

Enduring stone unveiled to mark Stamford's pledge to poetry

An enduring and interactive commemorative stone has been unveiled to mark Stamford's commitment to poetry.

The Stamford Poetry Stone was welcomed by a host of former poet laureates of the town who stepped up into its specially carved footprints to perform poetry written specially for the occasion on April 26.

Positioned in the natural amphitheatre of St Michael's Church square, it will be available to all as a platform to recite their own words and verse by stepping into the footprints of Darren Rawnsley, Stamford's first poet laureate.

Carved by artist and former Lincoln Cathedral stonemason Beatrice Searle, it was unveiled by Mayor John Dawson who was joined by town councillors, representatives from Stamford Arts Centre and local school children.

Pupils from local schools St Gilbert's, Great Casterton, Malcolm Sargent, Copthill and Bluecoats then stepped up to read a poem entitled 'Stamford' by Teresa McLean, Stamford's second poet laureate.

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Camilla McLean, Stamford's 2016/17 poet laureate said: "We hope this beautiful stone will inspire generations of poets to step up into the shoes of Stamford's poet laureates.

"Poetry and beautiful crafted words are even more important in this age of throwaway and confusing communication.

"We hope that everyone will be inspired to take a stand and speak their truth from the stone whether it be in the form of a lyric, a limerick, rap or rhyme, spoken word or sonnet. When perfuming from the plinth and if posting it to social media why not use the hashtags
#stamfordpoetrystone #stepupandspeak #weareallpoets "

The stone was conceived by Ms Searle, Stamford poets and Karen Burrows of Stamford Arts Centre and made possible by the kind donations of the Harry Skells Estate Trust, Stamford Arts Centre and Ketton Stone.

Beatrice met Camilla last December during an interview on the Arts Show on BBC Radio Lincolnshire and the project blossomed from there.

Beatrice said: "The carving of footprints into stone has a rich historical precedent in Pictish, Medieval and Roman history. Standing in rock has the great ability to anchor and empower a person, and those for whom the landscape of Stamford is beloved can draw an ancient strength from their connection with this local, Jurassic limestone."

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Seasonal readings will now take place from the stone and members of the public will be encouraged to share video or images of their readings.

Karen said: "This is a golden age of poetry and we are delighted that the town is at the forefront of this. This remarkable poetry stone marks Stamford Arts Centre's ongoing commitment to spreading the word about this most creative and inspiring of art forms."

The occasion also saw the launch of the poetry book '5 Years of Stamford Poet Laureate'. The title is available from Walker's Bookshop and Stamford Arts Centre's Cellar Bar.

Meanwhile the competition for Stamford's 2017/18 poet laureate commenced at the end of the day at the bar, with Emma Cuddeford's passionate and emotional performance scooping the accolade.

Emma said she would like to encourage young mums like herself to put pen to paper and share their words and thoughts.

Mother Emma who works full time for a literacy charity and is passionate about spreading the word about words!

ENDS

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Thanks go to:

Artist Beatrice Searle

The Harry Skells Estate Trust

Stamford Arts Centre Karen Burrows, Graham Burley, Gareth Whitley,
and Jo Dobbs

The Urban Planning Group, Ketton Stone

Andre Verona, Maria, Clifford, Simon

Councillor Andrew Croft

Matthew Cox Antiques Matthew, Daniel, Mike

Precision Landscapes and Stamford Independent Publishing

The Harry Skells Estate Trust

The Harry Skells Estate Trust is constituted under the will of the late Harry Skells of Stamford and the income of the Trust is derived from the original endowment fund under this will. The objectives of the Charity are:

- The provision of parks and recreation grounds for the use, benefit and advantage of the inhabitants of Stamford.
- The improvement of streets and roads within Stamford.
- The improvement of the appearance, utility and amenity of buildings, walls, lamp posts, fences and other structures and of parks, car parks, bus stations and other open spaces in Stamford.

The Charity is run by a board of Trustees who are the Councillors of Stamford Town Council under the chairmanship of the Town Mayor. All

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grant applications are considered on their merits and the availability of funds.

Stamford Arts Centre

Drawing on a rich heritage dating back to the 18th Century, Stamford Arts Centre provides the opportunity to experience and participate in a wide selection of art forms from theatre, music, poetry and film to sculpture, dance and drawing. The poetry scene at the Arts Centre is thriving with its biennial poetry festival, Verse, as well as regular open mic nights, poetry workshops and a programme of visiting poets and spoken word artists. The tremendous gallery is spacious, light and airy; open from Monday to Saturday, 9.30am to 9pm and it's free to look around. The main gallery accommodates an interesting and varied programme of contemporary exhibitions from local and international artists including photography, painting, textile, drawing and sculpture.

Beatrice Searle

Beatrice Searle is an artist and stonemason. Beatrice graduated from Newcastle University in 2013 having completed a Fine Art degree. She has recently completed her stonemasonry apprenticeship at Lincoln Cathedral (2016) and has returned to her art practice, which explores and attempts closer human connection with landscape. Stone is an important material in her work. Beatrice met current poet laureate, Camilla McLean, in December 2016 during an interview on the Arts Show on BBC Radio Lincolnshire, and the project blossomed from there.

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