

Being Human – where problems find solutions

Look around. Urban decay appears to have accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic doesn't it? It's certainly more visible with all the empty shops, shuttered businesses and general upkeep that has fallen by the wayside.

So the 'Urban decay and regeneration' sub-theme of this year's Being Human festival, the annual celebration of humanities research led by the School of Advanced Study (SAS) at the University of London, has heightened relevance and dynamism. Particularly as problems need solutions – and the humanities can provide the research and tools for regeneration.

Humanities research is proving itself crucial during the pandemic, says Professor Sarah Churchwell, the festival's director. 'The high streets of our towns and cities are some of the places where the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have been most visible. We've all seen the shuttered shops, bars, and venues, recognised the livelihoods threatened, the isolation facing everyone. The changes in our cities often register as loss, but people are also being profoundly creative in reimagining urban spaces around them. As our programme demonstrates, the humanities are helping people transform their cities and respond to a time of profound anxiety with adaptation and inspiration.'

Luckily for its fans, Being Human, which is run in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy, has proved itself an event that Covid-19 simply couldn't cancel. The 2020 festival features an impressive 220 events exploring this year's 'New Worlds' main theme from 12 to 22 November.

And our 'Urban decay and regeneration' sub-theme (there are four others: Culture and politics; Social inclusivity and equalities; Open spaces, landscapes and health; Museums and collections) has plenty to engage with. Like [Mining Migrations](#), organised by Keele University in partnership with Urban Wilderness CIC.

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](#).

Other 'Urban decay and regeneration' highlights include:

- [Sensing Sugaropolis](#). 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.
- [Alternative Aberdeens](#) (organised by the University of Aberdeen). Come along to this online creative writing workshop and 'in conversation' event and be inspired to imagine alternative pasts, presents and futures in Aberdeen. In the afternoon (4–6pm) participants can create different kinds of alternative worlds

with the guidance of professional authors and spoken word artists. Then in the evening (6.30–7.30) Jane Alexander, author of two acclaimed speculative fiction novels, Helen Lynch, writer of short fiction with a historical twist, and Mae Diansangu and Hanna Louise (spoken word duo behind Hysteria, Aberdeen-based showcase for alternative voices), will discuss their writing practice, how they create alternative worlds in their own work, and answer questions from the audience.

- [Global Derbyshire in 10 Objects](#) (organised by the University of Derby). This series of ten mini podcasts looks at how objects in the collections of Derby Museums, Derby Local Studies and Family History Library and Derbyshire Record Office can be the start of larger stories and honest conversations about the city's past, present and future. Through themes of exploration, exploitation and Empire, discover how these collections connect the local to the global, and how they continue to shape the city and county.

If you are more in the mood for humanities culture snacking, get the kettle on and drop in to one of the Being Human Cafes for a cuppa. They include [Bolton's Literary Heritage Café](#) where you can discover the lost literary heritage of Bolton's past and find out why the town was so important to writers such as Walt Whitman, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Thomas Hardy.

These are just samples of some of the free public online and socially distanced face-to-face activities taking place across the UK.

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.

Ends

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 @ahrcpress.
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.