

# BOSWELL BOOK FESTIVAL

The World's Only Festival  
of Biography & Memoir

2025  
9-11  
MAY

Dumfries House  
Ayrshire   

9-11  
MAY

Including

Boswell  
Children's  
Festival

Pam Ayres  
Laura Cumming  
Chloe Dalton  
Rupert Everett  
Dom Joly  
Andrew O'Hagan  
Anthony Seldon  
Wayne Sleep  
and more...

LIVE &  
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LIST



# BOSWELL BOOK FESTIVAL

The World's Only Festival  
of Biography & Memoir

29-31  
MAY 25

Dumfries House  
Ayrshire



## Festival Team

**Festival Director:** Caroline Knox  
**Operations Director:** Daphne Parlour  
**Schools and Family:** Janet Smyth  
**Press:** Fiona Duff  
**Social Media:** Jake Kendall  
**Volunteers:** Ghislaine Kennerley  
**Programming, Author Logistics and IT Support:**  
Victoria Henderson, Karen Wood and Stefan Mallia  
**Dumfries House:** Evan Samson and Sheila Gregory

Huge thanks to the many friends who volunteer their time to make the Festival possible and to the Trustees who give of their time so generously: James Knox (Chairman), Margaret Boswell Elliott, Peter Kennerley, Caroline Knox, Gillian Watson, Dr William Zachs.

Also thanks to the Dumfries House Education team, Dumfries House staff and the Army Cadet Force for their invaluable help.

The Boswell Book Festival is an event inaugurated and staged by The Boswell Trust, a charity registered in Scotland number SC041655 and a company limited by guarantee registered in Scotland SC380815. Registered office: Auchendrane, By Ayr, KA7 4TW. The Trust is established for the advancement of heritage, literary arts and education, specifically the restoration of James Boswell's Mausoleum in Auchinleck Churchyard and the creation of a visitor attraction in the adjoining Boswell Aisle.

The Boswell Trust has done its best to ensure the accuracy of all statements mentioned in this programme. Any errors are inadvertent.

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Royal Drawing School Festival Artist in  
Residence 2025



The Festival Organisers would like to thank His Majesty The King for making a substantial donation to support the Festival through the King Charles III Charitable Fund.



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL



We are deeply grateful to those who support the festival anonymously.

## MEDIA PARTNERS





LIVE &  
ONLINE

# Some People! Some Stories!

Caroline Knox

In our 15th anniversary year, we are once again bringing together an inspirational programme of speakers, which celebrates the infinite panorama of human experiences and achievements as told through peoples' life stories. Some People! Some Stories! Legends abound: whether the greatest stars of theatre and dance; our poetic National Treasure with her lyrics and laughs; or the lives of Scottish monarchs and their favourites. The sweep of history also touches this year's festival as the 80th anniversaries of VE and VJ Days are commemorated.

Powerful personal testimonies open our eyes to new worlds even on our own doorstep. A celebrated artist born into Glaswegian destitution, a double champion athlete who walked away from her sport, and most moving of all is the Scottish sub-postmaster who still lives with the tragic impact of his wrongful prosecution.

Join one of our workshops to bring your own stories to life, take time out to meditate with Buddhist monk Gelong Thubten, or bounce into the fun at our children's festival to get the readers of the future hooked on books.

Neither the children or adult festival would be possible without the generosity of our sponsors, patrons, friends and volunteers – to them all, heartfelt thanks.

**Caroline Knox**  
Festival Director

## Boswell Online!

If you can't make it to the festival in person, you don't need to miss out.

All events from the main venues will be live-streamed.

We are very glad to be able to offer this opportunity and greatly value the engagement with the Festival of those attracted to our unique theme of biography and memoir from all over the UK and beyond.

## Become a Festival Friend or Patron

For full details of all our packages please speak to the on-site **Box Office**, visit our website [www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk), or email [info@boswellbookfestival.co.uk](mailto:info@boswellbookfestival.co.uk)

# Friday 9 May

Tickets: [www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk)

## Rob Close & Gillian Hope

17:00 / £10, £8c

Named after their commanding officer, *Boswell's Galloping Farmers* was the nickname given to the Ayrshire Yeomanry in the First World War, a volunteer cavalry regiment retrained as grenadier infantry. Sent to Gallipoli to fight the Turks in 1915, four yeomen give their own accounts of their involvement in the campaign.

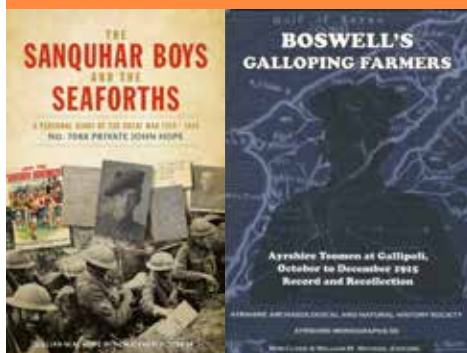
Elsewhere in Southwest Scotland, John Hope and four friends joined the Seaforth Highlanders and set off for the Western Front. *The Sanquhar Boys and the Seaforths* unveils John's diaries, chronicling their journey from enlistment in 1915 to the end of the war.

Written in secret, these records bear witness to the unimaginable realities faced by these young soldiers. The sole survivor of the five pals, John kept these diaries hidden, sharing the truth of his experiences only towards the end of his life.

John's granddaughter, Gillian Hope, and Rob Close, editor of *Boswell's Galloping Farmers*, tell the story of these remarkable personal records.

In conversation with Peter Kennerley

Personal accounts reveal the unimaginable realities of WWI faced by local young soldiers



John Hope  
Seaforth Highlanders

# A Room of One's Own

17:45 / £12, £10c

Age: 12+ Limited numbers

A play adapted from the writings of Virginia Woolf and performed in the round by Ellie Zeegen and directed by Richard Baron

Employing a host of historical characters from Jane Austen to Shakespeare's sister, the play showcases why the real Virginia Woolf's brilliant, funny and richly entertaining essay about freedom and identity (written almost a hundred years ago as a lecture delivered to female undergraduates at Girton College, Cambridge) has become one of the most powerful and significant feminist manifestos of this time, indeed any time.

Firebrand Theatre Company's new adaptation unfurls as a historical and literary quest that is rich in delicious irony and spiced with a range of colourful character sketches.

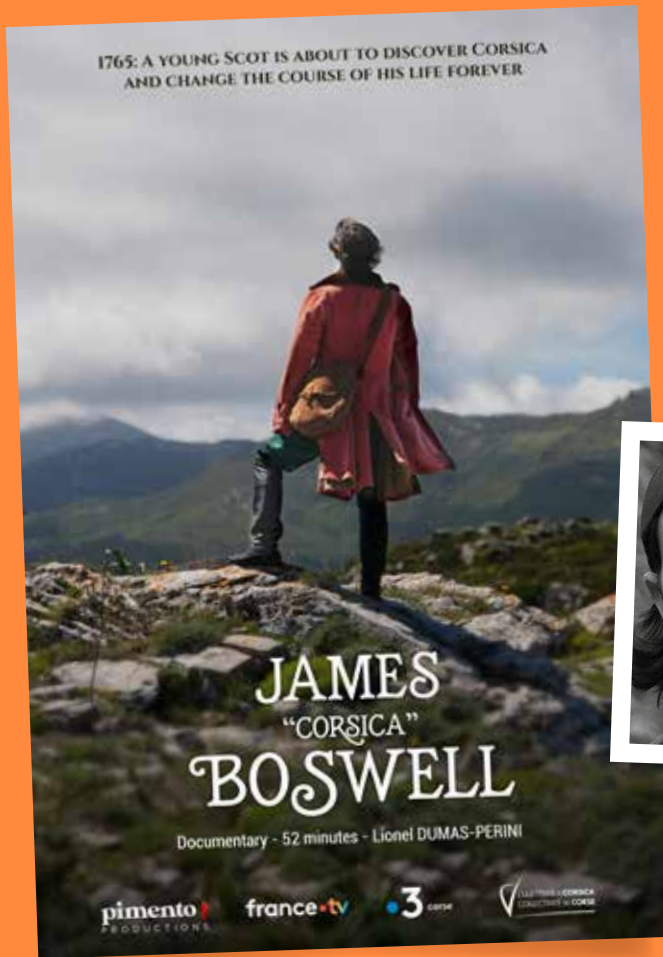
This performance by actress Ellie Zeegen has toured to great acclaim and sell-out audiences, including Pitlochry Festival Theatre's Winter Words Festival in February 2025.

Audiences describe it as "Powerful, moving, brilliant and memorable"

**A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction**

Virginia Woolf





An enduring friendship between a young Scot and Corsica's revolutionary leader



## Film Premiere: James 'Corsica' Boswell

18:15 / FREE

Corsican filmmaker Lionel Dumas-Perini introduces his fascinating new documentary on the intertwined lives and times of James Boswell and Corsica's rebel leader, General Pascale Paoli. Filmed against backdrops in Corsica, London and Ayrshire, Dumas-Perini brings to life, through actors as well as interviews with international Boswell scholars and enthusiasts, the remarkable tale of the young James Boswell's friendship with Paoli.

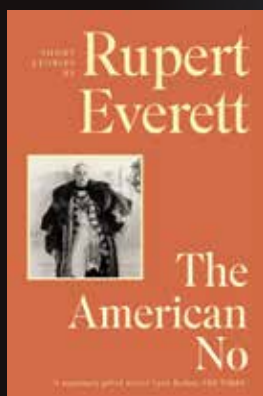
James Boswell's Grand Tour of Europe in 1765 takes him to Corsica where he meets Paoli who

becomes the hero in his 1768 book, *An Account of Corsica*, which chronicles Corsica's struggle for independence from the Genoese. An instant best-seller, the book brought Paoli lasting fame, not least with fellow Corsican Napoleon Bonaparte. Corsica's democratic constitution, drafted by Paoli, went on to inspire Benjamin Franklin and George Washington who used it for the blueprint for the American Constitution.

Paoli, exiled in London in 1769, was to remain a lifelong friend of Boswell.

# The American No: An Evening with Rupert Everett

19:30 / £15, £12c



A brilliantly written collection of stories that draw on the wealth of film and TV ideas created over the course of a fascinating career. As an actor Rupert Everett was most recently on our screens in *Napoleon*. As writer and director, his film of Oscar Wilde's

later years, *The Happy Prince*, was released to widespread acclaim.

Here in *The American No*, he brings us seven stories of love and loss, drama and glamour, hope and rejection, all written with the insight and empathy of one who is both consummate actor and writer, adding up to an intriguing self-portrait of himself at work.

A cast of extraordinary characters immerse the reader in exhilarating worlds, from a touching portrayal of Proust's creative life and childhood and the ferociously unforgiving world of a Los Angeles talent agency to a middle-aged Russian countess confronting sex and age in a Cotswold teashop and a blackly humorous story of a chaotic and emotional funeral in Paris. His earlier volumes of memoir, *Red Carpets and other Banana Skins* and *Vanished Years* became instant best-sellers.

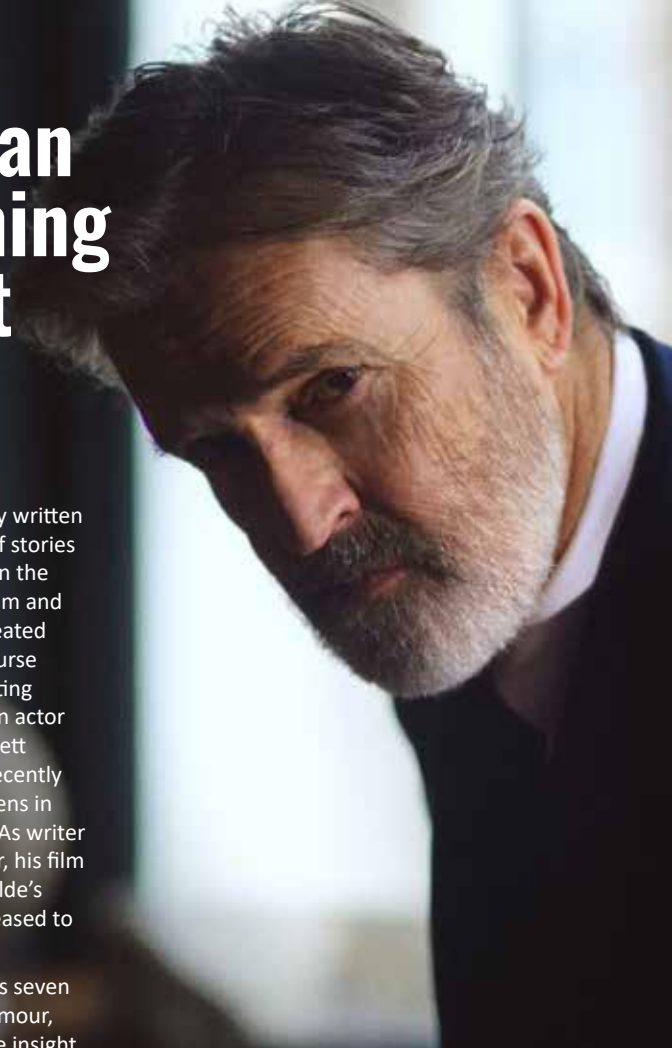
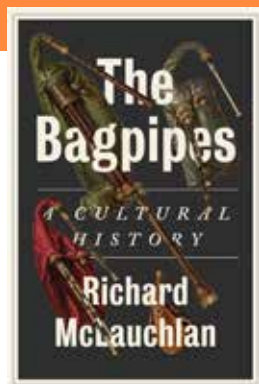


Image: Getty Images

**Deliciously gifted...  
Nothing and no  
one escapes his  
attention** Observer

# Saturday 10 May

Tickets: [www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk)



## Richard McLauchlan *(With a short live performance)*

10:30 / £10, £8c

History's first named bagpiper performed 'with a bag tucked under his armpit'. He was the Roman Emperor Nero. Since then, this strange animal-like conflation of bag and sticks has become the world's most beloved and contested instrument. Another piping emperor, Tsar Peter the Great, decided that his departed pet bear would live on—as a bagpipe.

Biographer and former Pipe Major Richard McLauchlan's vivid history tells the long story of an instrument boasting over 130 varieties, yet commonly associated with just one, from one country: Scotland's Great Highland Bagpipe. Telling anecdotes abound such as the piper who played troops into battle at Waterloo and his great-grandson doing the same 100 years later at the Battle of the Somme; he brings the story up-to-date with the rise of women pipers and the way in which a 'national instrument' can shift in meaning amidst the currents of identity.

## Sara Sheridan

10:45 / £10, £8c

Award winning, best-selling writer, Sara Sheridan, whose most recent novels *The Fair Botanists* set in Edinburgh in 1824 and *The Secrets of Blythswood Square* set in Glasgow in 1846, excels at weaving real life historical figures into compelling narratives.

She will talk about the art and discipline of combining the genres of fiction and historical biography; about her fascination with the past and how it triggers plot lines; and of treasures to be found in archives, as revealed in the current reissue of an earlier novel *On Starlit Seas*, inspired by the Victorian travel writer, Maria Graham, based on Sheridan's research in the archive of Graham's own publisher, John Murray, in the National Library of Scotland. Sheridan will also reveal in a twist worthy of fiction what drew her to re-issuing *On Starlit Seas*.





# Gelong Thubten

10:45 / £10, £8c

On October 8 in 2013, the Buddhist monk, Gelong Thubten woke to the shocking news that his spiritual teacher, mentor and closest friend, the leader of the Samye Ling monastery in Dumfriesshire, Akong Tulka Rinpoche, had been brutally murdered in Chengdu, China.

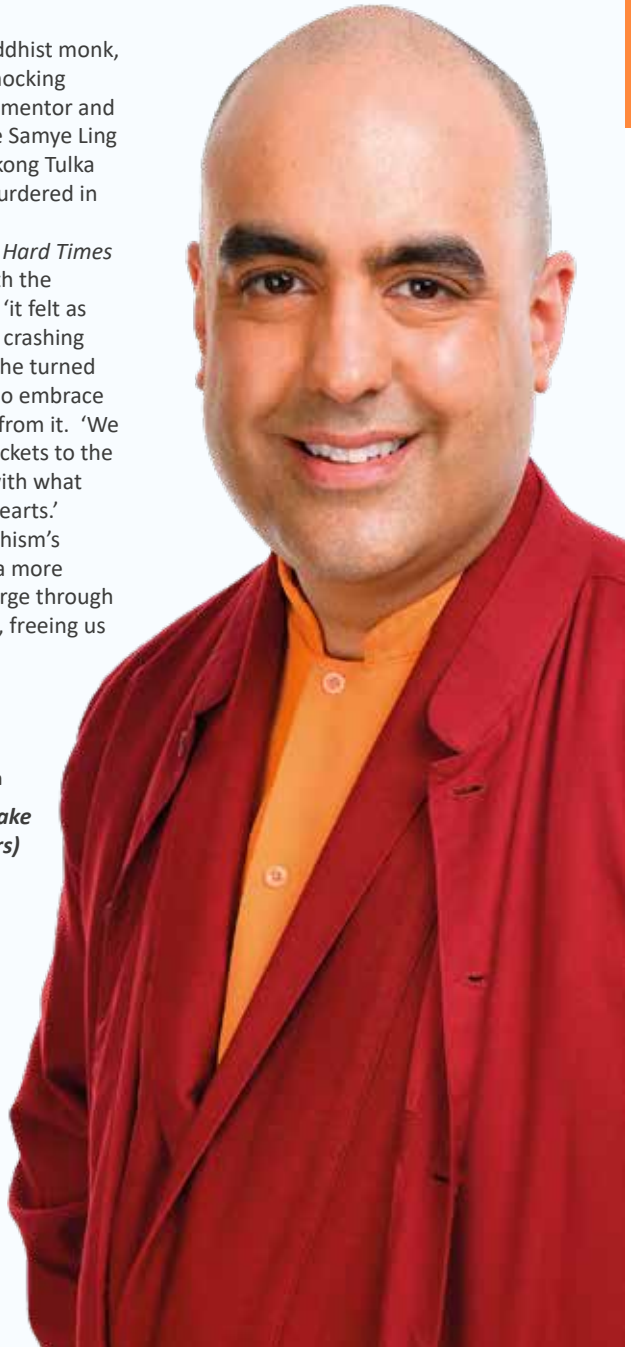
Thubten's book *Handbook for Hard Times* describes his having to deal with the aftermath of the tragedy when 'it felt as if my entire universe had come crashing down.' To survive this trauma, he turned to Rinpoche's own teachings - to embrace suffering rather than shy away from it. 'We humans' he writes 'can send rockets to the moon but find it hard to deal with what goes on inside our heads and hearts.'

Thubten, one of Tibetan Buddhism's leading monks, will show how a more sustainable happiness can emerge through the transformation of suffering, freeing us to achieve 'Fearless Living'.

This book follows on from the best-selling *A Monk's Guide to Happiness*.

In conversation with Vivian French

***A full meditation session will take place at 12:30 (limited numbers)***



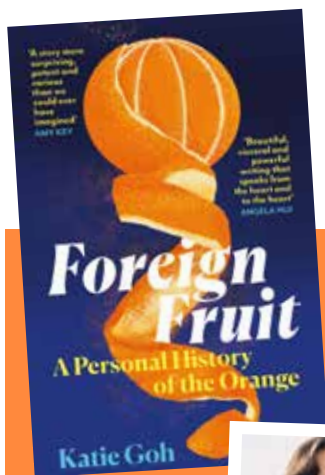


Image: Alice Melkic



## Katie Goh

12:00 / £10, £8c

The orange we know, waxed in vats, gathered in red netting and stacked in supermarkets, is not the same orange that grew from the first straggling orange grove that took root on the Tibetan plateau, part pomelo and part mandarin. The orange is a souvenir of history. Across time, it has been a harbinger of God and doom, fortune and failure, pleasure and suffering. It is a fruit that inspires metaphors, dreams, mythologies, superstitions, parables and histories within its tough rind. What happens when the fruit is peeled and each segment - each moment of history, each meaning in time - is pulled apart?

In this distinct, subversive and intimate hybrid memoir, *Foreign Fruit*, writer and editor Katie Goh explores the orange as a means of understanding the world, and herself within it. What she finds is a world of violence, colonialism, resilience, survival, adaptation - and of unexpected beauty and sweetness against all odds.

## Linda Porter & Jade Scott

12:00 / £10, £8c

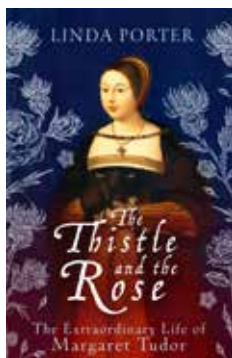
*The Thistle and the Rose* focuses on the misunderstood and underestimated monarch Margaret Tudor - child-wife to the king of Scotland, James IV and sister to the king of England, Henry VIII - here convincingly reconfigured as a skilled and ambitious power player in her own right. Widowed in 1513 she goes on to successfully manage disastrous marriages and sibling rivalry constructing a powerful position in her adopted Scotland as she fights for the rights of the child king, her son, James V.

In contrast, Mary Queen of Scots, successor to her father James V, spent almost two decades as a prisoner before her death at Fotheringhay Castle in 1587. From her chambers of captivity, she wrote countless letters, many encrypted using complex ciphers to prevent her communications from being intercepted.

More than 400 years after Mary's death, the recent discovery of further encoded letters has allowed historian Jade Scott to paint a vivid portrait of one of history's most compelling figures in *Captive Queen*.

In conversation with Anna Groundwater

## Leading historians throw new light on two queens who shaped Scotland's destiny



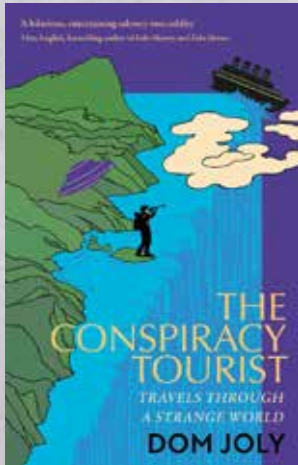
# Dom Joly

12:15 / £10, £8c

Multi-award-winning comedian, travel writer and columnist, Dom Joly sets out on a global journey, immersing himself in the strange world of conspiracies.

Conspiracy theories used to be fun, a bit of laugh. Did we really land on the moon? Was Paul McCartney cloned? Nowadays, however, in the aftermath of a global pandemic, and with the ever-increasing influence of social media algorithms, they are part of the body politic and a massive cause of division and mistrust.

Joly's travels see him meeting followers of QAnon in Cornwall and some New Age-ers in Glastonbury; hunting for UFOs in New Mexico; chasing Alex Jones of Info Wars around Austin, Texas; trying to prove that Finland exists and taking a flat-earther to the edge of the world. He finds the funny and the quirky, but also attempts to understand what makes people so drawn to conspiracy theories.



## The Flat Earth Society has members all around the globe

Flat Earth Society Facebook Post



## MEDITATION

### Gelong Thubten

12:30 - 13:30 / £10, £8c

#### Rothsaya Room

Join Gelong Thubten in a meditation session to increase your power of mindfulness.

Gelong (meaning Senior Monk) Thubten, was educated at Oxford University before becoming an actor in London and New York. Experiencing severe burn out, he entered Samye Ling monastery in Dumfriesshire and has spent six years in meditation retreats, the longest being four years. He is a world pioneer in the mindfulness movement and teaches internationally, including training Benedict Cumberbatch and Tilda Swinton in meditation techniques for their roles in a Marvel movie.

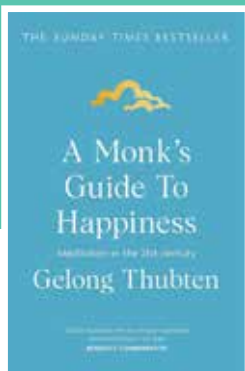


Image: Marc Millar



### Callum Robinson

13:30 / £10, £8c

*Ingrained* is a love letter to trees, timber and craftsmanship - and to finding your own voice. The eldest son of a master woodworker, Callum Robinson spent his childhood surrounded by wood and trees, absorbing craft lessons in his father's workshop and becoming his apprentice, helping to create exquisite bespoke objects.

But eventually the need to find his own path led him to establish his own design business going from commercial success to near-bankruptcy. Faced with its collapse, and the consequent dispersal of his team and everything he had worked so hard to build, he was forced to question what mattered most.

Callum tells the story of returning to his own workshop in a loch-side forest in the Scottish hills and to the world of wood; to handcrafting furniture for people who will love it and pass it on to the next generation - antidotes to a culture where everything seems so easily disposable.

In conversation with James Knox

TICKETS: [WWW.BOSWELLBOOKFESTIVAL.CO.UK](http://WWW.BOSWELLBOOKFESTIVAL.CO.UK)

# Nick Wallis & Robert 'Rab' Thomson

13:30-15:00 / £10, £8c

In April 2021, the Court of Appeal quashed the convictions of 39 former Sub-Postmasters and ruled their prosecutions were an affront to the public conscience. They were just a few of the hundreds who had been prosecuted by the Post Office using IT evidence from an unreliable computer system called Horizon. When the Post Office became aware that Horizon didn't work properly, it covered it up.

In *The Great Post Office Scandal*, journalist and broadcaster Nick Wallis, reporter on the scandal for over ten years who acted as consultant on the ITV drama *Mr Bates vs The Post Office*, recounts hitherto untold stories. Giving voice to the many innocent people who had their lives ruined by a once-loved national institution that has become a byword for corporate callousness and incompetence Wallis narrates how, against overwhelming odds, they fought back to clear their names.

Joining Nick Wallis will be **Robert 'Rab' Thomson** who was Sub-Postmaster at Alloa, wrongly convicted of theft in 2006, and whose case in 2024 became the first in Scotland to be quashed by the Court of Session. He will talk about the tragic impact and emotional toll the Post Office prosecution has had, and continues to have, on him and his family.



Robert 'Rab' Thomson



Nick Wallis

## Against overwhelming odds they fought back to clear their names

## Helen Lederer

13:30 / £10, £8c

Known to thousands as Catriona in the iconic *Absolutely Fabulous*, Helen Lederer has been part of comedy shows from *Bottom*, *Happy Families*, *Naked Video*, *French* and *Saunders to Girls on Top*.

*Not That I'm Bitter* is her powerful, frank, moving, and characteristically funny memoir of the child of a Jewish-Czech wartime refugee who became one of a handful of women at the heart of the right-on alternative comedy scene in the 1980s. Piece of cake? Bit of a laugh? Well, yes, and no.

Using humour to battle her problems with weight and low-self-esteem and showing how laughter can defeat the darker moments, it's Lederer's vulnerability that make her such a human narrator of her successes, but also of her mistakes.

Where are the jokes in addictions to diet-pills and steroid injections? Helen raises an important and open discussion around mental health alongside the evolved attitudes to women today. There's something in Helen Lederer's life-story that everyone can relate to.

A genuinely funny memoir with lots of heart - and just the right amount of bitterness! She pulls no punches, but every blow is wrapped in a laugh of recognition. Revealing, and moving, this is sweet, sour, laugh out loud, and addictive.



**Helen Lederer is  
the third funniest  
woman in the world**

Dawn French



Image: Steve Ullathorne

## WORKSHOP

## Sarah Smith

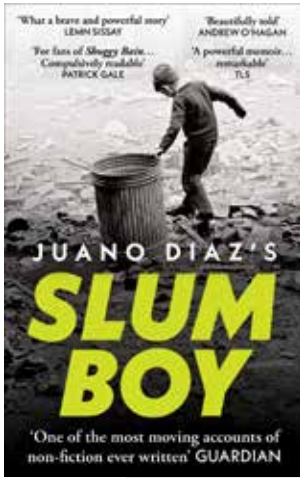
14:30–16:00 / £12, £10c  
Rothesay Room

Discover how to bring your family history to life and write about it.

As a family history researcher, Sarah has used family histories both to create fiction and to write and enhance non-fiction. Whether you've built an entire family tree, or are just getting started on genealogical research, you'll know how intriguing - and elusive - our forebears can be. But when it comes to telling stories, the gaps in our knowledge can be just as important as what we manage to pin down.

Acclaimed for her page-turner *Hear No Evil*, Sarah will share tips and prompts to help with your own writing, whatever stage you're at.





## Juano Diaz

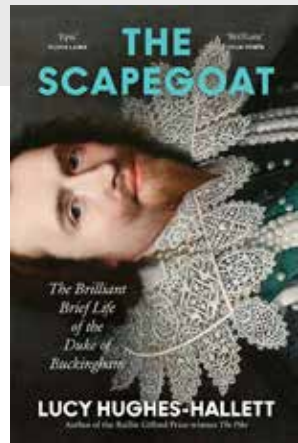
15:15 / £10, £8c

Juano Diaz's memoir *Slum Boy* recalls a world in which his Glaswegian mother, an addict, frequently abandoned him in his cold, damp, windowless bedroom until he was taken into care at the age of four and placed in a children's home.

In stark contrast, he is now a celebrated visual artist and photographer whose work has featured Madonna, Grace Jones and Pharrell Williams.

The adoption of this young mixed-race boy, renamed John MacDonald in the 1980s by a loving but strict Catholic Romany family, gave him a stable childhood until the conflict arising from his true identity as gay led him to be thrown out of the family home.

Penniless, he sheltered with rent boys in Glasgow but spent his days in Kelvingrove Art Gallery, a haven and inspiration for the budding young artist. Searching for his birth mother, he discovered her life of prostitution, alcohol, and mental illness. It was here at her side that he finally learned his real name, Juano Diaz.



## Lucy Hughes-Hallett

15:15 / £10, £8c

An immersive biography of the Duke of Buckingham, King James I & VI's favourite confidant, gatekeeper, right-hand man and lover, summoning an era that still resonates today as it navigates love, war-fever and pacifism in a society on the brink of cataclysmic change. When Charles I succeeded his father, he was similarly enthralled and made Buckingham his confidant.

In *The Scapegoat*, written with a novelist's touch, Lucy Hughes-Hallett conjures a courtly world of masques and dancing, exquisite clothes, the art of Rubens and Van Dyck, gender-fluidity, same-sex desire and appallingly rudimentary medicine.

Aware of the power of his own beauty, Buckingham's influence brought him immense wealth and power, becoming one of the most flamboyant and enigmatic Englishmen at the heart of seventeenth-century royal and political life. His fall from grace was equally spectacular as he came to represent everything that was wrong with the country.

Lucy Hughes-Hallett is a prize-winning cultural historian, biographer and novelist.

If people are fond of me, I am delighted, and I hope I have given a lot of people a laugh, as that is a great experience - to laugh!



Image: Mikal Ludlow Photography

## Pam Ayres

15:30 / £12, £10c

The *Bookseller* magazine recently stated that Pam Ayres is one of the UK's best-selling poets since records began. She has been delighting the nation - and making us laugh - for almost 50 years.

Pam will talk about her new book, *Doggedly Onward - A Life In Poems*, and will include a selection of poems and stories from this book, which covers the period from the 1970s to 2020s. Recent TV appearances include two series of *The Cotswolds* for Channel 5, *This Morning*, *Alan Titchmarsh*, *Countdown* and *Would I Lie To You?*





*In Search of*

# BEETHOVEN



*A Personal Journey*

## JOHN SUCHET

### John Suchet

16:45 / £10, £8c

John Suchet was one of the UK's best-known television journalists and newscasters, regularly presenting ITN's flagship News at Ten. In a second career he turned to classical music, writing the bestselling *Beethoven: The Man Revealed*.

In his latest book *In Search of Beethoven*, part biography, part memoir, part travelogue, Suchet draws on his own life and career as a foreign correspondent and news anchor to reveal how Beethoven's music has accompanied him through the best and worst of times. It was with him as a music-loving and adventurous teenager, as a journalist entering Beirut in the grip of civil war and is still with him as he continues to explore the old cities of Bonn and Vienna in search of the man behind the music. His journey, both literal and symbolic, using his own experience as a Beethoven aficionado demonstrates the life-changing power of great music.

In association with  
The Cumnock Tryst



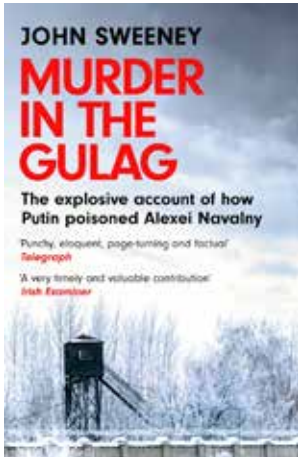
**'The Fever  
of Renown'**

### Gordon Turnbull

16:45 / £10, £8c

Two centuries before the term 'The Attention Economy' was coined for our time, the great Ayrshire diarist and biographer, James Boswell, ninth Laird of Auchinleck, inhabited it. Best known to us for his biographical works on Samuel Johnson and his candid diaries and letters, Boswell was also a determined self-publicist, keeping himself visible in the public eye via the social media of his day.

Making his annual Festival appearance, Gordon Turnbull, former General Editor of the Yale Boswell Editions, reveals a Boswell burning with what Samuel Johnson called 'the Fever of Renown' - source of both Boswell's great literary achievements and his self-tormented restlessness - and asking whether all the self-tortured hungering for fame was worth it in the end.



## John Sweeney

17:00 / £10, £8c

*Murder in the Gulag* is a warts-and-all biography of one of the most fearless and inspiring figures of our time. Award-winning journalist John Sweeney, who knew Alexei Navalny personally, also reveals what really happened to the Russian opposition leader in the freezing Polar Wolf penal colony in a remote part of Siberia.

*Patriot* is Navalny's own mind-blowing memoir, his final letter to the world ending with his prison diaries written from the cell where he died in 2024, aged 47.

Sweeney asks: 'If the West fails to stand up more forcefully to Putin, are we in danger not just of betraying Ukraine but our own security too?' and, 'Did Russia's democratic opposition and its dream of change, of the "wonderful Russia of the future", die in an Arctic prison yard along with Alexei Navalny?'

The larger-than-life journalist, based in London and Kyiv, is the author of 15 books and in his many years at the BBC he challenged dictators, despots, cult leaders and crooked businessmen.

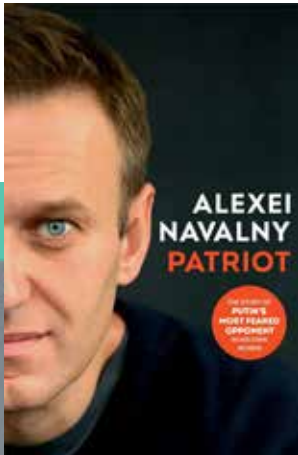
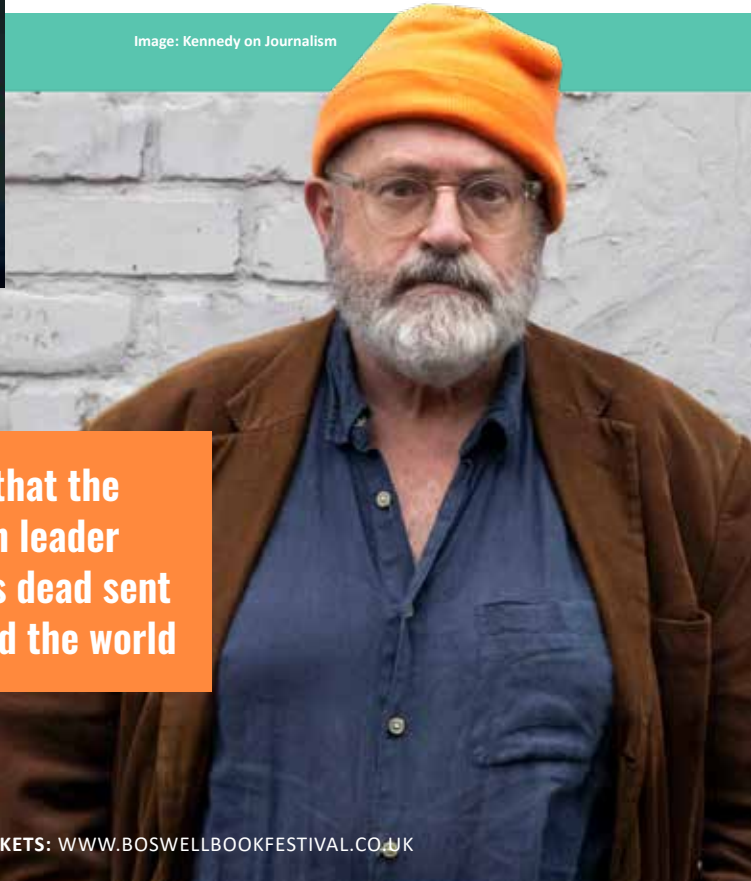


Image: Kennedy on Journalism



In 2024 the news that the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was dead sent shockwaves around the world



## Rodge Glass

18:15 / £10, £8c

Joshua died the same day he was born. In *Joshua in the Sky*,

Rodge Glass memorializes his nephew, who died in 2017 from HHT (hereditary haemorrhagic telangiectasia), a genetic mutation that Rodge also carries, which causes blood vessels to form abnormally and in Joshua's case meant he was unable to breathe.

In coming to terms with his grief and trying to make sense of his nephew's death, Rodge considers the value of hidden lives, devoting the same attentiveness to describing the sadly small life of Joshua that he gave to Alasdair Gray when writing the biography for which he won the Somerset Maugham Award.

Rodge Glass, author of eight books, will explore why hidden lives should be cherished as part of the way decisions are taken by biographers to determine who gets to be remembered and how - from the great and the good, to the unseen.



A book of great tenderness and originality. THE SCOTTISH FIELDWORK

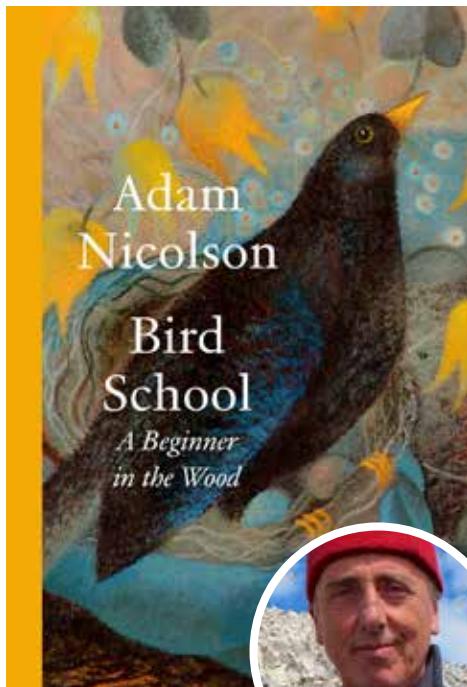


Image: James Nutt

## Adam Nicolson

18:30 / £10, £8c

Adam Nicolson, who grew up in the glorious surroundings of the National Trust Sissinghurst Castle, is an award-winning nature writer with a deep knowledge of the Scottish landscape, best known for *Sea Room*, his gripping memoir of his time spent on the Shiant Isles; and *The Seabird's Cry* recounting the current disaster afflicting the world's seabirds.

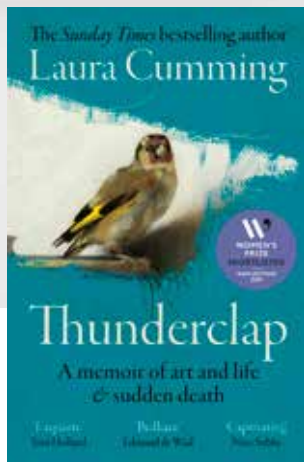
His new book *Bird School* was crafted from his time cocooned within a small shed amongst the trees in a forgotten field overrun by bracken and thicketed by brambles, season after season, looking, listening and getting to know the birds to see what it might teach him.

Beautifully written and woven through with philosophy, literature, science and a sense of wonder, always conscious that this is an age in which the natural world is under siege, *Bird School* pulls back the curtain on seemingly ordinary birds, taking a long, careful and concerned look at our relationship with the wild.

In conversation with Patrick Laurie



Image: Suki Dhanda



**A novelist's pace,  
a critic's eye, a  
daughter's heart**

**Financial Times**

## Laura Cumming

18:30 / £10, £8c

### Cumming is a word-painter....

On the morning of 12 October 1654, a gunpowder explosion devastated the Dutch city of Delft. Among the fatalities was the painter Carel Fabritius, dead at thirty-two, leaving behind his haunting masterpiece 'The Goldfinch'.

*Thunderclap* explores what happened to Fabritius before and after the disaster whilst interweaving the lives of Laura Cumming herself, her Scottish painter father and the great artists of the Dutch Golden Age. It takes the reader from seventeenth-century Delft to twentieth-century Scottish islands, from Rembrandt's studio to wartime America and contemporary London. This is a book about what a picture may come to mean, how it can enter your life and change your thinking in a thunderclap.

Winner of the 2024 Saltire Book of the Year Prize, renowned art critic and bestselling author Laura Cumming explores the precariousness of human life and asks 'What can art do to sustain us?'

**In conversation with James Knox**

Event sponsored  
by RNIB Connect  
Radio





## Wayne Sleep

20:00 / £12, £10c

**Legendary ballet dancer Wayne Sleep looks back on the extraordinary times he's lived through.**

Wayne Sleep has danced with ballet legends Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn, partied with Freddie Mercury and performed on the Covent Garden stage in 1985 with Princess Diana, becoming her close friend.

Ninette de Valois, founder of the Royal Ballet, described him as “the greatest virtuoso dancer the Royal Ballet has ever produced”. Wayne was also the shortest principal dancer in the Royal Ballet and as such he had to spin twice as fast and jump twice as high to succeed.

However, behind the glitz and glamour, Wayne has always felt like an outsider revealing in *Just Different* the difficulties experienced by a working-class, gay man in handling the prejudices of his generation and living through the Aids epidemic.

In this moving - but also laugh-out-loud and gossip filled - memoir, Wayne Sleep shows how he danced his way to success, fulfilment and love, overcoming obstacles along the way.

**In conversation with Robert Dawson Scott**

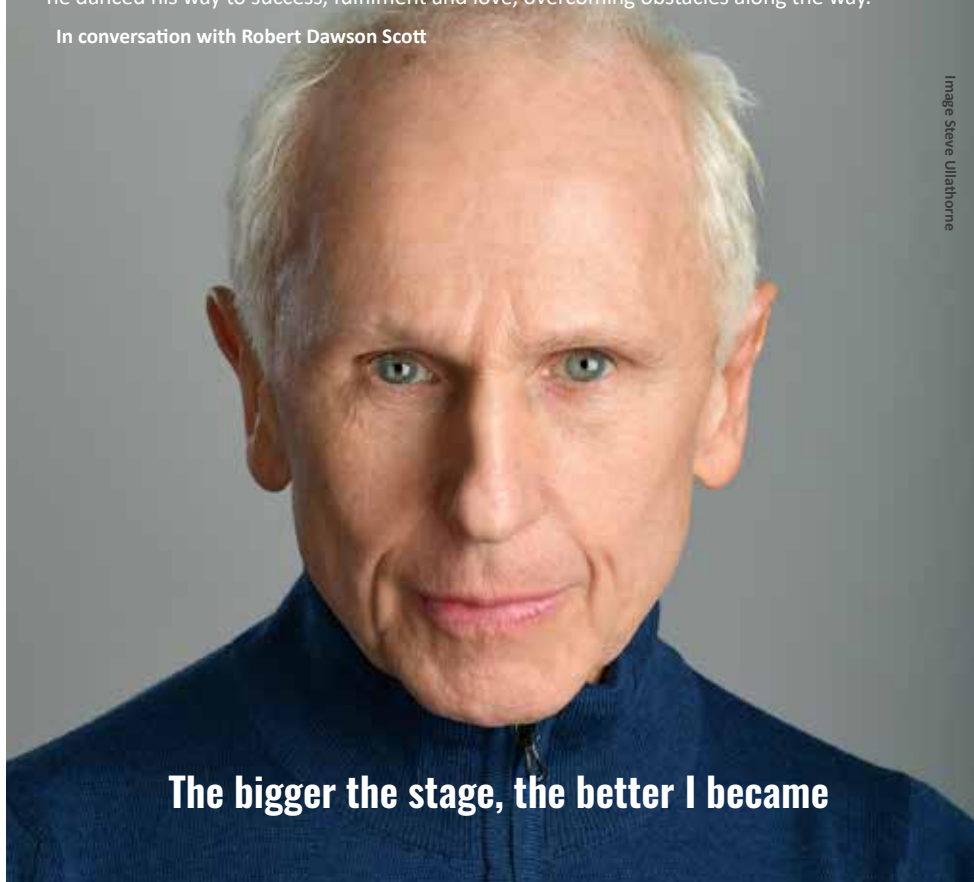


Image: Steve Ullathorne

**The bigger the stage, the better I became**

# Auchinleck House Tours

Sat 10 & Sun 11 May



Sat & Sun 10:00-10:30 / £7, £5c *Limited numbers*

Sat & Sun 11:00-11:30 / £7, £5c *Limited numbers*

Rarely open to the public, the Boswell Trust is delighted to welcome visitors to Auchinleck House for curated tours led by Gordon Turnbull, former General Editor of the Yale Boswell Editions.

Auchinleck House, a villa built as a country retreat in the Palladian style, was the family seat of Ayrshire's Boswell family. Built in 1755-60 by James Boswell's father Alexander, Lord Auchinleck, 8th Laird and a rich lawyer, the estate was inherited by James Boswell, aged 41, in 1782.

By the 1970s it was derelict, uninhabited and at risk. The Scottish Historic Buildings Trust first intervened, then turned to the Landmark Trust who restored the house in 2001.

To book a tour go to the online booking page at [www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk) or call the box office on 0333 0035 077. *Instructions regarding access and parking will be sent with your ticket.*

**Gordon Turnbull will also be speaking about Boswell at the Festival at 16:45 on Saturday 10 May.**

## The Boswell Quill

Lord Auchinleck built the road known as the 'Via Sacra' linking Auchinleck House to historic Auchinleck Churchyard where you can pay a visit to The Boswell Quill, the sculpture by Harry Gray which was installed in 2020. This giant bronze feather writing quill celebrates both the inventor of modern biography, James Boswell, and the universal power of the written word. The sculpture lies at the heart of a new visitor experience at Auchinleck churchyard where Boswell is interred in the family mausoleum.

The quill is the focal point of a year-round visitor destination, including a network of trails to explore the graveyard for adults and children. Signage at the entrance explains all, including the history of the site, along with leaflet holders of printed maps.

[www.jamesboswell.scot](http://www.jamesboswell.scot)

The Boswell Trust which commissioned The Boswell Quill is most grateful to LEADER for its funding.





There's  
lots to  
do...

## Dumfries House

30 minutes mini-tours / £9.00 through  
Dumfries House website or buy on the day.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to experience the superb interiors and treasures of Dumfries House which have been restored to their original splendour. Combining the architecture of Robert Adam and his brother with the furniture of Thomas Chippendale and leading 18th century Scottish cabinet makers, the house and original contents, which include nearly 10% of Chippendale's surviving work, represent one of the most important documents of the Scottish Enlightenment.

### Saturday & Sunday Tour times:

11:00	11:30	12:00	12:30	13:00	13:30
14:00	14:30	15:00	15:30	16:00	16:30

## Waterstones Bookshop - Festival Café Marquee

The excellent team from Waterstones, Ayr provide our on-site bookshop. On offer will be a superb selection of titles by or about our authors for all to browse and discover new delights.

**Book signings:** Authors will be delighted to sign copies of their books immediately after their events.

## Festival Café Bar – Festival Cafe Marquee

Waiting for a talk or coming out of one? In our Festival café marquee, sandwiches, wraps, large selection of cakes, tray bakes and scones together with teas, coffees, and soft drinks will be on offer for your delectation.

<b>Friday</b>	<b>16:00 - 20:00</b>
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>10:00 - 20:00</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>10:00 - 18:30</b>

## Coach House Café

A short walkway takes you to the Coach House where there is a more extensive menu on offer, from a warming bowl of homemade soup and a wide range of hot or cold snacks to a light lunch or supper. Freshly brewed coffee and tea with delicious cakes also await you or alternatively relax with a glass of wine or beer.

<b>Friday</b>	<b>10:00 - 18:00</b>
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>10:00 - 18:00</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>10:00 - 18:00</b>

## Woodlands Restaurant

There will be meals available. For updated details and how to book please refer to the online programme.

# BOSWELL BOOK FESTIVAL

The World's Only Festival  
of Biography & Memoir

2025  
9-11  
MAY

Dumfries House  
Ayrshire   

# FESTIVAL AT A GLANCE



## Box Office:

TELEPHONE: 0333 0035 077

ONLINE: [www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk)

## How to Watch

**LIVE:** All tickets £10/£8c except where indicated.

Events are one hour long except where indicated.

**ONLINE:** Events will be available to watch 'live' online via our website. Online tickets £5 or

[Online Rover ticket £40](#)



## Venues for 2025

Our main festival events over the weekend will take place in four venues:

- Pavilion
- Boswell Marquee
- Tapestry Room
- Rothesay Room

Entrance to ALL MAIN Festival events will be through the Box Office at Reception. The venue for each individual talk will be clearly marked on the website on the evening of Friday 9 May. Information Boards will display venues as you approach Reception.

No drinks to be taken into the venues please.



## Children's Festival

Will be at the Engineering Centre.

See page 38 for programme and tickets



# Friday 9 May

## OPENING EVENING

- 17:00** Rob Close & Gillian Hope
- 
- 17:45** Play: A Room of One's Own
- 
- 18:15** Film Premiere: James 'Corsica' Boswell
- 
- 19:30** Rupert Everett



LIVE &  
ONLINE

# Saturday 10 May

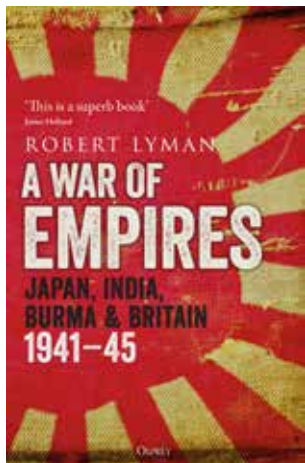
- 10:00** Auchinleck House Tour with Gordon Turnbull
- 
- 11:00** Auchinleck House Tour with Gordon Turnbull
- 
- 10:30** Richard McLauchlan
- 
- 10:45** Gelong Thubten  
**10:45** Sara Sheridan
- 
- 12:00** Katie Goh  
**12:00** Linda Porter & Jade Scott
- 
- 12:15** Dom Joly
- 
- 12:30** Meditation Gelong Thubten
- 
- 13:30** Nick Wallis & 'Rab' Thomson  
**13:30** Helen Lederer  
**13:30** Callum Robinson
- 
- 14:30** Workshop Sarah Smith
- 
- 15:15** Juano Diaz  
**15:15** Lucy Hughes-Hallett
- 
- 15:30** Pam Ayres
- 
- 16:45** John Suchet  
**16:45** Gordon Turnbull
- 
- 17:00** John Sweeney
- 
- 18:15** Rodge Glass
- 
- 18:30** Laura Cumming  
**18:30** Adam Nicolson
- 
- 20:00** Wayne Sleep

# Sunday 11 May

- 10:00** Auchinleck House Tour with Gordon Turnbull
- 
- 11:00** Auchinleck House Tour with Gordon Turnbull
- 
- 10:45** John Sweeney & Charlie English  
**10:45** Robert Lyman  
**10:45** Daniel Hahn
- 
- 11:00** Workshop Michael Malone
- 
- 12:00** Tom Chatfield  
**12:00** Bendor Grosvenor
- 
- 12:15** Richard Evans
- 
- 13:30** Workshop Edward Ross  
**13:30** Mo Wilde  
**13:30** Mure Dickie & Robert Lyman
- 
- 14:00** Chloe Dalton
- 
- 15:15** Charlie English  
**15:15** Rebecca Achieng Ajulu-Bushell
- 
- 15:30** Andrew O'Hagan
- 
- 16:45** Workshop Janet Smyth
- 
- 17:00** Claire Mitchell KC & Zoe Venditozzi  
**17:00** Billy Sloan  
**17:00** John Vaillant online & Cal Flynn live
- 
- 18:30** Anthony Seldon

# Sunday 11 May

Tickets: [www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk)



## In remembrance of the 80th anniversary of Victory over Japan Day

(VJ Day) 2/9/1945



### Robert Lyman

10:45 / £10, £8c

'This is a superb book.' - James Holland

*War of Empires: Japan* is a sweeping saga of the longest and possibly most savage campaign of World War II.

In 1941 and 1942 the British and Indian Armies were brutally defeated and Japan reigned supreme in its newly conquered territories throughout Asia. But change was coming. New commanders such as Generals Alexander, Auchinleck and Slim were appointed, and tactics were developed including a new volunteer Indian Army who fought ferociously to turn the tide of war.

But the first victory did not come until March 1944, when the years of rebuilding paid off with the defeat of the Japanese at Kohima and Imphal as they staged their famed but doomed 'March on Delhi'. Further extraordinary victories followed culminating in Mandalay in May 1945 and the collapse of all Japanese forces in Burma.

Tracing this so-called 'forgotten' war, acclaimed historian Robert Lyman reveals it to be a ferocious clash of competing visions of empire, which would irrevocably change the future of both Britain and the Indian subcontinent forever.



# Journalism Matters



Image: Nicola Hippiusley

## Charlie English & John Sweeney

10:45 / £10, £8c

At a time when truth, accuracy and plain facts are under constant threat from the falsehoods pedalled by pundits, politicians and influencers on social media platforms, what is the state of journalism today?

Under threat is objective 'routine' reporting in local and national titles - whether on-line or in print; investigative teams uncovering national and international injustices; the integrity of war reporting and the lack of bandwidth for long-term coverage

of 'forgotten' wars and humanitarian disasters.

Don't miss the insights and unvarnished truth from Charlie English, former head of international news at The Guardian and John Sweeney, old school journalist and author of a biography of Alexei Navalny.

Image: Kennedy on Journalism



## Daniel Hahn

10:45 / £10, £8c.

At a time when translated books such as *Butter* by Asako Yuzuki and *Kairos* by Jenny Erpenbeck are hitting the bestseller lists, the art of translation has never been more relevant.

*Catching Fire; A Translation Diary* is the record kept by Daniel Hahn, writer, editor and translator, whilst at work on translating the latest novel by acclaimed Chilean author Diamela Eltit, *Never Did the Fire*, evoking her country's violent past. Hahn's book unfolds in real time as a conversation between the original work of art and the one that he is creating through its translation, illuminating both in the process.

The problems and pleasures of conveying literature into another language are met by Hahn's humour, deftness, and deep appreciation for what sets Eltit's work apart, and his evolving understanding of what this particular novel is trying to do. His is a book full of insights into the creative brilliance of translation.

Hahn has translated over 80 books from Portuguese, Spanish and French.

In conversation with Lucy Hughes-Hallett



Image: John Lawrence

## The creative brilliance of translation

## WORKSHOP

### Michael J Malone

11:00-12:30 / £12, £10c  
Rothesay Room

#### From the flowering of the idea to print

Some people say everyone has a book in them. Maybe you've started, but don't know any of the "rules"; or you've worked your way into a corner; or you've finished, gone the rounds of agents and publishers to receive nothing but a heart-sinking "no"; and you're not sure where to go next.

Michael J Malone - award-winning poet, writer of 14 published novels, book-seller, literary judge and teacher of creative writing - can help you! His latest book *The Torments* is a supernatural mystery set in Ayrshire.



Inventive, profound, fabulously quirky, Bendor Grosvenor's journey takes him in directions that have never previously been trodden ... A triumph

Waldemar Januszczak

## THE INVENTION OF BRITISH ART

BENDOR GROSVENOR



### Bendor Grosvenor

12:00 / £10, £8c

Describing himself as an evangelist for British art, BBC's presenter of Britain's Lost Masterpieces embarks on a journey of discovery through an incredible array of artworks, architecture and artists from 10,000 BCE to the flowering of landscape painting led by Turner and Constable, which he believes is Britain's major artistic achievement.

Along the way he reveals how the art from these isles was created, what made it distinctive, and why it took so long to emerge. It is a story of beginnings, focussing on those truly original artists who were the first in their field; and as you would expect from the connoisseur TV presenter, he is unashamedly forthright in describing an artwork as beautiful or sublime and in some cases as unexpectedly bad.

In conversation with James Knox

# Tom Chatfield

12:00 / £10, £10c

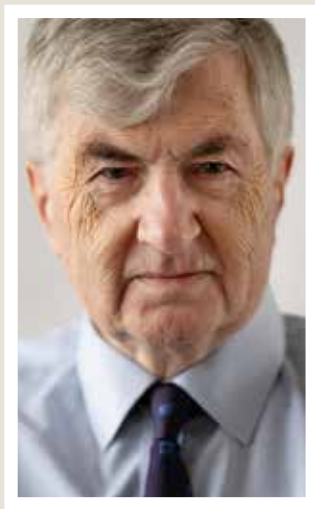
Technology is not just something we use - it shapes who we are. In *Wise Animals: How Technology Has Made Us What We Are*, philosopher and tech expert Dr Tom Chatfield explores how our relationship with tools, from ancient artefacts to artificial intelligence, has defined human evolution. With insight and urgency, he examines how AI is changing creativity, identity, and power in the digital age.

Chatfield will also explore the growing challenges AI poses to writers and the publishing industry as – often without their knowledge – their work is being used to train AI systems without permission or compensation.

As algorithms generate text and reshape creative work, what does this mean for authorship and originality? Writing, reading and storytelling are how we forge meaningful bonds between people; is AI a threat or a benefit to writers and their readers?



**One of the most original tech thinkers writing today, Chatfield's acclaimed books have explored digital culture, AI, tech ethics and the future of authorship**



RICHARD J. EVANS

HITLER'S PEOPLE

THE INSTRUMENTS  
 THE CONSPIRACY  
 THE SALARIES  
 THE SPYBOTS  
 THE BROTHERS  
 THE SISTERS  
 THE CHILDREN  
 THE WOMEN  
 THE MEN

THE FACES OF THE THIRD REICH



**A biographical study of Hitler's inner circle offers a new way to understand the horrors of the Nazi regime**

**Richard J. Evans**

12:15 / £10, £8c

Why did so many Germans take part in the crimes of Nazi Germany? How did they come to support Hitler and follow him almost to the very end? For too long, the Nazis have been presented in simplified terms as little more than psychopaths or criminals. In his major new work, renowned historian Richard J. Evans makes use of a mass of recently unearthed new evidence to present a more realistic view of Nazi perpetrators as human beings who were disturbingly like us.

In *Hitler's People*, Evans offers rounded, fresh and often startling new portraits of the men and women who created and served Nazi Germany, beginning with Hitler himself; going on to encompass leading figures like Göring, Goebbels and Himmler; enforcers of Hitler's orders, such as Eichmann and Heydrich; propagandists like Leni Riefenstahl; low-level perpetrators, such as the notorious Irma Grese and unknown sympathizers and fellow-travellers who helped the regime in myriad ways.

## WORKSHOP

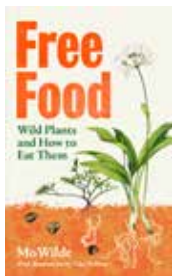
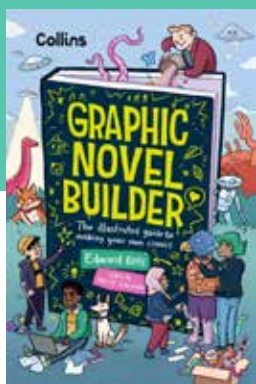
### Edward Ross

13:30-15:00 / £12, £10c  
Rothesay Room

Capture real life stories  
in comic book form.

Join comic creator Edward Ross for a graphic storytelling workshop and learn how to turn the raw materials of your life into a short comic or share your passion for other real-life stories and subjects in graphic form. The workshop will guide you through making your own illustrated non-fiction tale with narrative being more important than drawing ability. With comics and graphic novels growing in popularity there's never been a better time to explore this rich and interesting artform.

Ross's most recent publication *Graphic Novel Builder* is a comic book about making comic books!



### Mo Wilde

13:30 / £10, £8c

What if the food you need is all around you, waiting to be discovered?

Mo Wilde, forager and medical herbalist who lives in a self-built wooden house with an organic

teaching garden in West Lothian, will talk about her love of plants and medicinal species to be found in Scotland's natural larder.

In an era of rising food insecurity and climate crisis, foraging helps us reconnect with lost knowledge. In her talk on *Free Food: Wild Plants and How to Eat Them*, Mo will take you on a journey into the world of wild food, exploring the benefits of foraging and offering a deeper connection to the land and the food we eat.

Whether you live in a city or the countryside, an abundance of free food is at your doorstep. Not only is it sustainable, but it's also packed with nutrients and flavour beyond anything in supermarkets.



### Mure Dickie & Robert Lyman

13:30 / £10, £8c

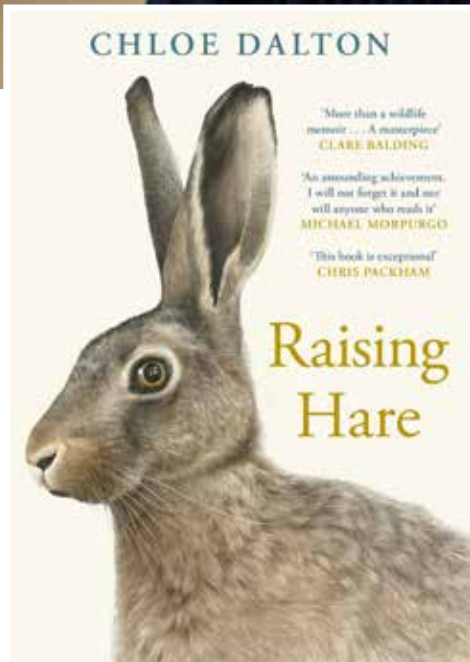
Examining Asia's geopolitics are Mure Dickie, the Financial Times' Asia correspondent and Robert Lyman, author of *Korea: War Without End*. They paint a picture of the nations and their leaders, past and present, including North Korean leader, Kim Jong Un and the impeachment

of the South Korean President, Yoon Suk Yeol.

At a time of acute international peril, the causes, outcomes and legacy of the Korean War, triggered by the West's refusal to appease an aggressor, have rarely been more pertinent.

Doubts about the stability of South Korea's democracy, and about the commitment of the US to the alliances that secure the country and neighbouring Japan, have implications far beyond the region. Any crisis between them and the axis of autocracy of Russia, China and North Korea, would send shockwaves throughout the world.

**The enduring impact of the Korean War on Asia's geopolitics today**



## Chloe Dalton

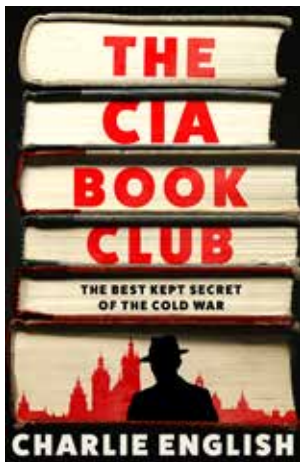
14:00 / £12, £10c

Imagine you could hold a baby hare and bottle-feed it. Imagine that it lived under your roof and drummed on the duvet cover when it wanted your attention – and that two years later, it still returned to your house for hours on end. This happened to me.

When lockdown led busy professional Chloe to leave the city and return to the countryside of her childhood, she never expected to find herself custodian of a newly born hare. Yet when she finds the creature, endangered, alone and no bigger than her palm, she is compelled to give it a chance at survival whilst determined to let it return to the natural world. Making no attempt to domesticate it she learned to adapt her own life, creating an environment where human and wild animal could exist side by side. Her best-selling *Raising Hare*, a story that has captured the imagination of thousands, is a life-affirming observation of a mystical creature.

**The instant Sunday Times  
Best Seller**





## Charlie English

15:15 / £10, £8c

*The CIA Book Club* tells the true story, for the first time, of George Minden, the head of a covert intelligence operation known as the 'CIA books programme', which aimed to win the Cold War with literature as it infiltrated over 10 million banned titles into the Eastern Bloc. The chosen books were by a vast and eclectic list of authors, including Hannah Arendt, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, George Orwell and Agatha Christie. Once inside the Soviet bloc, each book would circulate secretly among dozens of like-minded readers, quietly turning them into dissidents. With no physical combat, the conflict would be a battle for hearts, minds and intellects.

Former Guardian journalist Charlie English highlights the work of a handful of extraordinary people, such as an underground Polish publisher who endured beatings, force-feeding and exile in service of this mission in which books were smuggled on trucks, aboard yachts, dropped from balloons, and hidden in the luggage of hundreds of thousands of individual travellers.



Image: Nicola Hippisley

## Rebecca Achieng Ajulu-Bushell

15:15 / £10, £8c

Rebecca Achieng Ajulu-Bushell was once a double British Champion and the first Black woman ever to swim for Great Britain. Ex-elite athlete Ajulu-Bushell explains why, in the run up to the 2012 London Olympics, she walked away from it all at the age of 17 after reaching such heights in her career and despite her singular love of the water.

She reveals the true cost of excellence in sport.

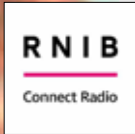
Her memoir *These Heavy Black Bones* lays bare the pressures within the swimming world as she reflects on what she gave up; missing the ecstasy of peak physical performance achieved as her body and mind were sharpened through gruelling training, but with no regrets about escaping the press scrutiny, bullying and separation from normality endured during the harshness of adolescence.

Since then, she has graduated from Oxford and recently became CEO of the 10,000 Interns Foundation that champions under-represented talent in Britain.

Image: Karis Beaumont



**British  
champion  
who walked  
away from the  
Olympics**



## KEYNOTE ADDRESS



### Andrew O'Hagan

15:30 / £10, £8c

From Ayrshire's very own Andrew O'Hagan, the author of *Mayflies*, comes the new paperback publication of an

irresistible, unputdownable, state-of-the-nation novel - the story of one man's epic fall from grace.

*Caledonian Road* has been lauded by critics and readers alike as worthy of Dickens, Thackeray or Zola for its vast narrative sweep and sparkling satire and style. O'Hagan's brilliant storytelling encompasses decadent aristocrats, Russian oligarchs, human traffickers and at its heart is the rise and fall of the on-trend, liberal academic, Campbell Flynn, pursued by his ruthless protégé.

In *Mayflies* and *Caledonian Road*, as well as in essays for the *London Review of Books* and the *New Yorker*, O'Hagan has forged a Scottish style of comedy and moral enquiry that has garnered him an international audience.

For this special keynote event at the Boswell Book Festival, O'Hagan will entertain us with a sparkling address 'On Humour'. "Comedy is the beating heart of everything I write," he says, "and the heart of the Scotland I grew up in." Using his own work and the great traditions of homegrown satire, from Burns to Billy Connolly, the comedians of Scottish home life, O'Hagan sets out on a personal journey to prove that performance is the cornerstone of his own writing and our national literature.

Event sponsored by RNIB Connect Radio

## Claire Mitchell KC & Zoe Venditozzi

17:00 / £10, £8c

As a woman, if you lived in Scotland in the 1500s, there was a very good chance that you, or someone you knew, would be tried as a witch. Witch hunts ripped through the country for over 150 years, with at least 4,000 accused, and with many women's fates sealed by a grizzly execution of strangulation, followed by burning in this legally sanctioned victimisation.

With testimony from a small army of experts, pen portraits of the women accused, trial transcripts, witness accounts and legal documents, *How to Kill A Witch* forms a rich and moving patchwork of tragic stories, revealing exactly why the Patriarchy went to such extraordinary lengths to silence women. Helping us comprehend the underlying reasons for this terrible injustice, Claire Mitchell, KC, and writer Zoe Venditozzi have delved deeply into just why the trials exploded in Scotland to such a degree and raise the serious question - could it ever happen again?



**There were no witches burned in Scotland - only women!**

Creators of the Witches of Scotland campaign call for a public apology for witches

## WORKSHOP

### Janet Smyth

16:45-18:00 / £12, £10c  
Rothesay Room

#### Yoga and Journaling

Enjoy a 75-minute Yoga and Journaling Workshop combining gentle movement with mindful writing. Through guided breathing, gentle poses, and reflective journaling prompts, you'll explore the mind-body connection while releasing tension and accessing deeper self-awareness.



This supportive space encourages grounding, self-discovery, and balance.

No prior experience needed, just bring a yoga mat, notebook and pen.



### John Vaillant online & Cal Flynn on stage

17:00 / £7, £5c

For hundreds of millennia, fire has been a partner in our evolution, shaping culture and civilization. Yet in our age of intensifying climate change, we are seeing its destructive power unleashed in ways never before witnessed by human beings, with wildfires raging in many parts of the world.

Winner of the Baillie Gifford Prize, John Vaillant, and Scottish author and journalist Cal Flynn, together explore our rapidly changing relationship with fire. In our ever-hotter, more flammable world, in which regions historically less affected by such disasters are now on the front lines of this growing environmental crisis, most recently in California, they reflect on what needs to be done to tackle the climate emergency.

Drawing on his international bestselling book *Fire Weather*, the story of the brutal urban wildfire of Fort McMurray that turned entire neighbourhoods into firebombs and drove 90,000 people from their homes in a single afternoon, Vaillant delves into the lives irrevocably altered by these disasters.

Image: John Sinal

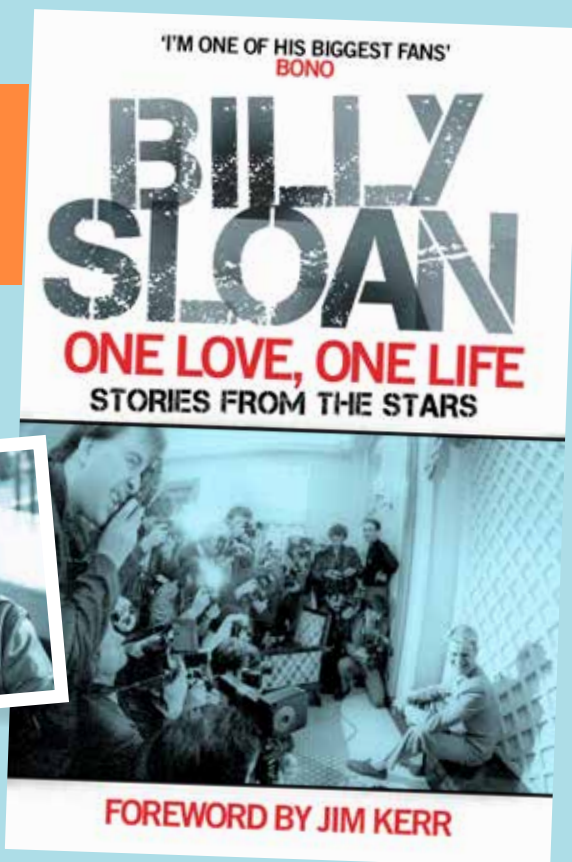


Image: Nancy Macdonald



**We are seeing the destructive power of fire  
unleashed in ways never before witnessed by  
human beings - most recently in California**

Brilliantly  
entertaining and  
searingly honest



## Billy Sloan

17:00 / £10, £8c

When legendary music journalist Billy Sloan was 15 he saw The Who play an incendiary live show at Green's Playhouse in Glasgow. It was the beginning of a lifelong love affair with music. Just a few years later he was backstage interviewing the likes of Keith Richards and David Bowie, at the height of Ziggy-mania.

In *One Love, One Life*, Billy tells his stories of the stars, from skipping Christmas dinner to see the notorious Sex Pistols to adventures with some of music's biggest names. There's Grace Jones in the bath, candid conversations with Rod Stewart, football in Brazil with Simple Minds, a tour of the White House with Paolo Nutini and close encounters with U2. Plus, the interviews that definitely didn't go as planned.

Brilliantly entertaining and searingly honest, *One Love, One Life* is an incredible insight into the stars we love and an unmissable backstage pass for music fans everywhere.

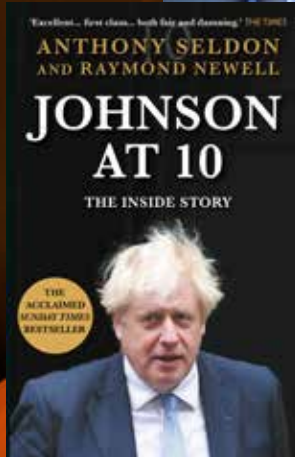
# Sir Anthony Seldon

18:30 / £12, £10c

Sir Anthony Seldon, educationalist, political commentator and honorary historian of Number 10, has updated his magisterial survey *The Impossible Office? The History of the British Prime Minister* to include Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak.

He discusses which of our prime ministers have been most effective and why, exploring their lives and careers, crises and scandals, successes and failures, as well as probing the changing relationship between the Monarchy and the Prime Minister in intimate detail. Why has the role endured longer than any other democratic political office in world history? And who have been the best and worst?

The book is a celebration of the humanity, frailty, work and achievements of 57 remarkable individuals who have averted revolution and civil war, leading the country through times of peace, crisis and war.



Event sponsored by  
the Hillhouse Group



# Boswell Schools' Day

The Boswell Book Festival programme for Ayrshire schools is staged by the Boswell Trust in support of their charitable aim to advance heritage, literary arts and education and is free for schools to attend.

As the world's only book festival dedicated to memoir and biography, the events for children are designed to introduce ideas of discovering - past and present - the lives of change makers and influencers. Also, importantly, the events introduce the idea of how to tell our own stories and the importance of learning to do this in a way that acknowledges experiences and builds resilience and in advance of the festival this year an Outreach programme takes place in local primary schools connecting these communities directly to the festival.

Each year we welcome over 400 schoolchildren to Dumfries House on the opening day of the festival.

## PROGRAMME FOR SCHOOLS' DAY FRIDAY 9 MAY 2025 BY INVITATION

### • Writing Your World: From Real Life to Fiction with Martin Stewart

Transform your understanding of creative writing with author Martin Stewart in this engaging session that bridges real life and fiction. You'll discover how everyday experiences can bloom into compelling stories. Hear about Martin's journey to becoming a writer, see how life events shape unforgettable characters, and learn how the smallest idea can grow into a great story. With top tips on how to nurture your own story seeds into fully-grown adventures, this event will demystify the creative process and empower young writers!



### • Dumfries House Tour

Pupils are invited to join a fun tour through the fabulous rooms of this great house built by Scottish architect brothers John and Robert Adam for Ayrshireman, the Earl of Dumfries, hearing tales of the children who once lived there, as well as stories of a particularly smelly ghost.

### • Workshop: Grow Your Own Story

With a guest appearance from James Boswell himself, pupils will discover how real-life moments can spark amazing stories using the "What If?" technique as they learn how to develop unique characters, explore exciting twists, and craft their own narratives in this Story Seed workshop.

**Don't forget the Children's Festival taking place 10/11 May.**

**Details at [www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk)**

# Boswell Children's Festival

**Saturday 10 May**

**ENGINEERING CENTRE  
& OUTDOOR CLASSROOM**  
[www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk)  
**0333 0035 077**

## What to Expect

**THE ENGINEERING CENTRE** is a large, enclosed room with seats. The speaker will be at the front talking about their books in a fun, interactive way with pictures or live drawing. Festival volunteers can let you in or out for comfort breaks.

**THE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM** is open on one side with a circle of stone benches. The performer will be in the centre. These activities are interactive and the audience will be invited to move around.

**Duration and age guidance is given for each event.**

**Children must be accompanied by an adult. Under 2s are free.**

**Tickets: Adults & Children £3  
Special price for KA18 Postcode £2**

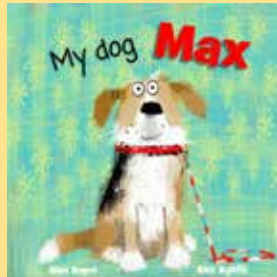
Astrid  
Jaekel

Vivian  
French

Supported by **Scottish  
Friendly**

## Springtime Stamps and Stories

**10:00-11:00 Engineering Centre £3/Age 5+**  
Join artist and illustrator Astrid Jaekel for a fun, hands-on workshop. You'll have the chance to create your very own concertina-style book filled with beautiful spring garden motifs made using handmade rubber stamps, experiment with colours and patterns, and bring the magic of spring to life on paper!



## My Dog Max with Alan Dapré

**11:30-12:15  
Engineering  
Centre £3/Age3+**  
Step into author  
Alan Dapré's

tail-wagging adventure with his heartwarming picture book *My Dog Max*. Follow along as he brings to life the story of a girl whose biggest wish is to have a furry friend of her own. With bouncy rhymes that will get everyone barking for more, Alan's interactive storytelling session is packed with props, giggles, and plenty of puppy-themed fun. Pup Pup Hooray!

## Tastes of the Town with Vivian French & Astrid Jaekel

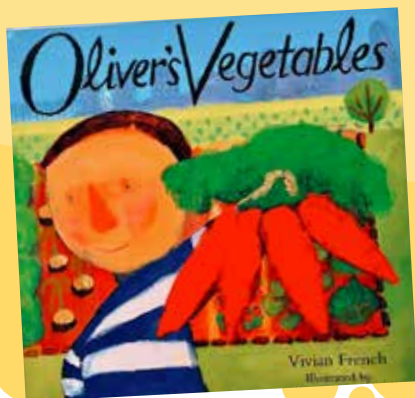
**12:45-13:45 Engineering Centre £3/Age 7+**  
Join author Vivian French and Illustrator-in-Residence, Astrid Jaekel to cook up a special recipe for your local area. What ingredients make your home special to you? Add a pinch of local stories, a sprinkle of favourite places, and a generous helping of friends to create beautiful words and pictures about the place you call home.



## Carrots, Spinach and Peas! Oh My! with Vivian French

14:00-14:45 Engineering Centre £3/Age 3+

Meet Oliver, who only eats chips - until he discovers a whole garden of delicious surprises with Vivian French author of *Oliver's Vegetables*. Join in with storytelling, song, and puppets as we follow Oliver's journey round the veg patch as he tries carrots, spinach, rhubarb, cabbage, beetroot, and peas! Will he ever find the potatoes for his beloved chips?



## True Tales of Dragons with Kate Leiper

15:15-16:00

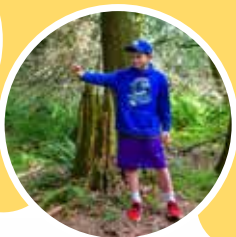
Engineering Centre  
£3/Age 7+

Step into the world of dragons with Kate Leiper, illustrator of *An*

*Illustrated Treasury of Dragon Tales*. Hear about some real-life dragons, test your knowledge in a fun quiz, bring a dragon to life in an exciting draw-along session and hear one of the book's thrilling tales. A fiery, fun-filled event for young dragon lovers and budding artists alike!



Allison  
Galbraith



## The Outdoor Classroom

### Woodland Walk & Tall Tales with Allison Galbraith

11:00-12:30 £3/5+yrs

Get ready for an adventure with storyteller and folklorist Allison Galbraith, exploring the gardens of Dumfries House, gathering twigs, leaves, feathers, and other natural treasures and listening to enchanting tales along the way. After the walk, you'll use your found materials to create a beautiful nature-inspired picture. **Dress for the weather.**



### Little Art School of Ayr

13:00-16:00 FREE

drop-in /4+yrs

Drop-in and meet the Little Art School, enjoy learning some top tips for creating your own pictures. There's only one rule: nobody is allowed to be highly critical of their work - no "Mine's Rubbish!!" uttered in here!

### Forest Bathing with Allison Galbraith

14:00-15.30 Meeting Point:  
Children's Festival Box Office  
£3 /8+yrs

Immerse your family in the art of Forest Bathing, known as shinrin yoku, the Japanese practice of mindfully connecting with nature. Together with storyteller and folklorist Allison Galbraith, you'll discover the gentle magic of being still among the trees, listening to their whispers, and breathing in the woodland air. A perfect way to slow down and reconnect as a family. **Dress for the weather.**

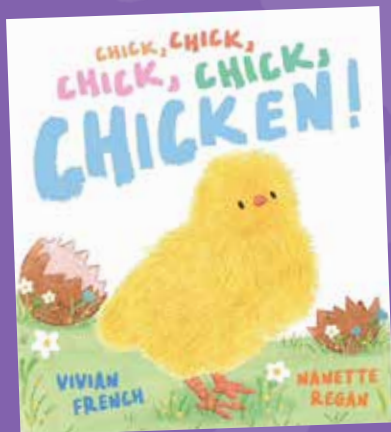
# Boswell Children's Festival

**Sunday 11 May**

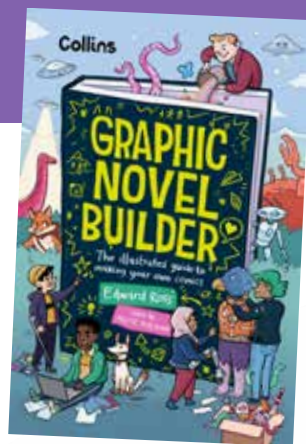
**ENGINEERING CENTRE  
& OUTDOOR CLASSROOM**  
[www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk)  
**0333 0035 077**

## A Clucking Great Time with Vivian French

10:15-11:00 Engineering Centre £3 / Age 5+  
Hop along to meet Vivian French as she introduces Julie, Bob, and Grandpa's charming flock of chickens in her new book *Chick, Chick, Chick, Chick, Chickens*. From fluffy Puffball Lulu to strutting Marvin the rooster, discover the wonderful world of these barnyard friends through stories and songs and join in with egg-citing fun facts as we wait for Lottie's special eggs to hatch.

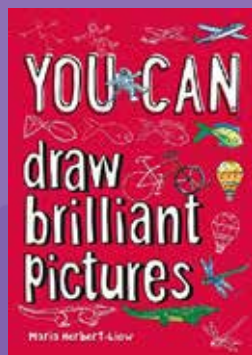


Supported by 



## Edward Ross: Comic Book Making

11:30-12:15 Engineering Centre £3 / Age 8+  
Get ready for a comic-filled adventure with Edward Ross, author of *Graphic Novel Builder*, a comic book about making comic books! In this hands-on workshop, you will dream up your own weird and wonderful characters, bringing them to life in your own comic book creation. Perfect for comic book fans and budding cartoonists.



## You CAN Draw Brilliant Pictures! with Maria Herbert- Liew

12:45-13:30  
Engineering Centre  
£3 / Age 5+  
Join artist Maria

Herbert-Liew, author of *You Can Draw Brilliant Pictures*, for a fun, playful, and inclusive art workshop! You'll explore drawing, colour, and collage to create a self-portrait and a special memory. Bring your imagination, your memories and be ready to create brilliant works of art.

## Haggis Hunting with Linda Strachan

**14:00-14:45 Engineering Centre £3 / Age 4+**  
Step into the world of Hamish McHaggis and discover fascinating facts about haggises, meet Hamish's animal friends, and explore his cozy Hoggie home. Learn about the McHaggis clan gathering and the mini beasts hidden in each book. Plus, don't miss a special visit from Hamish himself - the perfect event for young adventurers and those who believe in Haggis.



## Stories in Colour: Art-Making with Maria Herbert-Liew

**15:15-16:15 Engineering Centre £3 / Age 8+**  
Discover the power of sharing your story through art with artist Maria Herbert-Liew. Together, you'll explore different art materials and learn how to use them to bring your experiences to life. Come and create, share stories with new friends and add your unique voice to our collective artistic adventure.

Allison  
Galbraith



## The Outdoor Classroom

### Forest Bathing with Allison Galbraith

**11:00-12.30 Meeting Point:  
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£3 /8+yrs**

Immerse your family in the art of Forest Bathing, known as shinrin yoku, the Japanese practice of mindfully connecting with nature. Together with storyteller and folklorist Allison Galbraith, you'll discover the gentle magic of being still among the trees, listening to their whispers, and breathing in the woodland air. A perfect way to slow down and reconnect as a family. **Dress for the weather.**

### Drawing on Landscapes with Kate Leiper

**11:15-12:15 Meeting Point:  
Outdoor Classroom £3 /8+yrs**

Illustrator Kate Leiper will lead a wonderfully wild drawing adventure. Using twigs, feathers, grasses, and other found materials, you will create unique landscape artworks, inspired by the surroundings of Dumfries House. Explore new ways to sketch, smudge, and shape nature onto the page. **Dress for the weather**

### Woodland Walk & Tall Tales with Allison Galbraith

**14:00-15.30 Meeting Point:  
Outdoor Classroom  
£3 /5+yrs**

Get ready for an adventure with storyteller and folklorist Allison Galbraith, Exploring the gardens of Dumfries House, gathering twigs, leaves, feathers, and other natural treasures and listening to enchanting tales along the way. After the walk, you'll use your found materials to create a beautiful nature-inspired picture. **Dress for the weather.**

One of the most  
innovative writers of  
the Enlightenment  
and Inventor of  
Modern Biography

# James Boswell

1740-1795



James Boswell sprang from an ancient Ayrshire family, which had been settled at Auchinleck since the sixteenth century. He was born in Edinburgh in 1740 where his father, who became Lord Auchinleck, was a Judge in the Supreme Court of Scotland. His mother was descended from a minor branch of Scottish royalty.

He was educated at Edinburgh University followed by Glasgow University, where he attended the lectures of the great Enlightenment philosopher, Adam Smith. From the start, Bozzy as he was affectionately known, was drawn to the pleasure-loving side of life. His first visit to London at the age of 19 began a love affair with the city which never wavered. His charm, sensitivity and intelligence opened doors to the most brilliant men of the day, but the ultimate prize for Boswell was his friendship with the towering figure of Dr Samuel Johnson – compiler of the definitive dictionary of the English language and celebrated man of letters. Boswell's friendship led him to become Johnson's biographer and the account of his life, published 220 years ago this May, has never been out of print. His *Life of Johnson* established him as the inventor of modern biography and has upheld his reputation as one of the most innovative writers of the Enlightenment.

Boswell was also author of a pioneering travel book *An Account of Corsica* and his famous *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, which described an expedition made to the Western Isles with Dr Johnson. At the end of their journey, they stayed at Auchinleck where Johnson famously crossed swords with Boswell's father.

Boswell's fame redoubled in the twentieth century with the discovery and publication of his diaries, setting him alongside Pepys as one of the greatest diarists in the English language. Boswell ushered in the confessional memoir, which is so popular today. Nothing was omitted – including his innumerable sexual encounters, his battle with depression, his difficult relationship with his father, his frustrated political ambition and his life as a lawyer in the Scottish courts.

Boswell was an Ayrshireman through and through. He married his cousin, Margaret Montgomerie, with whom he had five children, and became Laird of Auchinleck on the death of his father in 1782 and devoted much time and money to the care of the Estate. He died in 1795 and was interred in the Boswell Mausoleum in Auchinleck churchyard.



### LUXURY OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATION

Offering luxury guest rooms as well as self-catering accommodation, Dumfries House Lodge which was recently awarded a prestigious Michelin Key, is the perfect location for a relaxing break.

### WEDDINGS & PRIVATE EVENTS

There can be no more memorable place for a special event than Dumfries House. Offering bespoke packages for 15 to 200 guests, set in the stunning rooms within the House and wider estate. Contact our team to arrange a visit and find out more. We cater for all occasions.



### VISITOR CENTRE, CAFÉ & SHOP

The shop has a wide selection on offer, with prices to suit every pocket, from our locally produced jams to traditional handmade walking crook. Our visitor centre and Coach House Café are ideal first ports of call on your visit to Dumfries House.

### GUIDED TOURS OF THE HOUSE

We offer a wide range of tours, allowing visitors to explore one of Britain's most beautiful stately homes. We also offer speciality tours which focus on particular areas of our collection, including a Fine Art Tour, Clock Tour and Chippendale Tour.



For information, visit [dumfries-house.org.uk](http://dumfries-house.org.uk)  
Cumnock, East Ayrshire, KA18 2NJ



THE  
KING'S  
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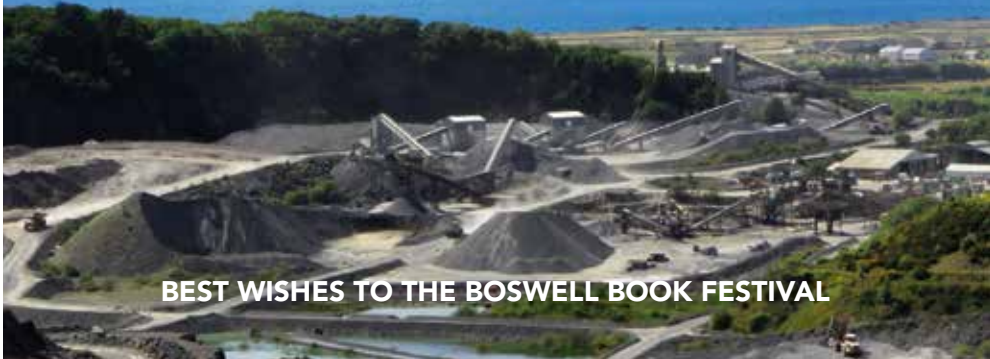


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**BEST WISHES TO THE BOSWELL BOOK FESTIVAL**



*"The Cumnock Tryst is a remarkable venture, an outstanding series of concerts..."*

\*\*\*\*\* *The Observer*

## 2025 Festival

Thursday 2 October - Sunday 5 October

World-class music in the heart of East Ayrshire, featuring performances by top classical, jazz and Scottish traditional artists.

## Launch Concert

**The Sixteen**  
Harry Christophers conductor

Saturday 24 May 2025, 7:30pm  
St John's Church, Cumnock

Experience the celestial harmonies of *Voice of Angels*, as world-renowned vocal ensemble The Sixteen presents a radiant programme of angelic choral music. Enjoy an evening of divine inspiration, featuring new works by Lucy Walker, Millicent B. James and Ninfea Cruttwell-Read, alongside Renaissance masterpieces and *Nothing in Vain* by James MacMillan, as we announce the 2025 programme.

For full details and to book tickets, please visit  
[www.thecumnocktryst.com](http://www.thecumnocktryst.com)



*Wigtown Book Festival*  
**WIGTOWN BOOK FESTIVAL**  
26 SEPTEMBER - 5 OCTOBER 2025

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# Scottish Friendly is proud to sponsor the Boswell Children's Festival

We are delighted to be a supporter of  
the Boswell Book Festival

9-11 May, 2025, Dumfries House



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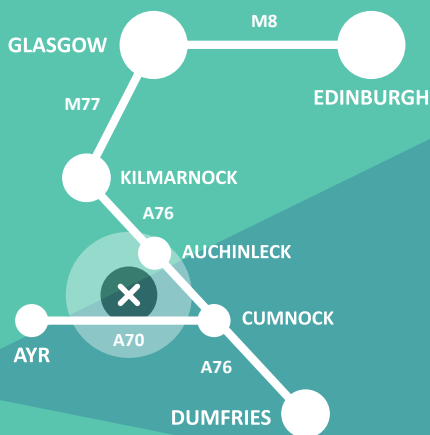
Details can be found on the Financial Services Register - Registration No. 110002. Member of ABI and AFM.

# HOW TO FIND US

FOLLOW THE SIGNS TO DUMFRIES HOUSE

## Dumfries House, Cumnock, Ayrshire KA18 2NJ

Directions on: [www.dumfries-house.org.uk](http://www.dumfries-house.org.uk)



### By Air:

Glasgow International Airport is 50 minutes away.

### By Car:

Access to Dumfries House is from the A70 Ayr-Cumnock or Cumnock-Ayr direction. There are two entrances – one clearly marked ‘cars only’ and the other ‘coaches only’.

### By Train:

The nearest train station is Auchinleck which connects to many lines in the region. The train from Glasgow Central calls at Barrhead, Dunlop, Stewarton, Kilmaurs, Kilmarnock, and Auchinleck. From Carlisle the train calls at Gretna Green, Annan, Dumfries, Sanquhar, Kirkcubright, New Cumnock and Auchinleck. Book a taxi in advance to pick you up from Auchinleck Station.

### Approximate journey times from:

Glasgow	50 mins
Edinburgh	2 hours
Dumfries	1 hour 10 mins
Stranraer	1 hour 30 mins
Carlisle	1 hour 30 mins

# BOX OFFICE

## Online Tickets

[www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk)

## By Telephone

**Tel: 0333 0035 077** (until 18:00 Friday 9 May)

Lines open: Mon - Sat, 09:00 - 18:00 (until 18:00

Friday 9 May then use Festival numbers below)

Most major credit and debit cards accepted – no cheques.

## Tickets also on sale at Waterstones, High Street, Ayr

(open Mon - Sat 09:00 - 17:30 / Sun 13:00 - 17:00)

Until Thurs 8 May 17:30

## Main Festival Weekend Box Office

Tickets by Phone 07530 380 021 (10/11 May ONLY)

Lines open: Sat 10 / Sun 11 May: 09:00-18:00

Tickets On-Site Dumfries House from 16:30 Fri 9 May

Fri 9 May 16:30-19:30

Sat 10 May 10:00-20:00

Sun 11 May 10:00-20:00

## Children's Festival Weekend Box Office

**Tickets by Phone 07555 924 377** (10/11 May ONLY)

Lines open: Sat 11 - Sun 12 May / 9:45 - 15:00

**Tickets On-Site Engineering Centre** (from Sat 10 May ONLY)

Sat 10 May 09:30-16:00

Sun 11 May 09:30-15:00

**Tickets:** Tickets must be paid for at the time of booking and are non-refundable. Tickets for The Boswell Book Festival are limited and may therefore not be available for purchase at the door on the day of performance. Where the postal option has been selected tickets will be sent 14 days before the event. There will be a handling charge added.

**Concessions:** Available to students, registered disabled (plus one carer), registered unemployed, under 16s and Young Scot cardholders. Proof of entitlement will be required.

**Events:** Events are one hour long unless specified. All seating is unreserved.

**Visitors with additional needs:** The marquee venues have wheelchair access. Seats on the front row or by the central aisle can be reserved for ticket holders with disabilities, subject to availability. To arrange, please phone the Box Office in advance.

**Latecomers:** Events start punctually. Members of the audience may not be admitted after the beginning of events.

**Programme details** are correct at the time of going to press. The Boswell Book Festival reserves the right to alter or cancel events. Please check the Festival website [www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.boswellbookfestival.co.uk), Facebook or X (Twitter) for the latest news, special events and information. Remember your umbrella in case of rain!