

Being Human festival returns to champion the humanities

In times of crisis, do we really need the humanities? From historians decolonising museum collections, to archaeologists bringing to life ancient texts, the UK's only national festival of the humanities is on a mission to demonstrate the many ways in which we do.

Returning between 12–22 November for the seventh year running, Being Human's theme this year is 'New Worlds' – perfectly timed to reflect on the radical global changes of 2020, from the Covid-19 pandemic to the Black Lives Matter protests and the most important US election in decades. Led by the [School of Advanced Study](#), University of London, in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council ([AHRC](#)) and the [British Academy](#), this free multi-city festival highlights how humanities researchers work every day on issues that shape the world that we live in.

Visitors in Stoke-on-Trent can expect to find Chatterley Whitfield Colliery (the UK's largest remaining deep mine site) brought to life once more after standing dormant and silent for almost 30 years, through a series of creative workshops led by researchers at Keele University. Londoners will get a chance to experience an 18th century Mogul Court, complete with live Indian music. And young people in Lincolnshire will co-produce a 'Charter of Open Space' inspired by Victorian social reformer Octavia Hill and the campaign for the right to access the outdoors.

In the ongoing uncertainties of the pandemic, this year's festival will also act as a testing ground for new cultural formats, comprising a range of online events including talks and conversations, virtual tours, quizzes, exhibitions, storytelling, virtual cafés and Q&As, as well as socially distanced face-to-face activities.

Special guest speakers at events include David Olusoga, Bonnie Greer and David Lammy.

Awards have been made to 27 universities and research organisations following a national funding competition, enabling free public events to take place across the UK over 11 days in November. Applicants had to successfully demonstrate the relevance of their research to contemporary issues in society, culture and everyday life – devising creative, inclusive events and activities that engage and appeal to a broad range of people and communities across the UK. Researchers are encouraged to work with community and cultural partners such as museums, artists and charities, and this year these include groups such as The British Shakespeare Association, Deafblind Scotland and North Wales Association for Multicultural Integration.

Professor Sarah Churchwell, festival director, said: *"Being Human celebrates the humanities and the many ways in which they help us to understand the world around us. In a year marked by an extraordinary pandemic and unprecedented global quarantine, political turmoil, and one of the most important elections in American*

history, we are all depending on the humanities more than ever to help us confront our challenges, resolve our differences, and find better ways of being human.”

Small grants of up to £2,000 will allow researchers to share their work with new audiences and the general public, responding to this year’s theme of New Worlds. Innovative event set-ups for 2020 include a drop-in repair shop exploring recycling, waste and sustainability, a feminist ‘rap battle’ based on ancient Mesopotamian texts, a ‘carnival of counter-tourism’ exploring gentrification and a sensorial artwork recreating weather conditions of the past and future.

To further extend the reach of the festival, a number of universities have been awarded extra funding to become festival ‘hubs’ in Derby, Glasgow, Sheffield and Swansea.

These highly local, place-based festival hub programmes will invite people to:

- **Look again at Derbyshire’s rich heritage as a global industrial powerhouse** via a series of online events celebrating the history of one of the UK’s most overlooked areas. Events rooted in museums, archives and schools include digital illustrated talks, ‘draw-along’s, public performances and ‘citizen curating’ of Derby Museum’s World Cultures Gallery.
- **Channel the Glaswegian spirit for invention and reinvention** in a series of events led by the University of Glasgow reflecting on the city’s past and future of the city, including an invitation to write a ‘poetic national constitution’ and an opportunity to delve into research on cultures of empire at the Hunterian Museum.
- **Ask ‘What kind of world is possible?’** at The University of Sheffield’s ‘People’s Palace of Possibility’. The headline event of its series invites festivalgoers to look at the everyday world with fresh eyes, viewing it through the lens of a diverse range of innovative humanities research.
- **Reflect on old worlds, new worlds and new beginnings** through politics, VR, wellbeing, human connectivity and creativity in a programme led by Swansea University, including banner-making inspired by the collections at the South Wales Miners’ Library and the creation of a Welsh ‘post-pandemic manifesto’ by local school pupils.

Other emerging themes in this year’s festival include: new worlds in relation to colonialism, exploration and migration, the changing faces of towns and cities and lost industries in the UK and explorations of new cultural forms and cultural inclusivity.

Professor Andrew Thompson, AHRC’s executive chair, said: *“The Being Human Festival demonstrates how arts and humanities research helps us all to make sense of these strange and unprecedented times. The platform that Being Human offers enables researchers to engage the public in many and varied ways, and I’m excited to see the programme of activities for this year reaching new audiences across the UK.”*

Professor Sir David Cannadine, president of the British Academy, said: *“Being Human is an occasion for everyone to connect with research in the humanities in a series of live and virtual events. Whether it is archaeology or art history, philosophy or psychology, classics or cultural studies, these subjects enrich all of our lives and help us to think about what it means to be human.*

“This year’s theme, New Worlds, is particularly apt as we grapple with the profound implications of the pandemic on how we live our daily lives. As well as providing a space to think about the big issues shaping our times, the festival will also provide a welcome opportunity to uncover new research and fresh perspectives on timeless matters of culture and the human experience.”

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Notes to Editors

Find out more about the festival at www.beinghumanfestival.org and on social media, Twitter at @BeingHumanFest and Instagram @BeingHumanFest.

- **For all enquiries**, please contact Maureen McTaggart, Media and Public Relations Officer, School of Advanced Study, University of London, maureen.mctaggart@sas.ac.uk / +44 (0)20 7862 8859
- **Being Human**: the UK’s only national festival of the humanities, 12-22 November 2020. 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.
- **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 892 research fellows and associates, held 1,903 events highlighting the latest research in the humanities, received 25.9 million online visits to its research resources and platforms, and hosted 173,493 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.
- **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 and 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.

- **The British Academy** is the voice of the humanities and social sciences. The Academy is an independent fellowship of world-leading scholars and researchers; a funding body for research, nationally and internationally; and a forum for debate and engagement. www.britishacademy.ac.uk @BritishAcademy. For further information, please contact Sean Canty at the British Academy press office on s.canty@thebritishacademy.ac.uk or +44 (0) 207 969 5273.