Havering’s inaugural literary festival promises to be an eclectic mix of local talent and well-known names

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Cracking the spine of a newly bought book is one of life’s simple pleasures. So is loosing yourself in the pages of a beloved, dog-eared novel.

November welcomes Havering’s first literary festival; an event that hopes to fuel the love of stories and books among residents. It will champion local tales and internationally acclaimed names in a programme that is set to captivate audiences, regardless of interests or age. In a line-up where emerging and established home-grown talents sit side-by-side household names, the festival will also celebrate the diverse experience among the residents and various community pockets.

Organised by the local council, councillor Viddy Persaud, cabinet member for culture said: “The festival is an opportunity for us to bring communities from across the borough together and encourage residents of all ages to enjoy reading and further their interest in books.”

But the festival is more than just books. Spread across 10 libraries and venues, including the National Trust’s Rainham Hall, there are talks on history, music and sport, as well as creative writing workshops for the budding writers out there. Also included on the line-up are activities to delight the younger audiences and that are sure to inspire further creativity. Fans of the British Bake Off will enjoy 2016 winner Candice Brown as she talks about life after winning Britain’s most mouth-watering show, and Jeffery Archer is sure to entertain audiences for an evening. Lovers of the crime fiction are spoilt – authors and scriptwriters of this seedy genre feature prominently, a testament to its enduring popularity. So whether you like thrillers or memoirs, or singing in rhyme, Havering Literary Festival has a gem or two waiting for you.
The festival programme showcases locally grown talent as well as covering literature’s many inroads. Whether you’re a budding writer, a history buff, or young scientist, the festival will have something for you. Here are just a few stand-out events you should make a note of.

Tony Cottee and Tony Gale
Two West Ham legends will once again enthral and captivate a crowd as they recall career highs and the on-field antics from their time as two of England’s top footballers. Local lad Tony Cottee was a striker from 1982 to 2001. Even though he fell slightly short of making 300 goals in competition, he was one of England’s most prolific goal-scorers in his time. For half of Gale’s 21-year career as a footballer, he donned the maroon and blue West Ham jersey, and won a Premier League title with Blackburn.
November 12; Rainham Library; 7:30pm

Kimberley Chambers
In an evening that will detail an unconventional career path and creative prowess, the Queen of Gangland Crime, Dagenham-born Kimberly Chambers will regale how she came to claim her place at the throne. After working at a stall in Roman Road Market, DJs at local pubs and driving a cab around Romford, Chambers took pen to paper at 38 and finished her first book in a year. She went on to establish herself as a much-loved crime writer, releasing her 13th book in January this year.
November 19; Harold Hill Library; 7:30pm

Ross Baker
Havering-born Ross Baker, author of The Magical Rainbow Bus of Fun, will host several story time sessions across two days. Illustrated by Gessami Dato, the picture book was self-published with the help of a kick-starter crowdfunding campaign which raised £1740. Upon becoming a father in 2013, and entering the colourful and sometimes peculiar world of story-time, Baker decided to give writing his own book a go. The Magical Rainbow Bus of Fun is a rhyming tale about a bright and magical bus that has 10 floors, each one a new fantastical world for children to explore.
November 9 at Collier Row 10am, Gidea Park 11:30am, Elm Park 2pm; November 10 at Upminster 11:15, Harold Wood 12:30pm, South Hornchurch 1:45pm

Ensonglopedia of Science
It’s not often a whole team of scientists fact-check a song for children, but Ensonglopedia of Science has been peer reviewed by some of the best academics and scientists in the UK. In rhyme, and in alphabetical order, award-winning John Hinton makes a big song and dance about science. Each of the 26 songs that make up the performance take inquisitive young minds through the black holes and the quantum physics of science with wit, and a little bit of gospel singing and interpretive dance as well. The show was nominated for Primary Times Children’s Choice Award at the Brighton Fringe Festival in 2017. Hinton will also host a workshop for a few lucky participants in science song writing. The workshop will cover rhyme, structure, analogy and word painting, and of course, science.
November 7; Romford Library; workshop, 5pm; event, 7pm

Creative Writing Workshop with Erin Kelly
In her creative writing workshop, best-selling crime author Erin Kelly, will delve into the tricks of the trade. She will go through how to create engaging characters and build the kind of suspense that will suck readers into the story until the very last word. Romford-raised Kelly will also offer sage advice on how to impress agents and editors, something she knows a thing or two about given her psychological thriller hit. He Said, She Said, made it on the Sunday Times Best Seller list and she was tasked with adapting the BAFTA winning series Broadchurch into a novel. Following the workshop she joins crime writer, Mark Billingham in an in-conversation. Several of the author’s novels have been adapted for TV, including his Tom Thorne detective series and novels In The Dark, Rush Of Blood and Die Of Shame.
November 8; Collier Row Library; workshop, 3:30pm; In-conversation with Mark Billingham, 7:30pm

Harold Hill History Talk
November marks the passing of 70 years since occupants of the first permanent home in Harold Hill moved in. And so this local history talk is a timely event. Havering’s local history librarian Simon Donoghue and local historian Don Tait take audience members back to the early days of the Harold Hill and Noak Hill area. The two history buffs published a book together to commemorate the area’s 50th anniversary in 1998, which included stories on famous visitors, plans to build a post-war housing estate in Harold Hill, as well as the tales of past residents and how the community grew over time.
November 13; Harold Hill Library; 2:30pm

The Havering Literary Festival is on November 5 to 24. For further information visit eventbrite.co.uk/o/havering-libraries-17797439061 or follow HaveringLiteraryFestival on social media.