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Fancy a cultured cuppa? Being Human expands online to lift academia above Covid-19 pandemic

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2020 [programme](#) for Being Human, the annual humanities festival led by the School of Advanced Study (SAS) at the University of London, launches today with an impressive 220 events exploring this year's 'New Worlds' theme from 12 to 22 November.

Already well-established as the UK's only annual celebration of humanities research, the programme boasts a diverse range of events delivered by academic researchers in collaboration with community and cultural partners such as museums, artists, charities, and many others. As expected, given the pandemic, online activities have come to the fore.

Now in its seventh year, this multi-city festival run in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy, appeals to a huge public audience: in 2019, 30,000 people attended events. Luckily for its fans, Being Human has proved itself an event that Covid-19 couldn't cancel.

That's because this year's festival will also act as a testing ground for new cultural formats, comprising a range of online events including virtual tours, quizzes, exhibitions and storytelling, as well as socially distanced face-to-face activities and, for the first time, virtual cafés.

A cross-festival community initiative, Being Human [cafés](#) invite people to put the kettle on, break out the biscuits and engage with some new ideas in the humanities in the time that it takes for a cuppa. They include the Forty Winks Café reflecting on contemporary culture, sleep and health with researchers from Northumbria University, and a 'Boston' tea party café exploring Black Country dialect with the University of Wolverhampton.

Professor Sarah Churchwell, the festival's director, said: 'The commitment, ingenuity and sheer persistence of our community has ensured the continuation of a vibrant and fascinating Being Human at a time when, sadly, so many other events have disappeared.

'Our new Being Human Cafés – hosted by more than 30 of our participants – exemplify not only our collective determination to adapt to changing circumstances, but also the continued importance of cultural and humanistic connections, especially in this challenging moment. They demonstrate our shared commitment to understanding and expressing what it means to be human together.'

The dynamic political and cultural relevance of Being Human 2020 will be demonstrated at its launch event by festival patron and prominent broadcaster and historian David Olusoga, who has exemplified the power of research in his own work like *A House Through Time* and *Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners*. David will give a thought-provoking talk and Q&A on decolonisation and 'new worlds'.

Other highlights of Being Human 2020 include:

- [Being Human in Conversation: the American Election](#) (12 November, 6–7pm). Professor Churchwell and playwright and critic Bonnie Greer, both natives of Chicago, will discuss the impact of the 2020 American election. This online event also has a Q&A.
- [Mining Migrations](#) (12 November, 10am–5 pm), Keele University. Chatterley Whitfield Colliery's derelict chimneys and winding gear are a defining landmark of the vast North Staffordshire coalfield. Yet this was also a dynamic centre with global connections, described in these stories via a self-guided walk around the nearby Whitfield Valley Nature reserve, or on the [website](#).
- [Sensing Sugaropolis](#) (20 November, 11am–2pm). Step back in time with the British Academy and the University of St Andrews to explore the diverse and complicated history, smells and stories of Greenock, a 'Sugaropolis'. Greenock's port was a global hub for sugar refining in the mid-19th century. Join us at the Watt Institution to hear stories and memories from local residents and pick up your own free sensory kit to discover the smells and histories at home.
- [Magical Mind: the World of Terry Pratchett](#) with Neil Gaiman and Rob Wilkins (17 November, 6–7 pm), Senate House Library ('hacking' its Pratchett archive). The late Terry Pratchett's novels created a new world where fantasy, science-fiction, humour and satire co-existed, firing the imagination of millions of readers. Join this live conversation event with Pratchett's friends and collaborators as they explore his fantastical *Discworld* universe. The event is hosted by Senate House Library, University of London, and SAS' Institute of English Studies.
- [Can Old Philosophy Help Build our New World?](#) (19 November, 6.30–8pm), Royal Institute of Philosophy. In turbulent times, many are looking for new solutions for our new problems. Is there any benefit still in the wisdom of the ages? In the age of the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter, can old philosophy be any help in creating a better world?
- [Pandemic Survival: Ancient and Modern](#) (18 November, 6–7.30pm), University of Lincoln. Join archaeologist Carenza Lewis online to learn about the Black Death (bubonic plague), the world's first pandemic. Snapshot talks are interspersed with interactive quizzes, card draws and even a 'battleships'-style game to shed light, bust some myths and find insights relevant to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- [Weather the Weather](#) (12–15 November, 10am–5pm). What was today's weather like in 1816? What will tomorrow's be like in 2080? 'Weather the Weather', organised by King's College London, is a sensorial artwork recreating weather conditions of past and future years with a four-day journey that begins in 1816, the year without summer, then 1904, when the link

between fossil fuels and climate change was first made, through to 1990, when worldwide targets for climate change were set, and ends with the speculative future weather scenarios of 2080.

- [The Peoples' Palace of Possibility](#) (12–22 November). This interactive project from the University of Sheffield is led by Sheffield-based theatre and interactive arts company The Bare Project. Participants will receive a series of letters and packages in the post over ten days, which will unfurl the mysteries of 'The People's Palace of Possibility' and invite them to share visions for the future and commit tiny acts of resistance.
- [A Poetic Constitution for Scotland](#) (12–22 November). Scots and New Scots – living at home or abroad – are invited by the University of Glasgow to share and explore what Scotland means to them today. The collated responses will inspire a new play that will premiere at Glasgow's Being Human festival hub on St Andrew's Day, 30 November.
- [Dawn of a New Era: Unfurling the South Wales Miners' Banners](#) (12–22 November), Swansea University. At least 50 miners' banners are known to have existed in South Wales and many of them are preserved at the South Wales Miners' Library at Swansea University. They have been used in protests, marches and demonstrations, including during the 1972, 1974 and 1984-85 miners' strikes. Swansea University draws on this amazing collection for an online exhibition to explore the images, colours and slogans and their meanings. And you can have a go at designing your own banner.

The full Being Human 2020 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. **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
2. **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.

3. **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.
4. **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 @ahrpress.
5. **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.