



BRADFORD
LITERATURE
FESTIVAL

IN-DEPTH REVIEW 2022

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2023 Festival Dates
23 June-2 July



CONTENTS

Director's Welcome.....	2-3
Facts & Figures.....	4-5
Returning to an In-Person Festival.....	6-7
The Inaugural Creative Economic Conference.....	10-11
The Legacy of the Free Word Centre.....	12-13
Little Amal's Visit to Bradford.....	14
Programme Highlights.....	15-17
Early Years, Education and Family Programmes.....	18-19
Our Unique Approach – The BLF Way.....	20-21
Communities.....	22
Supporting the Local Economy.....	23
Launching Three Major Year-Round Programmes.....	24-25
Case Study: Fox & Windmill.....	28
Bradford 2025 - BLF Celebrates UK City of Culture Win.....	31
With Thanks to Our Sponsors and Funders.....	32
Board Members and Team.....	33

BRADFORD LITERATURE FESTIVAL

Director's Welcome



Syima Aslam MBE
CEO & Artistic Director

It was a delight to welcome our wonderful audiences, artists and stakeholders back to the first fully live in-person Bradford Literature Festival since 2019.

Our 10-day literary and cultural celebration attracted 56,338 visitors, an 81% return on pre-Covid audiences, bucking the industry trend of a 60-70% return, and was heralded as the “Glastonbury of literature festivals”. In just eight years, BLF has established itself as one of the largest literature festivals in the UK and the industry leader for championing socio-economic and ethnic diversity of audiences and artists alike.

BLF was set up with a specified aim of creating a cultural renaissance to support the economic regeneration of Bradford. Eight years later I am proud to say we have more than played our part in the revitalisation of the local culture sector and the place making agenda for the city, creating a profile for the city regionally, nationally and internationally. This is reflected in our audience demographics with a third of our audience travelling from the region, a fifth nationally as well as attracting visitors from around the world. Indeed, one of our volunteers travelled from Los Angeles to be a part of the team, and there are families who plan their visits to the UK around BLF festival dates. This tells us our desire to host a truly inclusive, global, industry-leading festival is succeeding, and this year's programme was our most ambitious yet.

In our last public evaluation in 2019, I wrote that Bradford was launching its bid to become the UK 2025 City of Culture - and in May 2022, we won. It is a matter of immense pride for BLF to have been cited as one of the key reasons for the city winning the title of City of Culture and we look forward to playing our part in making Bradford 2025 a fantastic year of celebration.

This year we came back with a bang, featuring 484 live events – entertaining, educating and inspiring our wonderful audiences in Bradford's beautiful, historic venues. With each successive year we build upon BLF's world-class programme. It is wide-ranging, it can be challenging, at times provocative and we don't shy away from the difficult conversations. Instead we break down barriers through creating a greater understanding of our shared narratives and differing perspectives.

This year, BLF invited a stellar line-up of guest speakers including Ben Okri, Lemn Sissay, Joelle Taylor, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, Robert Peston, Joanne Harris, Jennie Bond, William Dalrymple, Amina Wadud, Dom Joly, Reverend Richard Coles, Sabrina Mahfouz, and Alastair Campbell.

Embracing Bradford's uniquely creative and entrepreneurial spirit, we launched the inaugural Creative Economic Conference. The conference focused on the crucial importance of the creative industries to the UK economy, placing the culture sector at the heart of levelling up in the North through economic and social regeneration. As the festival prepared to open its doors, we welcomed national leaders from the creative industries and the business world to provide key insights into these topics and share best practice.

Our Festival Hub rose again this summer in City Park, opened by none other than Little Amal. Venues across the district hosted a varied programme which flowed from celebrations of local legends the Brontës and David Hockney, to talks about race, identity and gender politics, as well as debates about history and world affairs, spoken-word poetry, and a cacophony of music from all corners and cultures of the world. There were workshops on unconscious bias, fiction writing and feminism, as well as cocktail making masterclasses, baby raves and opera. And the return of Bradford Comico, the city's only dedicated comics and manga weekend.

Our expansive Education Programme engages and inspires thousands of children aged 0-18 with an exciting programme of talks, theatre, storytelling, poetry, craft workshops, and Q&As, built on our own brand of 'learning by stealth'.

At its core, the BLF programme seeks to reflect the interests and concerns of the communities we serve, while reminding us that we are part of a much wider, interconnected global society. From the outset, BLF has been inherently 'of' and 'for' the city in which we belong. Bradford with its diversity, young population and entrepreneurial spirit is a bellwether for the nation's future and the conversations that take place in this city are of national and international relevance.

It would be disingenuous to pretend that Bradford is a city without challenges, it has some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country with around a third of children living in poverty and it has historically low levels of engagement with the arts. Consequently, BLF prides itself on being a festival that is open to people from all backgrounds.

This year, 69% of all festival tickets were issued for free to individuals and families from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This is certainly not 'the norm' for literature festivals, but an integral part of our ethos and engagement with this segment of our audience is one of the core reasons for BLF's existence. The arts should not be thought of as a luxury. Culture, and the shared experience it offers, is the difference between surviving and thriving.

From the outset, BLF's overarching mission to support the socioeconomic regeneration of Bradford through

the creation of an international festival was unashamedly ambitious, but the support we have received from our partners, local, national and international, visitors from around the country and our local communities, tells me this ambition was not misplaced. Art and culture can inspire people both young and old, it encourages social mobility and brings communities together. I am so proud that we have succeeded in creating a festival where a representative and diverse roster of artists and audiences feel safe and welcome.

We are so grateful for all the support we receive, particularly from our incredible audiences, funders and sponsors who empower us to continue forging this fascinating path, curating the conversations which others don't. I am sincerely grateful to every person who has attended, performed at, or championed our festival. It's an honour that you share our belief in BLF.

And whilst we take this moment to celebrate our successes, we will not rest on our laurels nor take what has been achieved so far for granted. There is still a long way to go, and no doubt challenges lie ahead. That said, I believe this festival has never been more relevant or important and I marvel at how far we have come in such a short space of time. Having just begun a story featuring the most wonderful cast of characters, in the most inspirational setting, I am so excited to find out what the next chapters hold.

"There was a lovely buzz about the festival. Everywhere I went I heard people enthusing about what the festival meant to them. You have done something very special."

Ben Okri, author and poet



FACTS & FIGURES

Total Events
484



Total Audience
56,338

53% Local
24% Regional
22% National
1% International



48%
BAME Audiences

59%
Below Average
Household Income



70%
FREE or discounted
tickets

96%
Rated BLF Very
Good/Good



19%
Audience Under 16

RETURNING TO AN IN-PERSON FESTIVAL

It's good to see you again

The last time BLF was live and 'in-person' was in 2019. The fact that the 484 events at this year's festival could be staged face-to-face was, therefore, a huge cause for celebration.

From the outset BLF was set up to create events that bring different communities together in shared, safe spaces and it has succeeded, becoming one of the most diverse festivals in the country. The festival's ethos is grounded in diversity and inclusion, both in terms of its guest speakers and panellists and its audiences.

"Look at Bradford bringing in the global audiences - this is Global Britain right here"

Sabrina Mahfouz, author

BLF is the biggest date in the city's cultural calendar attracting people from all walks of life to Bradford. So having this curtailed by the pandemic was a big challenge. 2019 attendance figures reached 70,000. In 2022, we achieved attendance of 56,338, which bucks the trend of festivals currently reporting 60-70% of their pre-Covid attendance, with a return rate of 81%.

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Each year the festival focuses on its annual strands; Brontë Heritage, Poetry, World Affairs and Politics, Gender Politics, Food, Sport and Faith and Ethics. We also select several anniversaries and themes to explore across the festival's programme, and this year the many and varied strands included David Hockney, Discovery of the Valley of the Kings, In Memory of Andalusia, the 75th Anniversary of Partition, the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, Neurodiversity, Anne Frank and JRR Tolkien.

Our stages welcomed Dom Joly, Giles Deacon, Jennie Bond, Lemn Sissay, John Barnes, AC Grayling, Ben Okri, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, Alastair Campbell, Ed Balls, and Keith Brymer Jones amongst a cast of hundreds of talented writers and artists.

Once again City Park was the home of BLF's annual Literature Unlocked: Family Fun Days, featuring free themed performances, craft workshops and storytelling sessions, across the two weekends of the festival. The themed days this year were Superhero Spectacular, Fantastical Fairy Tales, Myths, Mummies and Monsters



and Magical Mayhem. Partnership events included collaborations with the Royal Literary Fund flagship programme Writers Mosaic, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Bank of England, Opera North, Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, the Brontë Society, New Writing North, English PEN, Critical Muslim, Bradford Mechanics Institute, the JB Priestley Society, Yorkshire Adabee Forum, and UKPHA.

The various lockdowns during the pandemic prevented people from participating in shared experiences and reminded us of why these moments are the exclamation points which punctuate our day to day lives, so important not only for our enjoyment and stimulation, but also our mental wellbeing.

Sitting in an audience whether it is for a poetry reading, a debate on feminism, or a talk about crime fiction, is a unique experience. There is nothing quite like the buzz you get from a packed audience, or the conversations with strangers over a coffee in the Festival Hub, which is why it was so wonderful to fully welcome people back at this year's festival.

"Thank you for such a wide range of events and topics covered: from speakers on politics to theatre performances to music and events for children. I'm very grateful and it was a highlight of my cultural life this year."

Festival attendee

"I had a wonderful time in Bradford, and it has left me feeling so alive, refreshed, and inspired after the long hibernation of lockdown and its attendant effects on our capacity to mix, meet people and have all the stimulation of shared events. So, thank you again for involving me, and I very much hope you'll remember me for future years."

Tina Beattie, author



Lemn Sissay in Conversation with Alex Wheatle



Joelle Taylor in Conversation with Malika Booker



William Dalrymple: The Company Quartet



Rev. Richard Coles in Conversation with Rev. Kate Bottley

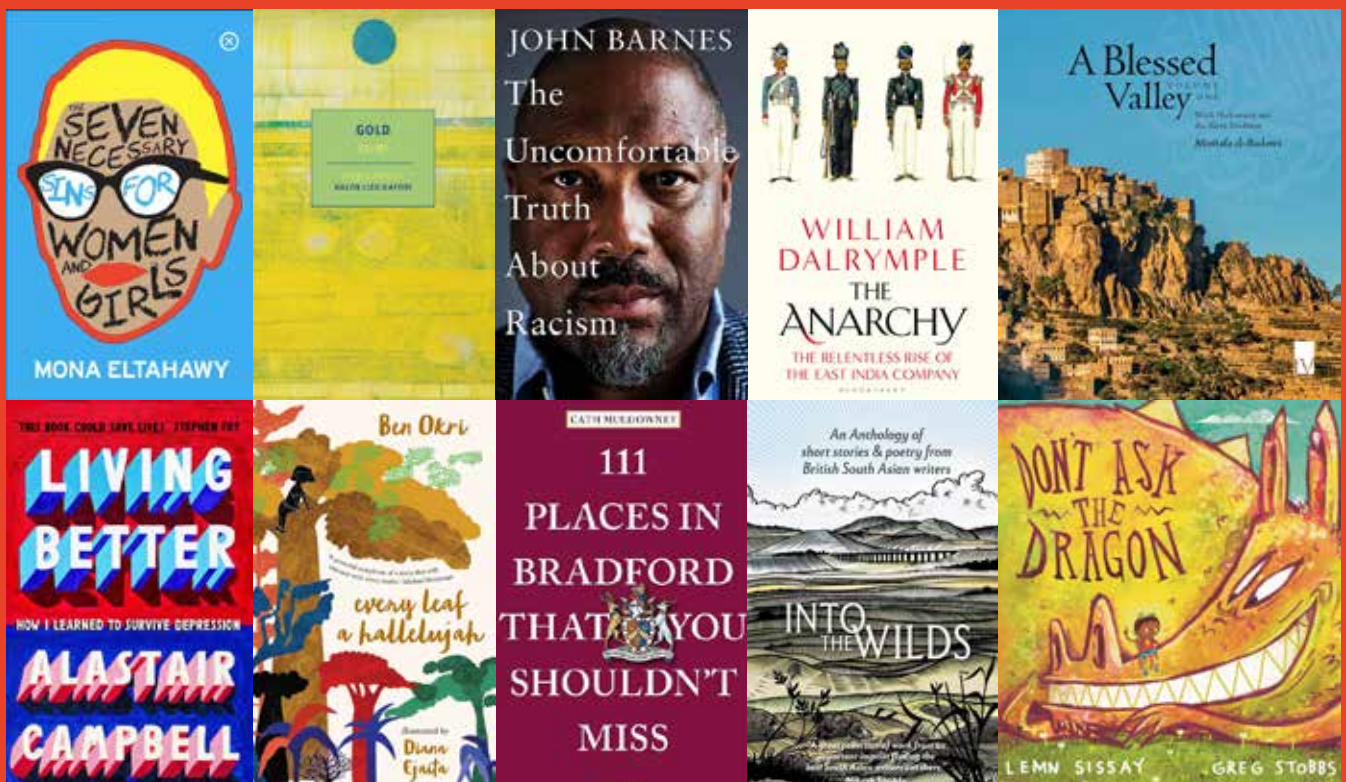
FESTIVAL TOP TEN EVENTS

- 1 **Exemplars For Our Time** | Peter Sanders, Michael Sugich, Dr Karim Lahham, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, Remona Aly
- 2 **Sufiyana Kalaam** | The Orchestral Qawwali Project
- 3 **The Ghazali Children's Project by Fons Vitae** | Mustafa Gouverneur, Adeeba Ahmed, Mohammed Isaaq
- 4 **An Evening of Comedy** | Richard Blackwood, Kane Brown, Kate Lucas and Tez Ilyas
- 5 **Kahani: A Journey Through Punjabi Folk Songs** | A BLF Special Commission featuring Shabnam Khan
- 6 **A Blessed Valley** | Shaykh Yahya Rhodus
- 7 **The Railway Children Return** | Special Advanced Preview Film Screening
- 8 **Sacred Music** | Sriranjini Simha, Freylach Band, Eeshar Singh, Ismail Hussain, Bishop Nick Baines, Christella Litras Sextet
- 9 **Alastair Campbell in Conversation** | Alastair Campbell and Sir Richard Lambert
- 10 **Shikwa Jawab-e Shikwa** | Saeed Khan, Ustad Razaqat Ali Khan



FESTIVAL TOP TEN BOOKS

- 1 A Blessed Valley | Mostafa al-Badawi
- 2 The Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls | Mona Eltahawy
- 3 Into the Wilds: An Anthology of short stories and poetry from British South Asian writers | Fox & Windmill
- 4 Gold Rumi | Haleh Liza Gafari
- 5 The Uncomfortable Truth About Racism | John Barnes
- 6 111 Places in Bradford That You Shouldn't Miss - 111 Places/Shops | Cath Muldowney
- 7 The Anarchy | William Dalrymple
- 8 Don't Ask the Dragon | Lemn Sissay & Greg Stobbs
- 9 Living Better: How I Learned to Survive Depression | Alastair Campbell
- 10 Every Leaf a Hallelujah | Ben Okri



THE INAUGURAL CREATIVE ECONOMIC CONFERENCE

Programme Overview

BLF's inaugural Creative Economic Conference (CEC) was born out of a belief that the cultural sector can spearhead the economic and social regeneration of the North. Hosted at the University of Bradford, the event brought together national and regional leaders from across the economic and creative sectors to tackle 'levelling up' and create greater urgency around regeneration.

Designed as a strategic leadership intervention, our day-long conference broke down historic silos and created debate amongst business leaders, creative organisations and cultural leaders on the most urgent challenges facing the creative industries today.

The conference created a platform that enabled a broad group of strategists and influential figures in their respective fields to learn from one another and combine their vast skills and knowledge.

This year's event featured panel discussions on a wide range of key topics including Levelling Up in the North, the Future of TV, Digital Poverty, Universal Basic Income, and Art and Activism. We welcomed a number of prominent figures including Henri Murrison, Director of The Northern Powerhouse Partnership, Sir Peter Hendy, Chairman of Network Rail, and Caroline Cooper Charles, Chief Executive, Screen Yorkshire.

The keynote conference speakers included Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin, Sir Peter Bazalgette, co-chair of the Creative Industries Council, Andy Haldane, CEO of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and former Chief Economist at the Bank of England, who delivered the inaugural BLF Cultural Sector Lecture, exploring the crucial role arts and culture play in social regeneration, and what the future of work may look like. BLF believes that culture is crucial to the economic regrowth of our region.

Our panellists shared their vision for a culture-led Northern recovery, highlighting the opportunities and challenges present in the region, as well as exploring how new approaches and changes to national and regional policymaking can make this vision a reality.

The conference also provided space for early career arts practitioners and the general public to access an industry-leading conference for free or at significantly reduced prices, empowering them to be included in the conversations which reflect and impact their careers and day-to-day lives.

Bringing people together at different levels of expertise and from different walks of life is integral to BLF's ethos. The festival was set up to create events which bring different groups together and be the platform from which to explore something new.

Tracy Brabin



Shanaz Gulzar



**CREATIVE
ECONOMIC
CONFERENCE**

**West
Yorkshire**
Combined
Authority

THE INAUGURAL CREATIVE ECONOMIC CONFERENCE

Aims for 2023

The future of TV and publishing is another hot topic affecting our region. With both Channel 4 and Hachette opening offices in Yorkshire, media is at the forefront of the 'race for the North'.

Our expert panellists discussed the challenges and opportunities for TV, broadcasting and publishing as the sectors navigate this turbulent period, looking at everything from the future of Public Service Broadcasting to the importance of regional voices and diversity, and most importantly - jobs for the North.

Andy Haldane led the government's levelling-up taskforce and has described the levelling up agenda as "one of the signature challenges of our time". Andy used his inspiring talk to explain why greater participatory democracy is essential to future growth and inclusion.

Transport remains a major issue for the North, with a 2021 study finding that Bradford has the worst rail connections of any major British city. An expert panel met to ask the question – if infrastructure investment were delivered to its fullest extent, what would the potential positive impacts be across the region? What would be the benefits for business and individuals?

The inaugural CEC was a huge success, with panellists and attendees remarking on the impressive calibre of speakers and broad-ranging topics. By bringing so many wide-ranging experts and voices together BLF provided a first of its kind forum that enabled industry leaders to share knowledge and best practice with one another, and at the same time inform and inspire those setting off on their journey in the economic or creative sectors.

The conference combined two essential themes that have not commonly been discussed together – culture and economics – and in doing so it has created new networks that we are confident will yield positive results in the long run.

The CEC will return next year to bring together industry leaders and create conversations that are integral to leadership, in the business and creative sectors and the economic and social regeneration of the North of England.

Andy Haldane



Panel discussion



Sir Peter Bazalgette



THE LEGACY OF THE FREE WORD CENTRE

The Inaugural Free Word Lecture at Bradford Literature Festival

In 2022, BLF became the grateful recipient of the Free Word's archive and legacy, celebrated with the inaugural BLF Free Word lecture, delivered by Booker Prize winner Ben Okri.

This annual lecture will be the headline event of the Free Word strand, honouring the festival's commitment to continuing the ethos and pioneering work of the Free Word Centre, an arts organisation focused on the power and politics of words.

Free Word was an international centre for literature, literacy and free expression based in Clerkenwell, London. The charity developed local, national and international collaborations that explored the transformative power of words. On the basis of shared principles and objectives, BLF was honoured to be chosen, from an impressive shortlist of UK cultural organisations to be the keeper of the Free Word flame, which is a source of immense pride for the festival.

Introduced by Tim Duffy, former chair of the Free Word centre, Okri used his powerful and captivating lecture to highlight the importance of poetry during times of turmoil and he has set the bar high for those who follow in his footsteps. Those who do will speak on positive themes including the promotion of human rights through literature

and it will serve as a powerful platform for writers, like Okri, to help shape the debate around language and how it is used.

In addition to the Free Word Lecture, the festival hosted a special series of events discussing the power of silence and the silenced, with acclaimed authors Mona Arshi and Ayisha Malik exploring the effect of silence on individuals and in society as a whole. The Free Word strand will be a core tenet of the festival programme, focusing on timely issues around justice, social cohesion and most crucially freedom of expression.

BLF is wholly committed to honouring the legacy of the world's first centre for literature and free expression and is dedicated to furthering Free Word's founding objectives of promoting, protecting and democratising the power of the written and spoken word globally, striving to promote education in literature and the arts, encouraging the development of the arts for public benefit and raising awareness of human rights issues.

We are thrilled that Tim Duffy has joined the BLF board, cementing the relationship between BLF and the Free Word legacy for the future.

"During Covid, Free Word lost the building on which it was dependent. But this is a story with a happy ending. We took the decision to transfer the funds and assets to another organisation to continue their work. And in BLF we found the perfect home. Inspirational leadership from Syima Aslam, imaginative programming, down to earth and unstuffy approach."

"To quote the Guardian, 'hailed as one of the most diverse festivals in the country, Bradford Literature Festival is one of the jewels in the city's crown'. We could not be happier that BLF is taking on the Free Word Legacy. It is in safe and very exciting hands."

Tim Duffy, Chair of Free Word



Ben Okri



Syima Aslam and Ben Okri



LITTLE AMAL'S VISIT TO BRADFORD

Launching Bradford Literature Festival 2022

Who better to launch BLF 2022, a celebration of the power of arts to unite communities, than Little Amal herself?

To mark World Refugee Day and open BLF 2022, Bradford welcomed Little Amal, who has captured the imagination of thousands of people since she visited the UK last year, to City Park for a day of inspirational workshops, activities and performances.

Garnering praise as the “exemplar of the Creative Case for Diversity” and “the most exciting literature festival in the UK”, BLF represents a safe public space where the ever-changing world in which we live can be explored, examined, and better understood - perhaps the perfect place for Little Amal to visit.

Bradford was the first of 11 places that Little Amal, a giant puppet of a Syrian refugee, explored during her journey across the country sharing a message of resilience and hope with anyone who has been forced to leave their homes.

She was welcomed by thousands at City Park, where we celebrated Bradford's City of Sanctuary status. The stunning 3.5 metre puppet was greeted with banners, gifts and letters that pupils from Bradford schools had created during BLF workshops taking place in schools, BLF's Imagination Station and the Festival Hub.

Following an inspiring morning at a local primary school, Little Amal arrived in a sunny City Park, greeted by thousands of local people, poetry readings, dancing crowds, and a Bengali brass band.

Little Amal was gifted boxes of 'hope', the English translation of 'Amal' in Arabic, to spread on her onward journey around the country.

“The message is to people that are foreign and that are moving to Bradford and it's about making them feel welcome.”

“We're trying to make Little Amal feel welcome into Bradford because her life's been so hard and we want her life to be really good.”

School children during Little Amal's visit

“The teams at the Council and the Literature Festival were brilliant to work with as partners. Enthusiastic, committed and communicative we felt supported throughout the pre-production period and on the day.

“Whether feeding in new ideas, or realising those already discussed, including the complexity of sourcing and making the blocks, organising the dance and music, or planning the layout of City Park - they went above and beyond to make sure Amal's visit to Bradford was a day to remember.”

Sarah Loader, Executive Producer, The Walk



PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Magical Mixology



Giles Deacon



Wrongsemble



AC Grayling



Robert Hardman and Jennie Bond



Lemn Sissay



Exemplars For Our Time



John Barnes





Robert Peston



Joanne Harris



Jan Carson



Poetry with a Punch



Ralph Rimmer, Stuart Fielden & Barrie McDermott



Tez Ilyas



Shaykh Yahya Rhodus



EARLY YEARS, EDUCATION & FAMILY PROGRAMMES

The Bradford Literature Festival Education Programme offers students and young people across Bradford access to exciting, engaging and entertaining literature for all ages. This year our extensive programme was bigger and better than ever.

Publishers, performance poets, illustrators, journalists, among many others, happily shared their skills and showed students that there's no singularly accepted form of literature: it all counts.

We had events putting the spotlight on Superheroes, Myths, Mummies and Monsters, as well as Poetry and Rhyme. Sitting alongside our public programme, our Education Programme is integral to everything we do. We are dedicated to offering the opportunity to engage with inspiring, life-changing literature to all students in Bradford and passionately believe in the power of words to open minds and develop students as well-rounded individuals.

BLF's Education Programme is open to all schools, PRUs, home educators, children's centres and clubs and is free to schools within the Bradford District and available to students from Early Years to Sixth Form.

From uncovering the mysteries of Ancient Egypt to celebrating the unsung heroes in our community – this year our programme was specifically chosen to help broaden and inspire young minds.

For our teenage audience we understand it is the facts that are important and offered some different perspectives for them to consider. Sessions covered humanising the Holocaust and meeting the inspirational survivor Trude Silman MBE, the exploration of why Partition is often missing from British history syllabuses and a deep dive into the world of Shakespeare bringing his works into a modern context and exploring themes from racism to identity politics.

Learning can also be fun and this is at the heart of the annual Literature Unlocked: Family Fun Days, which made a welcome return to City Park with live performances, craft

workshops and interactive storytelling sessions, all of which were free to attend.

Family theatre troupe Wrongsemble led a comic book themed adventure, incredible author and illustrator Thiago de Moraes shared his sketching secrets, guiding us into his world of gods, fantastical creatures and lost legends, and the brilliant Lemn Sissay talked about his first children's book alongside illustrator Greg Stobbs.

Other popular activities include baby yoga, rhythm and movement sessions, and a Makaton sign language class to help children take their first steps into the world of signing.

All of this highlights our focus on education and learning. Our free Education Programme, which focuses on raising aspirations and improving literacy, has racked up 79,683 pupil and teacher attendances since 2017, working with 84% of secondary schools and 61% of primary schools in Bradford.

In five years, our Education Programme has delivered 465 festival and in-school events, focusing our work primarily on schools serving the most disadvantaged communities. Most of these are located in the inner-city wards, where we've worked with 70% of all schools. To date we've also worked with almost 75% of primary schools in the district reporting low reading attainment, making sure that the benefits of literacy and cultural literacy are extended to all of our city's children and young people.

As well as our ongoing commitment to educational learning, BLF is also passionate about promoting reading for pleasure, and for us the festival is a portal into which young people, in particular, can discover new worlds.

As an organisation with community at its core, we are filled with warmth and hope by the many stories we hear of people helping one another and finding new and creative ways to stay connected. Words are what bind us together, whether that is a story or a poem, a text message or a video call. Now more than ever we see the importance of language and how it connects us all.

"The STEM day has been amazing and really varied covering everything from germs to video games – the speakers were fantastic and the children have taken so much away."

KS2 Teacher

"We have attended 3 sessions this week – it is such a fantastic opportunity because our students just never get the opportunity to attend events like these."

KS3 Teacher



OUR UNIQUE APPROACH

The BLF way

BLF operates the most comprehensive free-ticketing policy of any major literature festival in the country, for people from low income backgrounds. Under our Ethical Ticketing model, 57% of our tickets were allocated free in 2019 to people on low incomes. This year, 69% of our tickets were completely free.

We believe that everyone should have access to high-quality cultural experiences, and the many positive impacts on health, wellbeing, academic achievement and aspiration offered by engagement with the arts. That's why since 2015 we've made free tickets available to people who face financial barriers to attending – and we know that this approach is having a positive impact.

In 2022, 59% of our audiences reported household incomes below the national average, whilst 19% reported household incomes below £20,000 per year.

We are committed to making all our events inclusive and accessible, which is why our ticket prices remain low and why many of our events are free, ensuring that as many people as possible can access the festival.

Those eligible to access free tickets include disabled people, students over the age of 16 and in full-time education, pensioners, benefits recipients, and refugees and asylum seekers. Teachers and educators may also be able to attain free tickets for their students.

BLF is a festival for everyone and we are committed to creating as diverse a programme as possible. Our artist roster and audiences are amongst the most diverse to be found at any major literary event in the UK. This diversity reflects and embodies the vibrancy and richness of Bradford's communities.

In our first five years, 75% of events in our history strand featured 'world history', and one in ten festival events explored world affairs and politics. To date 2,090 artists have

graced the BLF stages – 44% from diverse backgrounds, with roots in 72 countries.

Our world-class programme reaches diverse audiences across the board – 48% BAME, 51% female, and 19% under 16.

The organisational commitment to diversity is embedded in our recruitment and governance, and has been since the festival was first set up. BLF is one of the few cultural organisations in the UK to be led by a South Asian, female CEO/Artistic Director.

The BLF Board and year-round team in 2022 was 23% BAME, along with 34% of our volunteers.

We're also committed to developing local talent; in 2022 half of our year-round team were born or brought up in Bradford and West Yorkshire.

We have participated in internship schemes such as with Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries, supporting the improvement of equality, diversity and inclusion across the arts - not only within our own organisation.

BLF is proud to be a multi-lingual festival. This is reflected in our programme which upends the traditional literature festival format, melding genres, languages, event formats and cultural references, helping audiences discover new artists, art forms and perspectives.

From Polish to Patois, Farsi to Gujarati and Arabic to Urdu, we foster the sharing of poetry in original languages, centring cross-cultural poetic traditions at multi-line up events, unique in the UK for their high quality and diversity.

In particular, the festival has garnered a reputation for diversifying the audience for poetry, with public audiences for this strand standing at an average of 61% BAME - a testament to our curatorial approach, which brings together a rich seam of contemporary voices.

"The two events which we attended were thoroughly brilliant! How unique and fantastic to have events like this welcoming and curated towards people of all cultures, faiths and ethnic minorities. Truly an inclusive festival!"

Festival Attendee

"The festival made me feel proud of Bradford. Cultural enrichment is a way for any city to progress. I enjoyed the festival as it catered for a wide range of interests."

Festival Attendee



COMMUNITIES

Since our conception, BLF has built strong ties with the communities we serve through considered and consultative programming. Through Covid, we continued our work with a blend of in-person and digital activity. This featured four Literature Unlocked: Family Fun weekends taking place in public parks during the summer of 2021; When All of this is Over digital programme, including Aladdin and the Stolen Stories, a specially commissioned storytelling experience for families to enjoy together at home, and Inspiring Women, a series of 10 short films focusing on the lives and achievements of 10 inspirational contemporary women of South Asian Muslim heritage. Keeping in touch in these ways has enabled a smooth return to the 10-day festival model with the 2022 edition without losing momentum, memory or community trust.

In 2022, BLF successfully delivered year one of a three-year project with funding awarded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to increase engagement levels with the festival's most diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged local communities.

This project specifically targeted well-established groups in Bradford District (South Asian and white working class) as well as less settled, conflict-affected, communities (Roma, refugees and asylum seekers). The project adopted a multitiered approach to forge, build and maintain relationships and foster greater trust and understanding. An initial consultation with 32 wide-ranging organisations led to the further development of existing relationships and the creation of new links. Built on a 'safe - stretch - spectacular' model, initially engaging community groups in their own spaces (community centres, village halls), followed by a 'stretch' event outside of these spaces, and culminating in a 'spectacular' event in the festival setting.

A period of consultations with each community culminated in 24 events involving 19 of the organisations, ranging from reminiscence workshops on topical themes such as the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the 1947 Partition of India, to a celebration of Roma culture in the form of a traditional zabava held during Gypsy, Roma and Traveller

History Month. The activities took place in a wide range of venues with an audience of 2,514 – of which 80% was BAME (including those from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities).

Through these programmes, we facilitated safe, steady, and impactful journeys for individuals, walking alongside them from community spaces to the potentially intimidating setting of an international literary festival.

For example, working in collaboration with Creative Scene, sharing our knowledge and experience, we created women-only spaces where women built confidence in themselves (the safe step), with each other and with the festival, leading to members of the audience reciting their own poetic renditions (the stretch). Following on from this, the women were encouraged to attend Shabnam Khan's event, Kahani: A Journey through Punjabi Folk Songs at St George's Hall (spectacular). Many of those who attended had never been to a live performance or visited this historic venue before and would not otherwise regularly attend cultural events in mixed spaces. We are proud to have engaged 105 women, none of whom had previously been to a BLF event.

We are proud to have worked in collaboration with a variety of Bradford-based cultural and community organisations including Creative Scene, AHRC, Ravensthorpe Community Centre (Dewsbury) and the Sahelis Project (Heckmondwike) to deliver this Paul Hamlyn funded project programme.

"You've made a difference in so many people's lives. If it wasn't for this project these women wouldn't have had this opportunity to come out and be together. They would have been sitting at home in front of the TV. Instead they've come here and they've socialised, they've sung, they've cried, they've been stimulated and it's been good for their mental health."

Nahid Ghafoor, Co-ordinator, Sahelis Project, Heckmondwike



SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

In less than a decade, BLF has established itself as the biggest date in Bradford's cultural calendar and one of the largest literature festivals in the country, delivering a £13m local economic impact* in 2022 alone.

For 10 days at the end of June and start of July 2022, we delivered a programme that attracted 500 renowned speakers and artists from around the world to Bradford, to participate in a uniquely diverse arts and cultural programme.

Highlighting Bradford as a centre for cultural excellence, we created 391 pieces of news coverage in leading national news outlets (audience reach 1.17bn) which brought 30,000 visitors to the Bradford District in 2022. In doing so, BLF supports the local retail, hospitality and tourism economy, generating hundreds of paid jobs and bringing more skilled workers into the city, as well creating hundreds of volunteering opportunities.

This year, BLF generated 730 days of paid work for practitioners and artists and booked 675 nights in local hotels and other accommodation in and around Bradford. Of course, the festival is only made possible by our army of volunteers – with 119 volunteers developing crucial skills that could be applied in events management, hospitality, and logistics, along with sector-specific skills such as stage management and artist liaison.

Bradford has a rich architectural heritage and BLF is grateful to be able to draw on this, hosting events in 42 separate locations, in some of the city's grandest and most impressive buildings including City Hall, the Wool Exchange and the Midland Hotel as well as at cultural institutions including St George's Hall and The Alhambra Studio. Events were not confined to Bradford city centre – our programme reached out across the district from Saltaire to Haworth. We were delighted to create partner events, held at the Square Chapel Arts Centre, to coincide with Paul Weller's concert at the magnificent Piece Hall, Halifax.

*Based on a standard 7:1 return.

"It's been great! I can't wait to come back next year!"

Volunteer

"I am so grateful for BLF, I volunteered last year and attended this year with my five year old son who absolutely loved it. It's such a wonderful thing to have for Bradford."

Festival Attendee



LAUNCHING

Three major new year-round programmes

Fresh from the success of this year's festival, BLF will launch three new programmes this autumn which further extend our audience reach and at the same time will provide innovative learning and development opportunities across Yorkshire and the world!

This autumn, a new podcast will be made available to the public for free featuring highlights from the festival, and a new digital education programme which will enable BLF to reach youngsters all over the world. BLF, in partnership with a network of international literary festivals, will also be unveiling a manifesto designed to encourage greater diversity when working with artists and writers.

EXPLORE WORDS, DISCOVER WORLDS PODCAST

This autumn, BLF launches its very own podcast – Explore Words, Discover Worlds – funded by the Peter Sowerby Foundation. Each episode will focus on a conversation from the festival – either an interview, panel discussion, or a talk featuring world-class writers and thinkers. Returning to a fully in-person festival was important to us. However, this podcast means we can provide content to people throughout the year.

The podcast, funded by Peter Sowerby and recorded by Nova Studios, brings the festival to people who are not able to travel to the festival, and bringing a selection of events to them will enable thousands more people from around the world to access BLF's unique brand of conversation.

There is so much to see and do at BLF, audiences frequently remark that they couldn't attend every event they would have liked to. By creating the festival equivalent of an audiobook they can have a regular dose of BLF whenever they choose.

"I thought it was really excellent... It was a delight to be in a multi-ethnic space, and to feel included."

Festival Attendee

The BLF podcast will bring the unique atmosphere of festival events to listeners at any time of day or night, whether it's on their commute to work, or while they are walking their dog.

In addition to this, the podcast will be produced locally – generating more work for local freelance creatives, and creating a valuable marketing tool that helps keep the festival, and Bradford, fresh in people's minds through fascinating, evergreen content.

DIGITAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME – BEYOND THE PAGE

BLF's Early Years, Family and Education programmes engage young people in literature by focussing on making learning fun, reading for pleasure through topics close to the curriculum.

Since 2015, we have provided over 100,000 creative learning experiences for pupils and teachers through working with schools in Bradford District, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield. The festival believes that in-person experiences and face-to-face encounters are the best way to encourage young people to read, but this new digital resource will enable BLF to reach a far greater number of young people across the world.

The first series of Beyond the Page will feature seven episodes from author and broadcaster Lemn Sissay, poets Carlos Andres Gomez and Anthony Anaxagorou, Professor Saeed Khan, along with celebrated children's authors Sean Taylor, Louie Stowell and Thiago de Moraes.

Sessions will range from intimate poetry readings to insights into writers, and an in-depth study of the history of the Partition of India to mark its 75th anniversary.

"It was an amazing festival. Inspiring and uplifting and thought-provoking."

Festival Attendee



PETER
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Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

This pilot series, launched in the new academic year, will inform where we take the programme, working with a focus group of educators to help hone and develop the BLF curriculum.

Thanks to Peter Sowerby Foundation for funding this programme, and to the wonderful authors who so kindly donated their time to the project.

DIVERSITY IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS – A MANIFESTO

Bradford Literature Festival is proud to launch the Manifesto for Diversity. This is a practical guide to enable cultural organisations and programmers internationally to move towards achieving real inclusion and genuinely diverse representation when working with artists and writers.

While similar guidelines are usually compiled by policymakers, this manifesto has emerged from creative collaborations between international festivals including the Lahore Literary Festival and writers from a variety of backgrounds in different parts of the world.

This Manifesto for Diversity comes at a time of significant global change, following the challenges of Covid-19 and in the wake of social justice movements like Black Lives Matter.

Three Yorkshire poets were paired with writers in Dubai, Karachi and Toronto, and in a series of online conversations, the six writers explored their understanding of diversity and its different contexts.

In this digital programme, consisting of three animated films, audiences will meet the six writers, learn about their collaborative process, the poems they wrote together in response to their explorations, and the BLF Diversity Manifesto which was born from the process.

BLF would like to thank Arts Council England for making this project possible.



MARKETING & PROMOTION

National media coverage included:

MailOnline

BBC
RADIO

THE BOOKSELLER
AT THE HEART OF PUBLISHING SINCE 1858

THE YORKSHIRE POST

sky news

theguardian

yahoo!



Evening Standard

The Daily Telegraph

Website visits
472,000

Billboard advertising
10m
impressions

Social media reach
1.2m

£1.17bn
value of media
placements



CASE STUDY

Creative Collaboration: Fox & Windmill

We have a strong tradition of collaborating with writers, arts organisations and publishers and we have consistently championed homegrown talent here in Bradford and across West Yorkshire.

Among them is Fox & Windmill, an independent publishing company based in Bradford. Set up in 2021 by friends Habiba Desai and Sara Razzaq, Fox & Windmill specialises in publishing fantasy, sci-fi, and young adult and literary fiction by South Asian authors.

Fox & Windmill launched its first anthology collection, *Into the Wilds*, at this year's festival and Habiba and Sara were also among the panellists who took part in an event discussing the role of indie publishing.

"We were first introduced to BLF when we were literature students at the University of Huddersfield," says Habiba. "Sara and I were in separate classes and never really knew each other. I volunteered because I'd never previously had access to a literature festival – I didn't know what it was, or what to expect. But it was something that looked interesting and fun to be part of."

"I remember going through the festival brochure in 2016 and seeing so many events that looked exciting. I couldn't believe that all this was happening in Bradford."

Habiba went to the volunteer induction where she spotted Sara. *"I didn't know that within those two weeks we would become best friends and business partners."*

She says the festival has helped her enormously. *"I've worked as a volunteer, been part of the festival staff and then became a Core member. Throughout my time working with BLF I've had the chance to see so many aspects of the festival and literature industry like bid writing, marketing and social media techniques, as well as learn about publishing."*

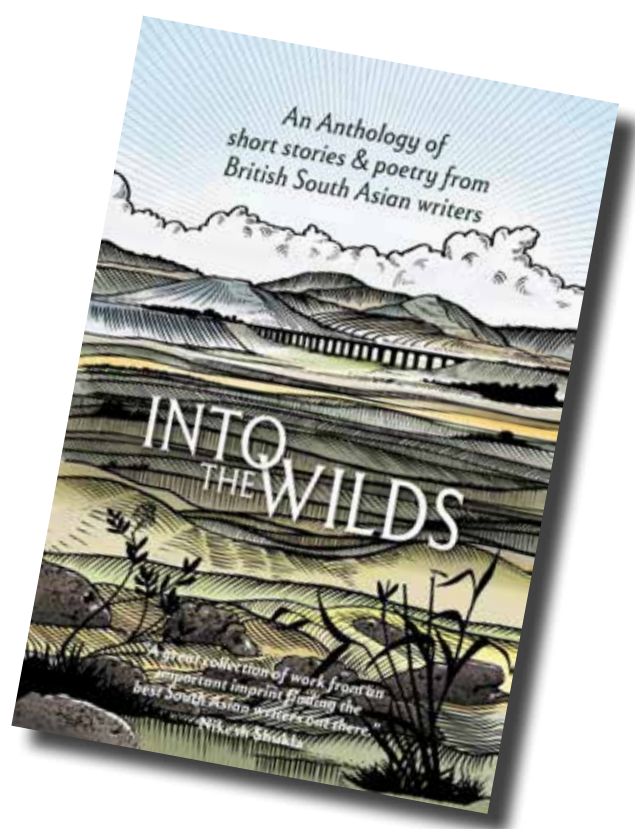
All of which has been crucial to her own creative development and that of Fox & Windmill. *"BLF has massively helped us in so many ways. Without it I don't think we would have had the opportunities we've received. It's helped us to connect with people from creative industries and helped me develop my communication skills."*

Habiba says the festival is inspiring, particularly to those from different backgrounds who wouldn't normally attend literary events. *"It was a really amazing moment to be at BLF as an artist. We had young women come up to us after the event telling us how special it was to see people who looked like them up on stage."*

And she believes the festival's influence will continue to spread. *"The lasting impact of BLF to the city and Yorkshire is monumental. It's a dynamic festival and it's important that new talent is championed because creating a space for those new voices from different backgrounds needs to start somewhere - and where better than at BLF."*

"For us to be on stage to launch our publication on the opening night of the festival was unbelievable. There's such magic in the air when BLF comes to the city. It makes it come alive and there's such a buzz in the air. To be part of that atmosphere was really special."

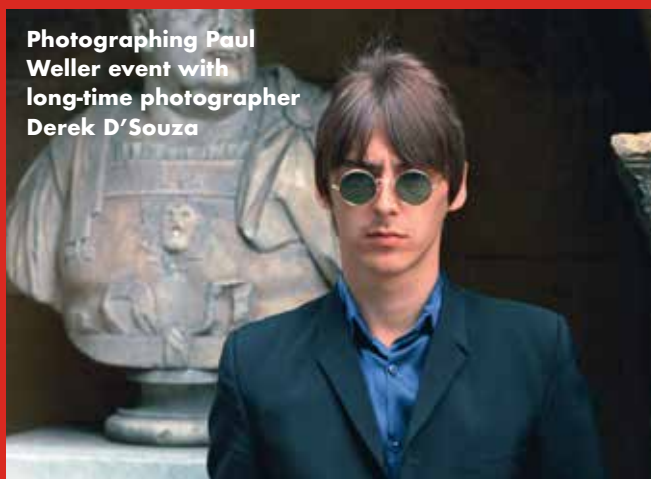
Habiba Desai, co-founder of Fox & Windmill



FIVE THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW

About Bradford Literature Festival

- 1 Ethical Ticketing**
Anyone who can't afford a ticket can enjoy BLF events for free.
- 2 Completely Free Education Programme**
Providing a week's worth of curriculum adjacent sessions for schools across the district.
- 3 A Year Round Endeavour**
We work with schools and community groups year round - we're not just 10 days in June and July.
- 4 Putting in the Hours**
This year we provided 35,640 hours of entertainment throughout the festival.
- 5 From LA to Bradford**
International visitors from Australia, Germany, Malaysia and more, including a volunteer joining us from Los Angeles, USA



"I cannot praise Bradford Literature Festival too highly. It is the jewel in Bradford's crown. It puts Bradford positively on the map of the UK, if not beyond, and I'm sure it played a big part in us achieving City of Culture 2025. Thanks to all who make it happen. I love its span and diversity, culturally & cross-genre. I enjoy coming to events alone even more than with friends, to mix and converse with new and different people, and I feel safe to do so. Social inclusion is a key element of the festival for me."

Festival Attendee



BRADFORD 2025

BLF celebrates UK City of Culture win



Bradford is among the most diverse cities in the country. We are a city which speaks more than 150 languages and home to an ever-growing raft of exciting entrepreneurs, emerging artists and arts organisations. We are home to one of the youngest populations in Europe, which will be a powerhouse for the future of our nation.

The change in the city's cultural landscape since the Bradford Literature Festival launched in 2014 is truly remarkable. Bradford's winning bid to be UK City of Culture 2025 illustrates the hard work that has gone into galvanising the cultural sector. BLF is extremely proud to have been a key bid partner and we believe that City of Culture status will be truly transformational for Bradford.

We are proud of the role BLF has played over the past eight years in showcasing Bradford's rich and diverse cultural heritage. Since our inception we have hosted many events celebrating our local heritage, including our annual Brontë weekend, Hockney Day, walking tours of Bradford's Blue Plaques; our film heritage; Little Germany and the stunning Bradford Synagogue, shining a light on our unique and rich cultural history.

The success of BLF over the last few years, has led to a growing number of high-profile national partnerships presented at the festival, most recently with the Royal Shakespeare Company, Opera North and the British Museum.

The tangible economic benefit that events such as BLF bring to the city is also one of the reasons why being UK City of Culture will create a crucial step change for Bradford. As well as creating exciting, innovative cultural and artistic events which will have an impact on the national cultural landscape, the boost for the local and regional economy will be invaluable.

In 2022, 53% of our audiences came from the Bradford District, while 24% were regional and 1% came from across the globe. People travel from as far away as Australia and North America to attend the festival, which shows the global appeal of the cultures we represent and of the city which we call home.

As Bradford gears up to take on the City of Culture mantle, we at BLF are excited to play an integral role in helping to create a lasting cultural legacy and a blueprint for others to follow.



"This is the most amazing news for an incredible city. Well done team Bradford 2025. You did us all proud. Now let's make the most of it! #itsourtime"



WITH THANKS TO

Our sponsors, funders and partners

Partnership working is critical to the success of Bradford Literature Festival – from venue support, to creative partnerships, to our media partners who work incredibly hard to ensure as many people as possible hear about the festival, both before and during the festival run.

This year, we welcomed new partners, and renewed our relationships with others – we look forward to working with each of them again in the future.

Thanks go to our media partner, Nova Studios, and our hotel partner, the Midland Hotel. Special thanks to our book partner, Waterstones, whose team work tirelessly, diligently, and patiently to ensure that our audiences can get their hands on the books they want, and that authors can put pen to title page at hundreds of sales and signings across the festival.

A huge thanks to all our partners listed below.

Key Partners



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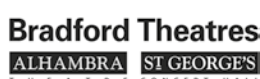
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Catering Partner



Venue Partners



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Consultants

Irna Qureshi

Farkhandah Faraz

Special thanks to...

BLF would not be possible without our stage managers, venue managers, technicians, box office team, drivers and our incredible volunteers, who work tirelessly to ensure audiences and artists have the best possible experience.



Supporting Bradford Literature Festival

If you would like to discuss sponsoring or partnering with the festival, please contact:

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01274 044138
development@bradfordlitfest.co.uk



explore words discover worlds

For information about Bradford Literature Festival's year-round activities and for programme updates visit www.bradfordlitfest.co.uk

For 2022 highlights and to keep up with 2023 festival news, follow us on social media



@BradfordLitFest #BradfordLitFest