



Sturminster Newton Literary Festival

PRESS RELEASE

Sturminster Newton will hold its very first literary festival on June 15th. The town will celebrate past writers with connections to Sturminster Newton, current Dorset based authors, and aspiring writers of the future.

Most events will be free with donations. Highlights of Sturminster Newton Literary Festival include a new walk around the town celebrating areas connected with Thomas Hardy, William Barnes, and Robert Young. Dorset dialect poetry will be recited in various cafes and venues in the town, storyteller Tim Laycock will be telling the tale of Tess of the D'Urbervilles in 20 minutes and local historian David Fox and members of the William Barnes Society will give an introduction on 'How to speak Dorset'. The Exchange will host talks from local author Roger Gutteridge, local history buff David Fox, and Dr Alan Chedzoy, renowned William Barnes' expert and biographer. Dorset authors at the festival include Rosanna Ley, Lulu Taylor and the poet David Caddy, who will all be speaking in the Exchange.

Visitors will be able to meet authors in various venues around Sturminster Newton in the morning where they will be discussing their books. The town will step back in time with residents and visitors being invited to wear Victorian costume with prizes for the best costumes. There will be a taste of a Victorian school room, and a quiz on literary connections. A poetry competition is being launched with a water theme, and there will be a writer's workshop on sense of place by Gail Aldwin. The Sturminster Newton Chamber Choir and John Blackmore will be giving a concert featuring poetry of Barnes and Hardy set to music. During the evening, members of the William Barnes Society will perform in the Exchange, along with Tim Laycock.

Festival organiser Michaela Knowles said: "We are really proud of the strong local content in our programme, representing writers with Dorset connections of the past and present. Because we want everyone to have the opportunity to enjoy the festival, almost all events are free and ticket prices of those which are not have been kept to just £10. We are looking forward to a very special day in our lovely, friendly town."

Councillor Pauline Batstone highlighted the benefits of the festival to the town: "We are proud of our Sturminster Newton writers, both past and present, as well as Dorset's strong

literary connections and are inviting others to share them with us and enjoy our beautiful town. The festival will benefit our shops and cafes on the day, and we hope people will want to come back to spend even more time with us.”

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Notes for Editors:

Thomas Hardy spent his early years in and around Sturminster Newton and lived at Riverside Cottages where he wrote *The Return of the Native*. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *The Woodlanders* are set in the area around Sturminster Newton.

William Barnes was born in Bagber, near Sturminster Newton and attended school in the town. Robert Young was born in Sturminster Newton in 1810 and both he and William Barnes wrote poetry in Dorset dialect.

Press attendance passes are available on request.