



The Birth of BroadstairsLit

By Jane Wenham-Jones

Authors, I can safely say, – I have just completed my eighth book – are a strange lot.

I wouldn't go so far as to suggest co-ordinating a bunch of them is like herding cats, but I do know that the amount of sweat, tears, planning and management behind a successful literary festival is HUGE. What with juggling writers and punters and venues and interviewers and transport arrangements and cancelled trains, there is plenty of scope for a slip twixt booking and finally appearing on stage. I am used to arriving at the various, brilliantly-organised festivals at which I interview, to find their directors with a slightly wild look in their eyes, so when someone first ventured the words "A Literary Festival for Broadstairs?", my first thought was not: "How splendid, may I run it?" But, quite frankly, to sprint for the hills.

Yet here we are! BroadstairsLit has been born, thumped on the back and brought into the world with suitably lusty cries. Its cunning USP is that it does not take place over a fortnight, a week or even a weekend – but is a series of individual literary-inspired events put on all year round. This still takes a fair amount of planning, of course, but with one occasion at a time to focus on, and a volunteer working group blessed with the human dynamo that is Denise Martin-Harker and the super-efficient Lee and Jacqui Wellbrook, no-one's had a breakdown yet.

Instead, thoroughly enthused, we've been putting out the word to a string of big names, citing the seaside venues – thank you Thorley Taverns and The Yarrow Hotel – and not-for-profit goodness of evenings out where you will not only hear sparkling conversation with the top names from the publishing world but very probably get a glass of Prosecco thrust into your hands. "Will anybody come?" one well-known novelist asks. Yes, I am able to assure her, they most certainly will!

One hundred and eighty eager Archers fans rolled up to the Broadstairs Pavilion to hear scriptwriter Keri Davies and actors Annabelle Dowler (Kirsty Miller) and Trevor Harrison (Eddie Grundy) talk about life behind the scenes at the long-running radio soap. A hundred and ten enjoyed a cream tea in front of Hallie Rubenhold and Lucinda Hawksley, as they discussed the hags and harlots in the backstreets of 18th century London and who influenced Charles Dickens (known as great, great, great Granddad to Lucinda!). Our next event, a charity evening in aid of the Broadstairs Town Shed – starring BAFTA-nominated actor Johnny Harris together with cast member Michael Smiley, in a Q & A and showing of his Britfilm *Jawbone* (Ray Winstone and Ian McShane also star) – on 29th October, sold out within days of its announcement. Tickets for Sir Tony Robinson are not yet on sale but we have a list of Baldrick fans asking to reserve them. (If you join the loyalty scheme you'll always get first dibs.)

We have all been touched by the number of people expressing their pleasure at the new venture and pledging their support. It seems there's a real appetite here for literary and arts events. And with Peter James, Hunter Davies and Miriam Margolyes among the line up for 2018, there should be something for everyone. All through the year...

What's next from BroadstairsLit:

January 28th – Storytelling at The Yarrow Hotel. An open mic event for anyone with an original story to tell. Come along and join in!

February 16th The Perfect Match. Prosecco and chocolates with bestselling romantic novelists Katie Fforde and Jo Thomas in conversation at the Yarrow Hotel.

March 10th No Cunning Plan. Sir Tony Robinson at the Broadstairs Pavilion. (I get to interview – I can't wait!)

For full details on all events and to sign up for our newsletter visit www.broadstairslit.co.uk or find us on facebook and twitter.