER**'s extraordinary story of the King of Haiti, to **GARETH WILLIAMS** and **ADAM HART** taking a fresh look at the stories of the Second World War. **MARC BENNETTS** offers a compelling eyewitness account of Russia spiralling into madness under Putin, while **JULIAN EVANS** in, Ukraine: Birth of a Nation, explores that country's complex history.

Perhaps the history of canals with **DAVID PARKER** will float your boat.

If social history is more your thing, hear **EVELYN WELCH** explore the curious world of men wearing wigs in 17th-century England or listen as **IAN HUDSON** revisits the troubling question of who actually discovered America. Across the centuries, there's plenty to pique your historical curiosity.

The power of literature



Award winning novelist **ANDREW MILLER** discusses *The Land in Winter*; social history brought vividly to life in a Britain where old certainties are beginning to crumble, but where the freedoms and possibilities of the 1960s have not yet arrived.

Later, join **LINDA O'BYRNE** who discusses the enduring appeal of Jane Austen and who wonders if Austen's most memorable men are actually the 'bad boys'.

Come along and listen to one of our heroines, **CLARE REDDAWAY**, and join her for a fun gallop through her desert island book choices, so you can start compiling a list of your own.

We finish Saturday with a premiere celebration of **LAURIE LEE**'s poetry performed by the Bristol Metropolitan Ensemble, who accompany **DAVID PARKER**'s film on the great man – a fitting end to a great day of literary pleasures.

Relaxing Sunday vibes



Start your leisurely Sunday morning with **JULIAN BAGGINI**, showing how a proper appreciation of coffee can guide us towards a proper appreciation of life. A little later, cheesemonger **NED PALMER** tells stories from 6,000 years of British cheesemaking, with cheese tasting and a glass of wine on offer – surely a Sunday morning not to be missed.

Then discover the Science of Happiness with **BRUCE HOOD** before joining **JAMES BAILEY** for a thoughtful conversation about purpose, resilience, happiness and what truly matters in our brief time on earth.



Celebrating our local writers

Clifton LitFest has always celebrated the extraordinary writers, thinkers and storytellers who live in, write in and draw inspiration from our area. This year, we're particularly proud to bring together an eclectic group of local voices.

On Friday, four very different writers take over the Clifton Club: exploring the intellectual history of the Pneumatic Institute; rediscovering an early 20th Century 'influencer'; sharing a powerful first novel about recovery and resilience; and offering a deeply personal perspective on Ukraine's struggle for survival.

And the local talent doesn't stop there. Across the weekend, you'll find Clifton writers exploring poetry, philosophy, history, psychology and happiness, alongside established authors and newer voices whose work reaches far beyond our neighbourhood.

As you browse the programme, look out for the writers who are part of our own literary community. You may be surprised by just how much remarkable writing is happening on our doorstep.

Art for the soul

The Bayeux Tapestry has arrived at The British Museum. Some will have seen that crate being unloaded at an ungodly hour of the morning and a few may have been lucky enough to get a ticket. This extraordinary artwork brings with it many stories which touch us deeply. Come and hear, **MICHAEL LEWIS** and **DAVID MUSGROVE**, the two people who are best placed to bring this remarkable survivor to life.

Follow this with **ANDREW GRAHAM-DIXON**'s new exploration of the life of Vermeer as a painter deeply embedded in the radical, intellectual, and political life of the Dutch Golden Age.

On Sunday, **DAISY FANCOURT** will show us how evidence suggests that engaging with the arts can improve our physical and mental health and will give us the tools to write our own 'arts prescription'.



Celebrate women writers

From Tudor England to the present day, we offer compelling stories which celebrate women who have challenged expectations, overcome barriers and forged their own paths.

ROSANNA PIKE brings the untold lives of ordinary Tudor women to the fore through **TIBB INGLEBY** the remarkable heroine of *A Little Trickerie*. In *Spider Woman*, **BARONESS HALE** reflects on her extraordinary journey from Yorkshire to becoming one of Britain's most distinguished judges. **MARY PORTAS** combines memoir and manifesto in *I Shop, Therefore I Am*, while **JENNY EVANS** tells the story of her battle with the press and police, which inspired her acclaimed book, shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Non-Fiction, *Don't Let it Break you, Honey*. One of LitFest's final events features **ZAHRA JOYA**'s intimate memoir of courage, survival and resistance as she tells about her life in Afghanistan, lived as a boy, and her escape in 2021.

Clifton LitFest

VENUES FOR 2026

Clifton Library

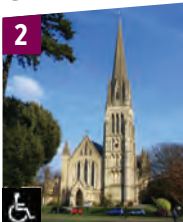
1



13 Princess Victoria St,
Bristol BS8 4BX

Christ Church

2



Clifton Down Rd,
Bristol BS8 3BN

Pavey House

3



Waterloo St,
Bristol BS8 4BT

The Clifton Club

4



22 The Mall,
Bristol BS8 4DS

Clifton High School

5



Clifton Park Road,
Bristol BS8 3JD
What 3 Words:
TONE.TAKES.HOLD



Disabled access



Festival Weekend Box Office: OPEN 10am - 5pm

Friday: Clifton Library

Saturday and Sunday: Clifton Library and
Clifton High School

Online tickets: www.foccal.com

Getting here

By Bus: Numbers 5, 8, 77 and 505 or plan
your journey via TravelWest website.

By Car: Car parking is very limited.

Refreshments:

Friday: Clifton Club

Saturday: Christ Church

Sunday: Clifton High School

Bar available at all evening
events.

Regent Street, Clifton Village

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Clifton Village BID (Business Improvement District)

works on behalf of local businesses to
protect and enhance everything that

makes Clifton Village so special. We promote the Village, support our businesses,
deliver events and improvements, and help keep Clifton a vibrant and
welcoming destination.

We are delighted to support Clifton LitFest, one of the finest events in the
Clifton Village calendar, and warmly welcome everyone to the Village.

Discoverclifton.co.uk

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Where Bristol comes to discover great wine

7 Princess Victoria Street, Clifton Village, Bristol BS8 4BX | 0117 3709930 | info@dbmwines.co.uk | dbmwines.co.uk

FRIENDS of CLIFTON CENTRE and LIBRARY (FoCCaL)

Clifton Library is a well loved and vital community resource in the heart of Clifton and is the only public building in the village. **FoCCaL** is a group of local volunteers, working with the library, to organise and support a variety of community events and activities such as talks, film nights, exercise classes, Bridge lessons, book club, craft sessions, table tennis, music, theatre etc. and of course this **LitFest**.

A full list of weekly events and a description of the talks and films can be found in our Autumn Programme brochure which is available at the Library. Do check our website for details and social media pages on Instagram and Facebook for up-to-date details of events.

Also, we are always looking for volunteers to help us run these events - we could do so much more with more help, so please contact us if you feel you could spare some time.

Get in touch, either by email: hello@foccal.com or on our website www.foccal.com

Our Partners

Clifton LitFest only exists because we have partners who support it by giving their time and resources generously.

Our speakers: we know that many of the speakers attend this festival as they are bibliophiles and do it 'for the library' - thank you.

Our volunteers: we need a large number of people to facilitate over fifty events, and we certainly could not function without them. Also, the volunteers add so much to the atmosphere of the festival, with their keen enthusiasm and warm welcome.

Our venues: a huge thank you to Christ Church, Clifton High School, the Clifton Club and Pavey House, who all make their premises available to us. Having a variety of venues in close proximity is vital to the festival working.

Our design team: Kevin Clutterbuck at LiquoriceSuite for designing this brochure and Jonathan Hyams for managing our website.



Thanks to Bristol Library Service, and a special thanks to the staff at Clifton Library, who always give the Friends such a warm welcome. Being able to use the library during the 'dark hours' was the original aim of **FoCCaL**. The **LitFest** has grown from that ambition and continues to support activities that bring people through the library doors, keeping this much-loved community space lively and welcoming throughout the year.

Clifton LitFest Diary of Events

Friday 13th November

MIKE JAY

FREE RADICALS: Politics, Poetry and Laughing
Gas at the Pneumatic Institution
10.30-11.30 Clifton Club £14/12

AMY FLETCHER

The Irrepressible Mary Jeune
12-1pm Clifton Club £14/12

PATRICK CHARNLEY

This My Second Life
1.30-2.30pm Clifton Club £14/12

JULIAN EVANS

Ukraine: Birth of a Nation
3-4pm Clifton Club £14/12

JOHN DAVIDSON & ABBIE ROSS

I Swear
4.30-5.30pm Christ Church £17/15

MICHAEL GOVE & GUY STANDING

How Can Education Fix Society?
7-9pm Christ Church £17/15

Saturday 14th November

JONATHAN PORRITT

Climate Breakdown: Getting Real? Opting Out?
Still On the Fence?
10.30-11.30am Christ Church £14/12

JACQUI FURNEAUX

7 Years on the Road on a Dinosaur Motorbike
10.30-11.30am Christ Church Crypt £14/12

JENNY CHANDLER

The Capsule Kitchen
10.30-11.30am The Library £14/12

MICHAEL KELLY

Soft Power in a World of Hard Men
10.30-11.30am The Rose Theatre £14/12

GUY STANDING

Reviving the Commons
12-1pm Christ Church £14/12

BIJAN OMRANI

God is an Englishman:
Christianity and the Creation of England
12-1pm Christ Church Crypt £14/12

CHRIS CHAPMAN

A photographic friendship:
James Ravilious and Chris Chapman
12-1pm The Library £14/12

ANDREW MILLER

The Land in Winter
12-1pm Rose Theatre £14/12

BARONESS HALE OF RICHMOND

Spider Woman
1.30-2.30pm Christ Church £14/12

ROSANNA PIKE

Writing Historical Fiction
1.30-2.30pm Christ Church Crypt £14/12

IAN HUDSON

Who Discovered America?
1.30-2.30pm The Library £14/12

KATE BRADBURY

One Garden Against the World
1.30-2.30pm The Rose Theatre £14/12

MARY PORTAS

I Shop, Therefore I Am
3-4pm Christ Church £14/12

ADAM SISMAN

The Lives of Others
3-4pm The Library £14/12

KATE NOAKES, ESME ALLMAN

and LIZ BERRY Body Poetics
3-4.30pm Christ Church Crypt £16/14

GUY SHRUBSOLE

Bringing back the Lost Rainforests of Britain
3-4pm The Rose Theatre £14/12

MICHAEL LEWIS & DAVID MUSGROVE

Story behind the story of the Bayeux Tapestry
4.30-5.30pm Christ Church £14/12

LEAH BROAD

How Women Challenged the Musical World
5-6pm Christ Church Crypt £14/12

JENNY EVANS

Don't Let It Break You, Honey
4.30-5.30pm Library Meeting Room £14/12

YOUNG WRITERS AWARDS

Young Writers Competition and Prize Giving
4.30 - 5.30pm Clifton Library

FREE

TOM OVERTON

New Ways of Seeing: John Berger today
4.30-5.30pm The Rose Theatre £14/12

ANDREW GRAHAM-DIXON

Vermeer: A Life Lost and Found
6-7pm Christ Church £14/12

CLARE REDDAWAY

Which eight short stories would you take to your desert island?
6-7pm The Library £14/12

LINDA O'BYRNE

Jane Austen's very, very 'BAD BOYS'
6-7pm The Rose Theatre £14/12

MARC BENNETTS

Witnessing Russia's Spiral into Madness under Putin
6.30-7.30pm Christ Church Crypt £14/12

SATURDAY EVENING MUSIC

LAURIE LEE & THE FOUR SEASONS

with David Parker and members of the Metropolitan Ensemble
Includes a glass of Prosecco
7.30-9.30pm Christ Church £18/16

Sunday 15th November

LIZ BERRY

Autumn Enchantments: Poetry Workshop
10-12 The Library Meeting Room £25

JULIAN BAGGINI

Coffee, Philosophy and the Good Life
10.30-11.30am CHS School Hall £14/12

PETE BROWNLEE

Prytherch - The Buzzard Man
10.30-11.30am The Library £14/12

PAUL CLAMMER

The King of Haiti (and how one Bristolian helped defend a slave revolution)
10.30-11.30am The Rose Theatre £14/12

GARETH WILLIAMS

The Impossible Bomb
10.30-11.30am Pavey House £14/12

DAISY FANCOURT

Art Cure: The Science of How the Arts Transform Our Health
12-1pm CHS School Hall £14/12

BRIN PIRATHAPAN Elevate:

Bristol Masterchef winner shares his story
12-1pm The Library £14/12

ADAM HART Operation Pimento:

My Great-Grandfather's Great Escape
12-1pm The Rose Theatre £14/12

JON DOYLE

Communion
12-1pm Pavey House £14/12

READING WORKSHOP

A Deep Dive into Jane Gardam's **Old Filth**
1-2.30pm The Library Meeting Room **FREE**

EVELYN WELCH Wig-Wearing Men and High-Haired Women in the 17th-Century

1.30-2.30pm The Library £14/12

MICHAEL CRICK & THANGAM DEBBOAIRE

Nigel Farage: How has he Changed British Politics?
1.30-2.30pm CHS School Hall £14/12

DEAN WILSON In Syd's Voice:

The extraordinary life of Dave Lawrence
1.30-2.30pm Pavey House £14/12

NED PALMER

A Cheesemonger's History of the British Isles Cheese, Wine and Cheesy History
1.30-2.30pm The Rose Theatre £17/15

JAMES BAILEY

What gives life meaning? And how do we find purpose when life doesn't go according to plan?
3-4pm The Library £14/12

KATHERINE DENKINSON

Angry Young Men: Understanding and Challenging the Manosphere's Influence on our Sons
3-4pm The Library Meeting Room £14/12

BRUCE HOOD

The Science of Happiness: How your mind makes sense of the world
3-4pm CHS School Hall £14/12

OCEANS with Tom Appleby

Panellists: Doina Cornell & Deborah Tomkins
3-4pm The Rose Theatre £14/12

JOHN KAMPFNER Braver New World:

What's Going Right in a World Going Wrong
4.30-5.30pm CHS School Hall £14/12

DAVID PARKER

Narrow Boat: The book that changed Britain
4.30-5.30pm The Library £14/12

IMOGEN ROBERTSON

What's in a name? Co-writing, Ghosting and Pseudonyms
4.30-5.30pm The Library Meeting Room £14/12

ZAHRA JOYA

The Vanishing Girl of Kabul
4.30-5.30pm The Rose Theatre £14/12

SUNDAY EVENING MUSIC

THE SHRINKS

Where the Mississippi Meets the Avon
7.30-9.30pm The Library £12/10

Tickets Available from www.foccal.com and **Clifton Library** - from 16th Sept.

Cash only during library opening hours (Thursday, Friday and Saturday) and card payments available on Wednesdays between 10.30 and 12.30pm.

Scan this QR code for further information and ticket sales

