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New for old – rethinking our world with Being Human 2021

From Caribbean food and shebeens to environmental storytelling and sustainable burials to Climate Change, the UK's only national festival of the humanities returns from 11 to 20 November, with hundreds of free events taking place across the UK.

This year the festival turns its attention to the pertinent theme of 'Renewal'. Whether it's in relation to our political systems, health and wellbeing, the cities and towns in which we live, how we work and spend our leisure time, or our relationship with the planet and the natural world, the current historical moment offers opportunities to rethink, to do things differently, to renew.

Following a largely digital festival in 2020, with online audiences exceeding 30,000, many event organisers are returning to in-person events this year, from walks and tours to workshops and talks – all designed to make university research fun, appealing and relevant to all.

The festival will kick off with a [virtual launch event](#) on 9 November with a special guest – writer, poet and broadcaster Lemn Sissay OBE – who will share a few thoughts on the importance of the humanities. Being Human is led by the University of London's School of Advanced Study in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the British Academy.

In fitting with the 'Renewal' theme and to coincide with the UN COP 26 climate conference taking place in Glasgow in November, a [COP26 Hub](#) is being led by the University of Glasgow with special support from the AHRC and UK Research and Innovation. Its programme will provide a renewed focus and approach to the climate emergency and how the humanities enrich our understanding of the issues and challenges, and their continued relevance to our everyday lives.

Events include a [Greener gaming hackathon](#), looking at ways to create a more environmentally conscious gaming industry, and an exploration of how [poetry might help us with the climate crisis](#).

Festival director, Professor Sarah Churchwell, said: "After the vast challenges, and changes, created by global pandemic and climate crisis, we are excited to focus this year's Being Human festival on the theme of renewal. We are all ready to focus on revival: regeneration, reconstruction, reimagination, revitalisation. Researchers are gathering to share cutting-edge ideas with publics all over the country, as we discuss and discover what comes next for humanity, how we will keep renewing our sense of being human."

Environment and climate change event highlights:

- [Let's talk about a new circle of life](#) (19–20 November). Organised by Liverpool John Moores University, this series of workshops and activities will explore sustainable burial and how we can create green spaces for shared grief.
- [Planting poems: Seamus Heaney's eco poetry](#) (13 November). Join the British Academy at Manchester's John Rylands Library to discover climate change

poetry written by Heaney and other contemporary poets, learn about the Irish poet's unassuming conservation activism, and reflect on how you experience our changing environment.

- [Environmental storytelling tackling air pollution](#) (13 November) is a unique project from Keele University. Young filmmakers from Stoke and New Delhi, and researchers from UK and India will explore how we can harness the power of storytelling for environmental change.
- [Farm Stories at Bath City Farm](#) (13 November), Bath Spa University. Making the most of the Bath City Farm site, this series of events includes arts workshops and readings from the work of South African writer, Bessie Head, whose essays and fiction reflect on the pleasures and politics of farming.
- [Creating our future: food in the 21st century](#) (15 November). Anglia Ruskin University has joined forces with the mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to challenge participants to put ideals of democracy into action at these citizens' assembly-style workshops to discuss, debate and deliberate on issues including food, work and the city before delivering a set of recommendations.
- [Waste of our time: renewing pictures of a changing valley](#) (18 November) organised by Swansea University. In 1983, the university's South Wales Miners' Library produced a documentary in which residents of Banwen, Onllwyn and Seven Sisters discussed the effects of coal mining on their landscape, people and wildlife. But how has life and landscape in the Dulais Valley changed since? Come along this event to find out in a new documentary created by the adults and children who live there today.

Other festival highlights include:

- A special festival 'Hub' led by [Coventry University](#) will build upon the 'City of Culture 2021' project, with events celebrating its iconic post-war architecture and sites of literary significance.
- [Power and protection](#) (15 and 17 November). At this interactive film screening from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Dead Ernest Theatre, participants will follow the real case of a woman in the 1930's who was deemed legally incapable of managing her own affairs thanks to her 'mental infirmity'. After reviewing archival documents and the film, they will vote on the arguments and share their views on the outcome with each other and a group of experts.
- [The food and idea exchange](#). On 17 November, the Museum of London's Ellipse Hall will be transformed into an evening marketplace extravaganza to feed the mind and body with stalls offering activities such as food tasting, workshops and debates about London's past and present markets. Insights from the evening will inform the '[London Eats](#)' project, a collection exploring Londoners' relationships with food.

- [Computer Cupid: looking for love in pre-internet Britain](#) (17 November). Based on research into the 1970s divorce laws, this British Academy event will review Dateline, the first computer dating service, explore first-person accounts and flirtatious ads from the time, and show what dating looked like 1970s-style. After the talk, have a go at creating the perfect Dateline ad to see if you too can find love.
- [‘Hidden stories: from the Caribbean to Great Britain’](#) (11–14 November). Museumand, the UK’s National Caribbean Heritage Museum, presents four days of Caribbean culture on Lincoln’s High Street as part of the University of Lincoln’s festival Hub programme. There will be a pop-up Caribbean kitchen and shebeen, talks, performances and insightful conversations about food and music from the islands.

The full programme Being Human 2021 festival programme is available at <https://beinghumanfestival.org/events/>

Find out more about the festival at <https://beinghumanfestival.org/> and follow the latest news on Twitter at @BeingHumanFest.

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Notes to Editors

1. **Being Human: a festival of the humanities, 11–20 November 2021**
Led by the School of Advanced Study, University of London, in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy, Being Human is a national forum for public engagement with humanities research. The festival highlights the ways in which the humanities can inspire and enrich our everyday lives. For more information, please visit www.beinghumanfestival.org or follow the festival on social media at @BeingHumanFest.
2. **The School of Advanced Study (SAS)**, University of London, is the UK’s national centre for the promotion and support of research in the humanities. SAS and its member institutes offer unparalleled resources, facilities and academic opportunities across a wide range of subject areas for the benefit of the national and international scholarly community. Last year SAS welcomed 996 research fellows and associates, held 1,500 events highlighting the latest research in the humanities, received 31.6 million online visits to its research resources and platforms, and hosted 100,119 visits to its specialist libraries and collections. The School also leads Being Human, the UK’s only nationwide festival of the humanities. Find out more at www.sas.ac.uk or follow SAS on Twitter at [@SASNews](https://twitter.com/SASNews).
3. **The Arts and Humanities Research Council** is part of UK Research and Innovation. We’re the UK’s largest funder of arts and humanities research and training, investing over £100 million every year. We fund independent researchers in a wide range of subjects, including history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages, design, heritage, area studies, the creative and performing arts, and many more. The research we fund provides social

and cultural benefits that contribute to the economic success of the UK, as well as to the culture and welfare of societies around the world. Find out more about us at ahrc.ukri.org, or on Twitter at [@ahrcpress](https://twitter.com/ahrcpress).

4. **The British Academy** is the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences. We mobilise these disciplines to understand the world and shape a brighter future. We invest in researchers and projects across the UK and overseas, engage the public with fresh thinking and debates, and bring together scholars, government, business and civil society to influence policy for the benefit of everyone. www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk [@BritishAcademy](https://twitter.com/BritishAcademy). For further information please contact Sean Canty at the British Academy Press Office on s.canty@thebritishacademy.ac.uk or +44 (0)20 7969 5273.