



## PRESS RELEASE

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13 March

### **Worcestershire poet launches new book inspired by the unforgettable story of the people who saved the region's canals**

Poet Heather Wastie will this week be launching her new collection – *The Muck and Shovel Brigade* - to kick start *The Ring*, a major new arts programme for Worcestershire.

The book is inspired by the decades long restoration of the Droitwich Canals, which resulted in the reconnection of the Mid-Worcestershire Ring in 2011, a 21-mile route, running from Droitwich to the River Severn and from there to the open sea.

Heather's work gives an insight into some of the people who helped to restore the canals and includes the photography archive of restoration pioneer Max Sinclair. The poems and photographs come together to create a unique artwork, conjuring the spirit of the 'muck and shovel brigade'.

Heather will be performing poems from the book during *The Ring's* launch party at the Diglis House Hotel in Worcester this Thursday, and at a public performance at The Railway Inn, Droitwich on Wednesday, 4 April at 2pm. The 15 March is also the official start of *The Ring* - supported by the Canal & River Trust, the charity that cares for the nation's waterways - which will see a series of events and installations around the 21-mile waterway route throughout spring and summer. It will feature internationally acclaimed artists who will be working with local communities to create a series of unexpected and inspiring artworks that explore the heritage, ecology and people along the urban and rural waterways of Worcestershire.

Heather says: "I grew up boating on canals with my family, and some of my first memories are of meeting the Sinclairs by the water. It's been fascinating to revisit this era and see again the amazing work and ingenuity that saw local people battle to save the canals. I remember the Droitwich canals when they were derelict and overgrown. To walk along them now, so full of life and nature, and to hear the stories about how this came to be is inspiring. You learn so much from visiting the water, speaking to people and writing about it too. I hope my collection, together with Max's photos, can go some way to telling this unforgettable story of local people working hard for something they loved and thought was important."

Ian Sinclair, son of Max, says of Heather's book: "This book highlights the beauty of the two canals and the people who battled to bring these waterways back into use as a navigation and a local amenity, instead of what had become an open sewer through the town and an inaccessible

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corridor through the Worcestershire countryside. I hope you enjoy my father's photographs and get to experience this special place for yourself."

Tim Eastop, producer of the Canal & River Trust's *Arts on the Waterways* programme says: "We're looking forward to a fantastic spring and summer that will see a variety of arts, events and installations created along the region's waterways. We're delighted to be launching *The Ring* with Heather's collection of poems, coupled with Max Sinclair's photography, which are a unique snapshot of the life of Worcestershire's canals."

Cathy Mager, Artistic Director of *The Ring*, adds: "When Ian Sinclair contacted me in 2016 to tell me about the work of his father Max and all those who took part in this restoration project, I immediately knew that it would be a vital to *The Ring's* artistic programme. Heather has captured the story of the restoration beautifully in her poems. *The Ring* and all its exciting new artworks are the direct legacy of the efforts of these inspirational volunteers."

Heather Wastie was born and lived in the Black Country until moving to Worcestershire in 2006. She was Worcestershire Poet Laureate 2015-16 and is well known for her interpretations of oral history. As Writer in Residence at the Museum of Carpet in 2013, she turned people's memories into poems, monologues and songs which were published under the title *Weaving Yarns* (by Black Pear Press in 2015). In total she has now had five illustrated poetry collections published. In 2017, she was commissioned by Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust to compose a children's song cycle to celebrate the restoration of the Weavers' Cottages in Kidderminster. She has also worked as poet and actor for National Trust property, Croome Court. She spends much of her time writing and touring theatre, poetry and songs about women on the waterways with writer and actor, Kate Saffin for Alarum Theatre. The show is touring in Worcestershire this April to tie in with *The Ring* celebrations. See [www.WastiesSpace.co.uk](http://www.WastiesSpace.co.uk) for more information about Heather's work.

For more information about *The Ring* visit [www.theringart.org.uk](http://www.theringart.org.uk) or for enquiries and updates about the project contact *The Ring* project team: [theringworcs@gmail.com](mailto:theringworcs@gmail.com)

For more information about the Canal & River Trust, including how to volunteer, please visit [canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://canalrivertrust.org.uk)

**ENDS**

### **Notes to editors**

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### ***The Ring***

This project has become a leading project of the Worcestershire Arts Strategy '1000 Days' following initial meetings led by the Worcestershire Arts Partnership.

Project partners include: Arts Council England, Canal & River Trust, Worcestershire County Council, Worcestershire Arts Partnership, Wychavon District Council, University of Worcester,

Worcester City Council, Meadow Arts, Destination Worcestershire, South Wales and Severn Waterways Partnership, For Droitwich Spa, Worcester, Birmingham and Droitwich Canals Society, Droitwich Arts Network, Sustrans, Museums Worcestershire, New Art West Midlands, Droitwich Waterways Trust and Museum of Royal Worcester.

Web: [www.theringart.org.uk](http://www.theringart.org.uk)

Facebook: @TheRingWorcs

Twitter: @TheRingWorcs

Instagram: TheRingWorcs

The artists confirmed for *The Ring* are:

- ***Rich White, Occupation (Diglis Island Residency), Diglis Island, Worcester (March - Sept 2018)***  
Bristol-based sculptor Rich White will be taking residence on and exploring the heritage of Diglis Island, during which he will explore the island's history and future, and create a temporary, large-scale sculpture, entitled *Occupation*. Visible from the towpath, the work will evoke a bygone era of huge activity on the island, harking back to when, amongst other things, it was a centre of waterways maintenance, production and manufacturing. Research and in-progress reports will be documented on his project website.
- ***Heather Wastie, The Muck and Shovel Brigade, Droitwich Canals. View an e-book of Heather's poems on-line from 19 March 2018***  
Former Worcestershire Poet Laureate, Heather Wastie was introduced as a child to the canals of the West Midlands. She has written a series of poems that sparkle with wit and warmth, inspired by the Droitwich Canals, the people who restored them and the photography archive of Max Sinclair, documenting the completion of the Mid-Worcestershire Ring canal system: its journey from an overgrown, unloved place to the lively network it is today was a labour of love for hundreds of volunteers over decades. This limited edition book of poems and photographs conjures the spirit of the 'muck and shovel brigade'.
- ***Katy Beinart, Saltways, Vines Park, Droitwich and Droitwich Heritage Centre (May - Sept 2018)***  
Brighton-based interdisciplinary artist Katy Beinart will explore Droitwich's historic past as a salt production centre, exporting salt around the world via vital canal routes and other 'Saltways'. In a symbolic journey that mirrors the 'Saltways' routes, a heritage working boat will travel from Gloucester Docks to Droitwich carrying a sculptural pavilion based on the old saltworks, to be filled with salt from around the world and locally produced Droitwich Salt. Droitwich was founded on its natural salt brine springs and, at its peak, exported 120,000 tonnes of salt a year. The Salt Pavilion will be displayed at the Salt Museum in Droitwich Heritage Centre until early September before departing on board a working boat as part of Salt Fest. The canal was reopened in 2011 following a major restoration programme, including the Netherwich Canal Basin

which was the terminus of the Barge Canal where larger vessels came to pick up salt from the brine springs.

- **NEON, Weorgoran Pavilion, South Quay, Worcester City Centre (15 - 24 June 2018)**

As summer arrives *the Weorgoran Pavilion* will appear in the centre of Worcester. Prepare to be mesmerised by this innovative performance pavilion and its vibrant programme of literature, music, dance and workshops led by local artists. The stage's vibrant design is the creation of NEON, a design studio that works between the disciplines of art and architecture. The sculptural pavilion takes its inspiration from the Saxon origins of the name Worcester and its ancient translation, "the people of the winding river". NEON is an award-winning art, architecture and design practice that who are experienced at producing public projects at an urban scale. Their work engages with the public, transforms the ordinary into extraordinary and creates moments of surprise and excitement. They are fascinated with initiating an emotional response, stopping people in their tracks and breaking the monotony of the everyday.

- **Dave Crowe, Shire Skies, South Quay, Worcester City Centre (15 - 24 June 2018)**

Beatboxer Dave Crowe and *Stranger Faces* headline our opening night performances on *The River Spectacle* stage (15 June) with a lively mix of funk and beatbox sounds. Dave Crowe has created a site-specific soundscape especially for *The River Spectacle* stage, working with local choirs to compose an atmospheric and mysterious recording inspired by *The Ring's* waterways, which will play at selected times. He says, "The waterways of this beautiful landscape have linked the communities for millennia, yet they reflect at all times the vastness of the skies that bring us the water flow needed to have such a precious link with one another."

Dave Crowe began his career as a street beatboxer in Ledbury, mimicking and morphing environmental sounds of his home town into spectacular vocal compositions. His music videos have since gone viral, commanding multimillion hits on YouTube. He performs around the world with his bands *HeyMoonShaker* and *Stranger Faces*.

- **Emily Speed, Hollowware, Diglis Canal Basin, Worcester (August 2018)**

Working with the Museum of Royal Worcester, sited a short walk from *The Ring's* route, Emily Speed presents an interactive performance work. Explore the museum and then encounter a costumed character, emerging from a narrowboat to share tales of the curious and fantastical history of Royal Worcester Porcelain, which owes its success to the international transport links provided by the waterways. Commissioned by Meadow Arts as part of a major autumn exhibition at Museum of Royal Worcester, Emily Speed utilises ceramics, costume, architecture and performance to explore themes of shelter and the personal histories of inhabitants of buildings. Emily has looked at the museum's archives and its symbiotic relationship to the canal and river network, as well as how the decorations of canal boats link to the fine art traditions of porcelain production.

- **Lucy McLauchlan, Opening the Floodgates, Oil Dock Basin, Worcester (August - September 2018)**

Lucy is one of the UK's leading female street artists. Her internationally acclaimed, large-scale monochromatic paintings combine ancient, almost prehistorical influences with graphic sensibilities. Lucy will be creating a new work for *The Ring* in Worcester

throughout the spring and summer. Her career has seen her exhibit in galleries, museums and festivals across the globe, creating work using a 'one-take' philosophy that rejects extensive preparation using digital tools. Her commissions have adorned multi-story buildings across Europe, gigantic billboards in China, huts in The Gambia, windows in Japan, walls in Moscow's Red Square, water towers in Italy, a Norwegian lighthouse, Detroit car parks and abandoned NYC subway tunnels. Within the UK, Lucy infamously created the 'Todo es posible!' mural in 2010 on the outside of the former brutalist Birmingham Central Library, while four of her works are in the Victoria & Albert Museum permanent collection.

### **Arts on the Waterways**

The *Arts on the Waterways* programme is supported through Arts Council England and Arts Council Wales. It provides artists with time and space along the waterways where they can slow down, research and make ambitious new work responding to important social, environmental and heritage questions. The Canal & River Trust believes that *living waterways transform places and enrich lives* and the role of the Trust is to ensure there is always a place on your doorstep where you can escape the pressures of everyday life, stretch your legs and simply feel closer to nature.

[www.canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk)

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