

It ain't half hot mum – Being Human 2021 and the greening of the humanities

The eyes of the world will be on Glasgow for the United Nations Cop 26 climate change conference at the end of October. And that presents a tremendous boost for one of the key sub-themes of the Being Human 2021 festival of the humanities (11–20 November) – ‘Nature, environment and climate change’.

Of course this annual festival, led by the School of Advanced Study at the University of London, will have its own [COP26 Hub](#), being led by the University of Glasgow with special support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (festival co-sponsor, with the British Academy) 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](#).

Anyone underestimating the power of poetry for social and political change only has to walk through London’s remodelled St Pancras Station – a perfect example for Being Human 21’s overall theme of ‘Renewal’ - and look at the statue of Sir John Betjeman who proved a stumbling block for would-be developers who wanted to flatten the old station. Irish poet Seamus Heaney was also known for his focus on the natural world, but in later life he more actively explored climate change, peatland conservation and environmental challenges.

[Planting poems: Seamus Heaney’s eco poetry](#) (organised by the British Academy) will help visitors discover climate change poetry written by Heaney and other contemporary poets, learn about Heaney’s unassuming conservation activism, and reflect on their experiences of our changing environment.

The event will take place at the John Rylands Library, home to the archive of the Carcanet Press, one of the outstanding independent literary publishers of our time. Visitors can also hear climate poems published by Carcanet, and then write their own verse on wildflower seed paper inspired by what they have heard – and then plant them to help support local wildlife.

“As COP26 dominates the news agenda, humanities research helps us understand how climate change is shaping what it means to be human today, and helps equip us with the tools we need to weather this crisis in every sense, from asking questions about the relationship between humanity and nature, to the ways in which history and politics have shaped the crisis, and literature and film respond to it.” said Being Human’s director, Professor Sarah Churchwell

There has been extensive media coverage of the ways in which the global pandemic has made people more aware of their local environment and wildlife. [Nottingham’s nature post-pandemic](#) (University of Nottingham) offers a discussion with representatives from Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, campaigners, and youth and

community groups on how the coronavirus pandemic has underlined the need for nature in our lives like never before.

Nottingham has contemplated new directions for conservation in the county, including the reintroductions of species such as beavers to renew the local landscape and habitat. This event will explore how post-pandemic nature must be about renewal and rebirth, with people taking action to protect it.

Death is often a conversation stopper. But [Let's talk about a new circle of life](#) (Liverpool John Moores University) invites visitors into a safe space to confront mortality, connect with loss, and explore how current burial practices might be unsustainable.

Participants will join ongoing death studies research into sustainable death and burial, and the development of a manifesto to lobby policymakers to create sustainable green spaces for shared grief. Come along on 19 November for a Walking Death Café where you will be encouraged to talk openly about your experiences with death but more specifically about current unsustainable burial practices and sustainable alternatives.

Other 'Nature, environment and climate change' highlights include:

- Climate Museum UK is a mobile and digital museum creatively stirring and collecting responses to the climate and ecological emergency. With the University of Birmingham, it is presenting [Good Living](#). These two online forums will explore the Climate Museum's Virtual Reality art program, led by young people in the UK and Brazil, and are inspired by 'Traditional Ecological Knowledge' – a field of study in anthropology describing indigenous and other traditional knowledge of local resources. The work explores how art can help us to re-connect with nature by exploring the nature wisdom embedded in the philosophy of indigenous cultures.
- If you've found solace in the outdoors and green spaces over the past year, join researchers from Goldsmiths, University of London at [Sounding the River Quaggy](#) to experience this urban river in a whole new way – through sound. Whether it's the dawn chorus or underwater recordings, explore the soundscape and contribute your own field recordings at a sound walk workshop, and hear from resident scientific and cultural experts about the importance of the river to the community and local eco-system.
- In 1983, Swansea'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 to [Waste of our time: renewing pictures of a changing valley](#) (organised by Swansea University) to find out in a new documentary created by the adults and children who live there today. Swansea University will also present [Climate adventures in forgotten realms](#), a workshop exploring how to use climate as a motivator for an adventure. Come along to see how medieval narratives can

help create lively and breathing narrative worlds – and start your own climate adventure.

- As the climate crisis accelerates, our species is facing the greatest ecological challenge in its history. Coventry University's [Restoration and renewal for Rainforest people](#) will connect the people of Coventry with indigenous peoples fighting to preserve the rainforests in South America. It includes the screening of a new documentary, interviews with indigenous peoples who have deep experience of dealing with ecological change, and British climate activists alongside a showcase of indigenous artefacts, bringing the cultures of the rainforests to Coventry.
- Open to all, [Forest of Imagination](#), a contemporary arts event organised by Bath Spa University, allows the local community to work alongside professional artists to creatively respond to the climate emergency and test ideas for the future of our planet.

These are just samples of some of more than 200 free public online and face-to-face activities taking place across the UK from 11–20 November.

The full 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](https://twitter.com/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](https://twitter.com/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.