

Start
creative

writing

They say that everyone has a book in them, but few actually put digit to keyboard. If we are all so creative, where does the aspiring author start? Denise Smith can help.

Whitstable-based writer and teacher Linda James says that writers are born observers. She says: "If you want to become a writer, study people and events; listen to how people speak, how they walk, how they interact with others." Carrying a notebook and writing down observations is useful. Overheard snippets of conversation in a queue or on the bus can inspire all sorts of themes and situations.

Writing requires commitment, but it seems that many succumb to 'the enemy within'. Despite all the big ideas and the passion, many aspiring authors are simply unable to sit down and get on with it. They listen to that little inner voice that provides excuses not to start. Deciding which part of the day is best helps; whether it is 2am or 2pm, writing for 10 minutes every day will create the habit of writing.

Your subject matter may be a personal passion or an event or situation you have experienced. However, if you haven't decided on a topic, Canterbury Laureate Sarah Salway suggests going to the library. "This will help work out what sort of book you want to read – those are the best books to write."

Some people find that taking a course on creative writing can give them the confidence to start, and there are many in the area to choose from. Linda, who runs writing workshops, suggests that a writing tutor can "guide you with their expertise, inspiration and know-how into how to get published".

Sarah agrees that beginner writers should join groups to meet other writers, not least because family and friends don't always understand that sitting at a desk scribbling is actually very hard work!

Finally, it is important to enjoy what you are doing, but to become a published writer, you have to keep going and finish. Linda says. "You must have the tenacity to overcome numerous rejections and believe I AM A REAL WRITER."

Courses

The Horsebridge Arts and Community Centre, Whitstable. Writing workshop with Linda James
From January, every Sunday, 2-4pm
More info and to book a place: writingunderwater@tiscali.co.uk or T: 07969 051064

The Horsebridge Arts and Community Centre, Whitstable. Writing – Stage, Screen and TV
10-week morning class, cost £90
Starts 12 January
More info and to book a place: 0845 606 5606

Canterbury Adult Education Centre. 10-week evening classes, cost £90
Starts 9 January

- Creative Writing for All
- Creative Writing – Further your Skills
- Creative Writing – Advanced

More info and to book a place: 0845 606 5606

Books

Get Started in Creative Writing: Teach Yourself by Stephen May. Publisher: Teach Yourself. **RRP £10.99**

Poetry Writing: The Expert Guide by Fiona Sampson
Publisher: Robert Hale Ltd. **RRP £12.99**

A crown of words

Celebrated Kent author Sarah Salway is the new Canterbury Laureate and Index writer Denise Smith asked her a few questions about the post.



"It's a great honour for me," says Sarah, "especially being based in Canterbury, which has such a rich literary heritage."

Working through the Canterbury Festival, Sarah is the figurehead for some exciting literature developing across the district.

The particular scheme Sarah will be involved in is an intergenerational writing project 'Wise Words'. She will work with teacher trainees at Canterbury Christ Church University and Writing MA students from the University of Kent to design workshops for community groups aged under 18 and over 60. "It'll be really exciting to see what happens, not least because the words written by a seven year old may be just as wise as those written by a 70 year old!"

The Laureateship is an annual programme that partners Canterbury City Council with the Canterbury Festival, and the crown passes to another writer next year.

A Laureate is normally associated with poetry, but this is not the case for Sarah. "We'll be using all kinds of writing, including letters and text messages. There's a wealth of writing initiatives already established in the area, and I'm very much looking forward to working alongside them."

In addition to this venture, Sarah will also be working on her own writing project. This will use different methods of telling stories, and will be based on the green spaces around the Canterbury district from formal gardens to woodlands.

Sarah got into writing as a child by keeping a diary. She went into journalism from school, and worked for magazines and newspapers, including *Cosmopolitan* and *The Scotsman*.

Index Poetry
Seeds (after Palm Sunday, Anselm Keifer) by Sarah Salway

Deep in the root ball of the ship
the plant collector is making a nest.

He counts his catch, tucks each seed
in its own hand-labeled box, ebony
cabinet ticking with paused hearts.
He dreams one day of growing

a fresh desert, of dried moments
in the old land coming back to life.

And as he waters the dust, sailors
sleep and no-one sees the wooden

mast dancing in tune to the wind's
song until, reaching for water, it leans

too far, loses balance. White sails,
like baby gowns, christen the sea.

It wasn't until she had a family that she started to write creatively.

Sarah has since published three novels and a collection of short stories. Her first poetry collection, *You Do Not Need Another Self-Book Book* will be published by the Kent poetry press, Pindrop in early 2012.

Her last novel *Getting the Picture* was published in 2010, and you can learn more about her work at www.sarahsalway.net

Writers of note

Canterbury and its surrounding area have been home and inspiration for many literary greats, says Denise Smith

Geoffrey Chaucer, author of the Canterbury Tales, springs readily to mind, and poet and playwright Christopher Marlowe.

William Somerset Maugham was brought up in Whitstable by his aunt and uncle, and used his local knowledge in 'Of Human Bondage', where Whitstable became Blackstable and Canterbury became Tercanbury. More recently, Joseph Conrad wrote his last five novels at his home in Bishopsbourne.

The literary role doesn't end in the past though; the current Canterbury locale boasts some good writers, and an excellent creative space. Run by Canterbury City Council, 'The Little Blue Hut' on the Tankerton Slopes provides a residency for creative practitioners. Local poets Nancy Charley and Nicky Gould each spent a month there this year.

Canterbury also encourages its local authors. The annual John Hayes Canterbury Award rewards the best piece of work relating to Canterbury. Past winners have included Margaret Sparks, renowned local historian and prolific author, whose 1965 book about the Parish of Wytham is still in print.

The 2010 winner was Paul Crampton, with 'Canterbury Suburbs and Surroundings'. Paul has written five novels, his first, 'Strangers in Focus', published in 2005. Canterbury born and raised, Paul has written more than a dozen non-fiction works. He is currently working on two Canterbury-based books. One combines religion and history with conspiracy theories. The other is a history of the Cathedral Precincts.

Another local scribe is Laurie Stone from Blean. He was a journalist when he met Dragons' Den favourite Theo

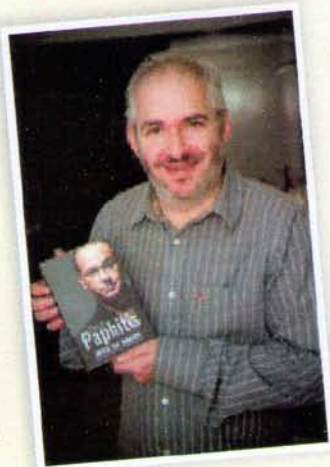


Paphitis. Laurie pitched the idea of ghost-writing his autobiography and the successful entrepreneur and boss of Ryman co-operated. The project culminated in Enter The Dragon being published a couple of years ago.

University of Kent lecturer Nancy Gaffield has also been recognised this year for her first poetry collection, which won the influential Aldeburgh Prize. Tokaido Road was published earlier this summer and the poems engage with Hiroshige's woodblock print series, Fifty Three Stages of the Tokaido.

Nancy completed the MA degree in Creative Writing at the University of Kent in 2009.

For information about The Little Blue Hut, see www.creativecanterbury.com



Mary had a little bear...

Most people have heard of the Tourtel roundabout in Canterbury but have you ever wondered where this strange name comes from? It is Mary Tourtel, the creator of Rupert Bear.



Mary was born in 1874, daughter of a stone mason and stained glass artist.

After studying at the Sidney Cooper School of Art in Canterbury, Mary became a children's book illustrator.

Mary married Herbert Tourtel, a sub-editor at the Daily Express. At that time, the paper was in fierce competition with the Daily Mail, which had a comic strip called 'Teddy Tail', and the Daily Mirror's 'Pip, Squeak and Wilfred'.

Henry arranged for his wife to draw a small cartoon feature to compete, and on 8 November 1920, the 'Little Lost Bear' was published. Eventually to be known as Rupert, the original bear was brown, only turning white when the Express cut its inking expenses. Mary went on to write 36 episodes.

Her stories refer to a magic river. Some say this is the River Nailbourne, which flows through the Elham Valley. A chalk stream, it only flows in wet winters and disappears during dry periods.

After writing and illustrating 46 books about Rupert, her failing eyesight forced Mary to retire in 1934. She died in 1948 and is buried in St Martin's Churchyard. Mary Tourtel left a great legacy, and some of her original drawings and other Rupert memorabilia can be seen in the Rupert Bear Museum, part of the Museum of Canterbury. Little Rupert's story time takes place at the Museum on Thursday 8 December, 10.30 to 11.30am. Join Rupert Bear and friends for stories, singing and a creative activity for 2-5 year olds. The cost is £3 per child, with one accompanying adult free.

Visit www.downlandcycles.co.uk for a route to follow the 'magic' River Nailbourne.

