

Report to Patrons and Benefactors

August 2025

The Winter 2024 and Spring 2025 Festivals have again shown that the CLF audience's curiosity and appetite for a rich programme of events continues to dazzle us.

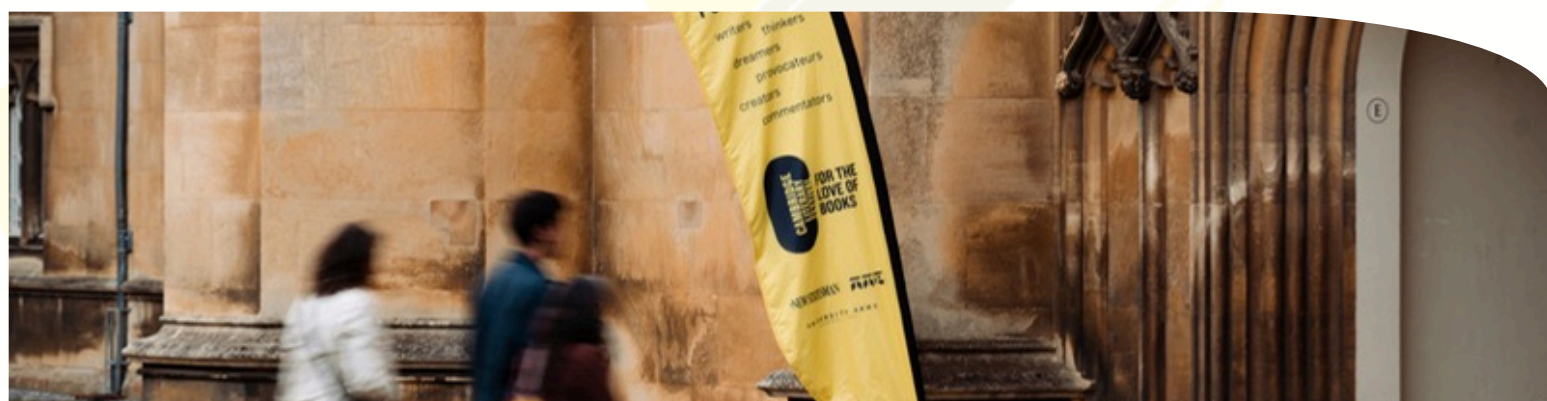
In turbulent times, where copyright, freedom of expression and even of thought are at risk, our Festival continues to provide a vital space for reflection and inspiration, and a platform to address the issues of our time with depth and expertise. This year in particular, the Festival opened doors into spaces within this city that may not be visited by some, and welcomed people to share their art, their stories and knowledge with many.

Thank you, as ever, for your support of the Festival. Your generosity plays a critical role in fostering creativity, opening access to culture and contributing to this rich cultural offering within Cambridge. We cannot do it without you.

Key highlights and achievements for the year

A double-bill one-off event in September 2024 whetted the appetite of the audience ahead of our Winter Festival. **Elif Shafak** and **Oliver Burkeman** addressed packed rooms; further one-offs featured **Dr Suzanne O'Sullivan**, Nobel Prize Laureate **Abdulrazak Gurnah**, **Rob Macfarlane** and **Lord Heseltine**.

We staged two Festivals featuring 135 speakers, including globally renowned and emerging novelists, poets and writers, household names from the worlds of stage, film and TV as well as incisive Cambridge academics, art lovers, environmental campaigners, economists, broadcasters and political heavyweights.



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The **Cambridge Series** again platformed world-leading Cambridge University academics in a range of events for the intellectually curious: **Helen Charman** provided a radical case for liberated motherhood, **Neil Lawrence** interrogated what AI means for our identity, **Barbara Sahakian** and **Christelle Langley** provided new perspectives on improving brain health, **Joycelyn Longdon** inspired us to use climate action as a shared goal and **Michael Banner**, Dean of Trinity College, made the case for why Britain should pay reparations for historic wrongs to present Caribbean inhabitants.



The third *A Room of One's Own Lecture* was delivered by Bloomsbury scholar **Frances Spalding**, providing a riveting backdrop to the history and reception of Virginia Woolf's landmark text; a limited-edition commemorative pamphlet was produced and distributed to ticket holders.



Fiction and poetry featured fulsomely. Iconic novelists **Ali Smith** and **Alan Hollinghurst** lit up the nights in November, while Booker Prize winner **Samantha Harvey** launched our Spring Festival with her extraordinary novel *Orbital*. With Irish writing in the ascendant, our annual debut novelists panel was devoted to Irish Writers, and we welcomed an exceptional trio of talent: **Roisín O'Donnell**, **Garrett Carr** and **Louise Hegarty** delighted audiences and in return enjoyed long signing queues.



Poets, actors and wordsmiths such as **Michael Rosen**, **David Larbi**, **Harriet Walter** and **Hollie McNish** took us on a tour of the English language in all its idiosyncrasies.

Anniversary events marking literary greats featured at both Winter and Spring Festivals. The extraordinary legacies of **James Baldwin**, **F. Scott Fitzgerald** and **Jane Austen** were each discussed in panel events to sold-out audiences.

The climate crisis, nature and the environment were explored in events that challenged, delighted and inspired us to act, with **Mike Berners-Lee**, **Tony Juniper**, **Helen Czerski**, **Helen Scales**, **Guy Shrubsole**, **Chloe Dalton** and **Tom Heap**.

We continued our partnership with the *New Statesman*, hosting **Breakfast with the Editors**, the **New Statesman Debate**, and inviting *New Statesman* journalists to chair events.

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The debating chamber of the Cambridge Union was put to its traditional use in our annual **New Statesman Debate**. The motion was carried: *This house believes private schools should be abolished*.

Our third annual **State of the Nation Lecture** drew a capacity crowd as award-winning journalist, author, broadcaster and academic **Gary Younge** addressed the Cambridge Union to speak on immigration, freedom and the economy and set out his priorities for what we need to change to improve our country.

We livestreamed sold out events to ensure that popular events remain available to all. We continued to add events to CLF Player, to reach a global audience. This now includes over 420 recordings.

CLF Funding

Cambridge Literary Festival is a registered charity (1153944). Our objective is the advancement of education for the benefit of the public by the promotion of literature, language and the arts in particular through a literary festival in Cambridge.

We have a mixed funding model that includes ticket income, sponsorships, donations, memberships and grant funding.

This diverse range of income enables the festival to provide a high-quality range of events, widen access to culture and develop a growing programme of outreach activities. We are registered with the Fundraising Regulator, and we follow the FR code of practice.



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Children's events

At a time when reading habits amongst children are changing, we responded with a free Children's Festival and welcomed a throng of talented children's authors.

Our annual free Schools Day extended its offer to primary schools in addition to secondary schools with two outstanding events at the Cambridge Union in May 2025.

244 children from local state primary schools were welcomed to an event with award-winning author **Patrice Lawrence**; a further 257 state secondary school students were enthralled by **Jason Reynolds** in conversation with **Guy Gunaratne** on Jason's verse novel *Long Way Down*.

Both audiences exceeded expectation with the scale and detail of their questions. Every pupil went home with a free book.

Over 2,100 free tickets to our Children's Festival were given away to children and families. We worked with local schools to ensure that tickets reached families from all backgrounds and we will build on learnings of how we distribute tickets for future free children's events.

Cressida Cowell, Jacqueline Wilson, Jamie Smart and Katie Kirby were among those who delighted and dazzled hordes of children on the Cambridge Union stage and in the historic Union Library, a beautiful bookish space for young readers.

Cressida Cowell was awarded the CLF Contribution to Children's Reading Award.

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Free tickets & concessions

In addition to the 2100 free tickets for the children's Festival, we also provided free tickets for young people leaving care, NHS workers and beneficiaries of cancer charity Something To Look Forward To. 10% of all tickets were sold as concessions as part of our efforts to widen access to the festival.



Free library event & free books

We held a free children's event in Cambridge City Library during Spring half-term. We gave away 130+ books to Cambridgeshire libraries, in addition to the 501 books given to children and young people on the Schools Day.



Working with schools

We partnered with Cambridge City Council on a Heritage Lottery Funded schools project celebrating 150 years of the Cambridge Corn Exchange.

Published children's authors worked in five Cambridge schools delivering a series of creative writing workshops.





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Festival bestsellers

Winter 2024

Mackenzie Crook | *If Nick Drake Came to My House*

Patrick Grant | *Less*

Michael Rosen | *A Life in Writing*

Rupert Everett | *The American No*

Tim Spector | *The Food for Life Cookbook*

David Nicholls | *You Are Here*

Led By Donkeys | *Adventures in Art, Activism and Accountability*

Hollie McNish | *Lobster: An Evening of Poetry*

Zandra Rhodes | *Iconic*

Harriet Walter | *She Speaks! What Shakespeare's Women Might Have Said*

Spring 2025

Samantha Harvey | *Orbital*

Ash Sarkar | *Minority Rule: Adventures in the Culture War*

Andrew Marr, Helen Lewis, Hannah Barnes & Megan Gibson | *Breakfast with the Editors*

Danny Dorling | *Seven Children: Inequality and Britain's Next Generation*

George Monbiot | *Neoliberalism & How It Came to Control Your Life*

Helena Kelly, Alex Clark & Bharat Tandon | *The Life, Writing & Legacy of Jane Austen*

Ilan Pappé | *What's Next for Israel & Palestine*

Anthony Horowitz | *Literary Lunch*

Michael Heseltine | *An Urgent Agenda to Rebuild Britain*

Ian Hislop, Helen Lewis, Andrew Hunter Murray & Adam Macqueen | *Private Eye Podcast Live*

Richard Ayoade | *The Unfinished Harauld Hughes*

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“ Thank you for organising such a brilliant event. My year 9 son has gone to bed early to finish reading. Something that hasn't happened in a long time.

“ You have a terrific Festival, expertly organised and staffed

“ An unforgettable trip! Cambridge is so beautiful and interesting. The lecture was a highlight—especially the free book, sparking my intrigue with its unorthodox themes and experimental word spacing choices. As someone with a passion for reading, I loved it! Educational, inspiring, and just awesome. - Holly - year 10

“ These two weekends are the highlight of my year.

“ It is such a special event and my experience of you has been so organised and warm - thank you thank you.

“ How you manage to organise such a large event and keep everything to time, ensure we all find our event venue and seat and opportunity to purchase books is truly amazing. I stand in awe of such a feat! Well done everyone.

“ Congratulations ... every aspect of your Festival seemed to be running brilliantly well!

“ We are so grateful to the organisers of CLF who went above and beyond in supporting Concrete Rose... Not only did they generously provide complimentary tickets for our young people and hosts, they also arranged for us to meet with Ashley and enabled us to promote our cause throughout the day.

Hearing from a Cambridge graduate with care-experience who has triumphed in spite of hardship was truly inspiring and Ashley's warmth and kindness will certainly stay with our young people.

