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**FULL HARVEST – Writers Community Engagement**

**Applause and South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) are working together on Full Harvest - a series of audio stories and poems inspired by the South Downs landscape available as podcasts this summer.**

Seven writers have been commissioned to pen ten audio stories/poems, each one focussing on one of the seven rivers that weave across the park. As part of their work, they have been engaging with local communities in the South Downs area to find out more about how people and the landscape interact.

Here are five case studies from their community work.

**Theo Toksvig- Stewart** met (virtually) with A level English Language students at **Alton College, Havant.** He delivered a workshop on story structure and how to adapt work for different audiences to help with their creative writing coursework. He focussed on horror stories and using their work, asked groups to create their own stories each focussing on a subgenre of horror. The ideas were creepy, weird, violent, and dark, which gave Theo plenty of inspiration for his audio story.

**Sarah Hehir** focussed on the River Ouse and in particular the town of **Lindfield.** She spent time in Lindfield conducting a poetry writing workshop and follow up sessions with the local U3A. The workshop encouraged a combination of abstract poetry with first person monologue to reflect on the past and present living and working by the river. Through this Sarah learnt some Sussex dialect, foraged for food, and even ended up with inspiration for her piece – Wild Garlic.

**Rosanna Lowe** has been working with **Arts on Prescription**, a **Hastings** based organisation that links arts and wellbeing through social prescription. She ran four creative writing sessions with a group of people with physical and/or mental health challenges, exploring memories of rivers and stories about how rivers scare or soothe. She made three river trips with group members – tracing the Cuckmere from Alfriston to the sea, visiting various bridges along the Arun and a trip to the River Rother, where one of the group members had once worked on boats.

**Merrie Williams** worked with the community in **Brighton**. Much of her poetry and prose was developed from the stories she gathered from her one to one interactions.

Her piece ‘Brigthon Rocks’ explores two friends dealing with their own challenges to lead the lives they want. One character is based on a local man, who originally moved from up North, not just because of the vibrant gay scene, but because of a connection to the surrounding country. The female friend in the story is based on the story of a local survivor. The culverted river Wellsbourne,  becomes a metaphor of the stories and issues we force underground.

**Sara Clifford Lead Writer** has been working around the **River Ouse** and the **Adur.** She has been inspired by how work and industry have shaped the landscape of the rivers and the surrounding Downs.

For the Ouse, she drew on research, interviews, and workshops she undertook for audio drama **Cherry Soup**in 2019, when she was Writer in Residence. She worked with a wide range of groups including schools, colleges, and lunch clubs, as well as an art /writing group with Art Techniques and a drop-in group at **Newhaven Fort** - the latter on a windswept rainy day, with the ferry leaving the town.

She was intrigued by the **Cement Factory, at Beeding above Shoreham** on the river, she wanted to know more about its past and what stories it had to tell. Sara interviewed people who used to work there, as well as taking several walks along the river, taking in view of the derelict factory on one side and Cissbury and Chanctonbury Rings rising above the fields on the other side.

Full Harvest aims to encourage people to get outdoors and engage in their local landscape. This year has increased isolation for many people and this project champions the positive benefits nature can bring to wellbeing and mental health. It aims to link more people to their local landscape, its history, its rivers, its wildlife, and habitat.

QUOTE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH FROM SDNPA ?

The writers finished work will be available in June 2021 and listeners will be able to access these stories through listening apps like Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Overcast and Pockets Casts. Audiences can plug in and listen while they walk and explore the landscape, or enjoy at their leisure.

The podcasts will be launched to the public during the summer of 2021 and will be available to d**ownload and listen** on the SDNPA and Applause websites and popular listening platforms such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk> / [www.applause.org.uk](http://www.applause.org.uk)

Find out more below about each of the seven writers involved in Full Harvest.

**Writers**

**Sara Clifford – focussing on the River Ouse and Adur**

Sara studied English at Manchester University and has an MA in Screenwriting. Her first play, **Some Sunny Day**, was selected by both Paines Plough and the Soho theatre, as part of their Writers’ Development programmes, and she has gone on to write over forty plays including commissions for the Soho Theatre, York Theatre Royal and Nottingham Playhouse, and her work has been produced in France, Italy, Guadeloupe and Hong Kong.

As Writer/ Artistic Director of her company, Inroads, she works with local communities to create place-based work rooted in their stories. Sara will be writing two audio stories for **Full Harvest** and will explore the River Ouse and the River Adur, she is interested in exploring how the river has shaped the local community and its stories from industry and jobs, to the environment and leisure and how local people view it today.

For more information on lead writer Sara Clifford here <http://www.inroads.org.uk/>

**Lucy Flannery – focussing on the River Meon and Itchen**

Lucy’s writing career has included: working with Alison Stead and Roy Hudd on **Like A Daughter,** a drama for BBC Radio 4, being commissioned to write an original play, **Tomorrow Will Be Too Late**, as part of the D-Day 70th Anniversary Commemoration and writing **Nan**a one-minute monologue created during lockdown for Ink Festival. She has worked on the Chichester Festival Theatre’s playwriting course and most recently as Writer-In-Residence at the University of Plymouth. She is both an artistic practitioner and an FE College Governor, she is experienced in working with young people.

**Sarah Hehir – focussing on the River Ouse**

Sarah has been a writer, dramatist and a drama teacher for over 20 years. She performed at Kosovo’s International Literary Festival in 2019, and in 2013 she won the BBC Writer’s Prize for a radio drama **Bang Up** where the North Downs became part of the narrative and was broadcast as the afternoon drama on Radio 4. An accomplished writer for Theatre, Film, Radio and TV she was recently chosen as the commissioned poet on the Turner Prize ‘**Connect together’** a project using words and ideas collected through community workshops to create an epic poem about the journey from London to Margate.

**A. G. G.  – focussing on the River Cuckmere**

*A. G. G. is a writer and essayist from London. Through literature, he explores a variety of themes including masculinity, belonging, trauma, love, crime and rehabilitation. Photography and filmmaking, are additional mediums he employs as forms of expression. After completing his education he went on to work in a variety of creative roles, most recently as a workshop facilitator addressing gang culture and youth violence across the Capital. He recently signed his first book deal, which is due to be published later this year.*

**Rosanna Lowe – focusssing on the River Arun**

Rosanna is an experienced writer, theatre director and performer. Theatre work has included devised work for The Young Vic and La Mama NY and writing two community plays for Wellingborough Castle. She has worked in travel writing, winning awards with the Royal Geographical Society Award and The Times Young Travel Writer. She wrote **Volcanoland**, a travel narrative about Guatemala, collecting extraordinary stories and testimonies about the civil war and its aftermath. In 2019, she was the commissioned writer on the Goonhilly Village Green Project, a multidisciplinary festival celebrating the nature, heritage and community of Goonhilly Downs.

She has worked on engagement projects with arts organisation MSL in Hastings and created a set of audio story poems called **Ordinary Extraordinary** based on Hastings residents. Rosanna has run a creative writing programme for women in Holloway Prison and writing for wellbeing sessions online for Arts on Prescription, which caters for people with health inequalities including M.E., depression, anxiety, PTSD and brain injury.

**Theo Toksvig-Stewart – focusing on the River Rother**

Theo is a dyslexic writer and actor. His play **Endless Second** was shortlisted for the Holden Street Theatre Award and the Sit Up Award at the 2019 Edinburgh Fringe. The play transferred to the Park Theatre and Pleasance Islington as part of each venue’s ‘Best of the Fringe’ season and was commissioned as an audio drama for BBC Radio 4.

In 2020 Theo was commissioned by Warts and All Theatre to write an adaptation of **Robyn Hood** developed with children in care in Wellingborough. He was part of the BBC Writersroom Drama Room Scheme 2019/2020 and the 2021 Minack Emerging Playwrights Programme.

**Merrie Williams – focussing on the Hidden river in Brighton**

Merrie Joy Williams is a poet, novelist and editor. She was shortlisted for the 2020 Bridport Poetry Prize, longlisted for the 2020 National Poetry Competition, and is a winner of The Poetry Archive’s ‘Wordview 2020’ competition, permanently featured on their website. She is the recipient of a London Writers Award, and Arts Council England awards for poetry and fiction.

Merrie is passionate about collaborations, as well as residencies and commissions, which help keep her writing practice fresh and evolving. She was a poet-in-residence with MMU Special Collections and Manchester Poetry Library, who are currently releasing an illustrated broadside of one of her poems.  Her most recent residency was with Historic England, in partnership with Spread the Word, commissioned to research and write one of their **High Street Tales** (Woolwich).

Merrie has read or discussed her work in various places, including The Southbank Festival, The Seren Cardiff Poetry Festival, and BBC Radio. Poems been published in Poetry Wales, The Interpreter’s House, The Good Journal, and elsewhere. Her debut collection is **Open Windows** (Waterloo Press, 2019).

**Notes to Editors**

* **Full Harvest is *commissioned by Applause Rural Touring in partnership with the South Downs National Park Authority***
* Applause Rural Touring is an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation based in Kent, a rural touring scheme that supports communities throughout the South East to access professional theatre, music and other performing arts. Applause is committed to commissioning and supporting artists and companies to make, produce and tour exciting new work across our region.
* **The South Downs National Park** is the third largest National Park in England and has the largest National Park population, with 117,000 residents. The National Park has a rich cultural heritage, with four market towns, 5,860 listed buildings and 616 scheduled monuments. From rolling hills to bustling market towns, the South Downs National Park’s landscapes cover 1,600km2 of breath-taking views and hidden gems, including 18 distinctive landscapes and 13 European wildlife sites. The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) is responsible for keeping the South Downs a special place and is also the planning authority for the National Park. The Authority is a public body, funded by government, and run by a Board of 27 Members.
* Further information and images please contact: **Georgette Purdey** [**marketing@applause.org.uk**](mailto:marketing@applause.org.uk) **07894 145328**

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