



Announcing Britain's new Canal Laureate 2022: Roy McFarlane



**PRESS
RELEASE**

**Embargoed until
8 December**

The Poetry Society and the Canal & River Trust are delighted to announce the appointment of Britain's new Canal Laureate: Roy McFarlane.

Poet Roy grew up in Birmingham and the Black Country, surrounded by canals. He says:

“I lived, played and loved by canals and rivers and am looking forward to recapturing those stories; tales of diverse communities in urban settings who lived with canals in their backyard.”

During lockdown, Roy, like many of us, spent a lot of time outdoors. He retraced routes along his local canal towpath and developed a newfound understanding of how waterways can become sites and spaces for wellbeing and an aid to mental health.

Roy begins his role as Canal Laureate this month, following in the wake of poets Nancy Campbell (Canal Laureate 2018-9), 2021 Forward Prize-winning Luke Kennard (2016-17) and Jo Bell (inaugural Canal Laureate, 2013-15).

During his Laureateship, Roy is interested to explore how people feel about their local canals currently, and how our national and global history can be read in the story of the canal network's development. He adds:

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“I’ll be exploring stories of women, labour and migration in the building of these canals, and how that contributed to the Industrial Revolution with its hidden histories of colonialism and imperialism.”

Roy will be both writing his own poems, and working with various groups of canal users, including boaters, to create new collaborative works. His first project will involve a canal walk on the shortest day of the year, to be followed by return visits on the Equinoxes and the longest day. Other projects with a wellbeing, nature or history focus will follow – and canal communities who would like to get involved with them should contact The Poetry Society for the latest updates.

Established in 2013 by The Poetry Society and the Canal & River Trust, the Canal Laureateship aims to encourage exciting new writing about the Britain’s historic canal network. Previous Laureateships have seen poems stencilled onto towpaths in biodegradable paint, designed into new lock-beams, and translated into short films. Poets have drawn on conversations with boaters and engineers, kayakers, lock-keepers and litter-pickers, delved into archives, and given new life to forgotten classics in performances, publication and animations.

Canal poetry has been celebrated at venues and events including: the Hay Festival, the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Birmingham Literature Festival, National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port, London’s Southbank Centre and Crick Boat Show, Braunston Historic Boat Show, Welshpool Poetry Festival, Market Bosworth Festival, Leeds Liverpool Biennial, and in a dedicated canal edition of BBC Radio 4’s *Poetry Please*.

The project is part of the Arts on the Waterways programme, a partnership between the Canal & River Trust and Arts Council England to attract new audiences for both the waterways and the arts, working with a range of partners and engaging actively with local communities.

Richard Parry, chief executive at Canal & River Trust, said:

“Every one of our Canal Laureates has shown us the waterways through new eyes. Roy is passionate about telling the stories of people, places and history: topics that resonate in the Trust’s work. Growing up in the heart of canal country, his perspective on the changing nature of the waterways and their growing importance in the wellbeing of local communities is exciting. I am delighted to welcome Roy as our new Canal Laureate and look forward to hearing the stories he finds to tell.”

Judith Palmer, Director of the Poetry Society, said:

“We’re really proud of the new work that’s been created through our longstanding partnership with the Trust. Rivers have never been short of glory, but it was time canals began to receive the attention they were due. Now there’s a vibrant new body of work which celebrates the many ways canals touch our lives, with poems responding to the people, places, history and wildlife of our amazing canal network. We can’t wait to see how Roy McFarlane opens up new perspectives on the UK’s canals over the months ahead.”

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The Canal Laureate's new poems and observations will be published on www.waterlines.org.uk

Follow Roy's adventures via Twitter [@CanalPoetry](https://twitter.com/CanalPoetry)

– ENDS –

MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

For further information, images or to arrange interviews please contact:

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Notes to Editors

Roy McFarlane

Roy McFarlane is a poet, playwright and former Youth & Community Worker born in Birmingham of Jamaican parentage, spending most of his years living around the Black Country, and now residing in Brighton. He's held the role of Birmingham Poet Laureate, Starbucks Poet and Birmingham & Midlands Institute Poet in Residence. He is also an *Ambit* and *Poetry Wales* competition winner. His debut collection *Beginning With Your Last Breath* was followed by *The Healing Next Time* (Nine Arches Press, 2018, nominated for the Ted Hughes Award and the Jhalak Prize). Roy has an MA in Writing Poetry from Newcastle University and the Poetry School, and is presently working on his third collection with Nine Arches Press which is due for publication in October 2022

The Poetry Society

The Poetry Society is the UK's leading organisation for poetry. With innovative education and commissioning programmes, and a packed calendar of performances, competitions, and digital projects, The Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages. The Poetry Society was founded in 1909 to promote a "more general recognition and appreciation of poetry". Since then, it has grown into a dynamic arts organisation, representing British poetry both nationally and internationally. It has a thriving worldwide membership and publishes Britain's leading poetry magazine, *The Poetry Review*. The Poetry Society is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation and a registered charity.

poetrysociety.org.uk • Follow us on Twitter [@PoetrySociety](https://twitter.com/PoetrySociety) and Instagram [@ThePoetrySociety](https://www.instagram.com/ThePoetrySociety)

The Canal & River Trust

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

wcanalrivertrust.org.uk

Art on the Waterways

Initiated in 2012, the Canal & River Trust's Arts on the Waterways programme connects the Trust with the contemporary arts. The programme offers time and space to artists, producers and curators to create work and attract new audiences for both the waterways and the arts. The Trust works with a range of partners engaging actively with local communities. Waterways are becoming the longest cultural space in the UK, flowing into areas that the arts find difficult to access. Arts on the Waterways is made possible through a strategic agreement with Arts Council England.

canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/waterway-arts • [#ArtsOnTheWaterways](https://www.instagram.com/ArtsOnTheWaterways)

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