



South Downs Poetry Festival

FOCUS ARTS CHI UK ANNUAL REPORT: 2025

CHARITY NUMBER: 1200784

TRUSTEES: Barry Smith, Joan Secombe, Ian Barnett, Lesley Amanda Gravett.

South Downs Poetry Festival, SDPF, is an annual pop-up festival which – uniquely – spans many miles: the length and breadth of the beautiful South Downs National Park and the surrounding area. The festival is organised by Focus Arts Chi UK, a registered charity (number 1200784).

2025 has continued our poetical journey with the festival running in locations around the South Downs with exciting events taking place in our usual eclectic choice of venues, including museums, churches, galleries, community spaces and even a jailhouse. We began at the University of Chichester, to mark the bicentenaries of the Romantics, this year with an in depth look at John Keats. Lecturer Fiona Price gave a talk, SDPF poets gave a dramatic reading of *La Belle Dame sans Merci* while actors Gareth Williams and Paula Tinker gave a rare reading of the Pre-Raphaelite favourite, *Isabella*. A new event this year was held at Petersfield Museum with poetry/music ensemble Poetry in Motion presenting an event around the work of local classic poet, Edward Thomas. The national 80th anniversary commemoration of VE Day took us to the grade 1 listed Old Library in Midhurst, with a talk by historian Lord Egremont from Petworth House and a rendition of the Vera Lynn song *We'll Meet Again* by Emily Rose Smith and Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* by Timothy Ades, plus war poems classic and new from South Downs poets.

Our contributions to the annual Festival of Chichester were the Poetry & Jazz Cafe with guest poets Helen Ivory and Marin Figura at the Assembly Room and Poetry and Music with a focus on the women Romantics with the legendary actor Steven Berkoff reading from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* at the Novium. At St John's Chapel, Sussex Serendipity featured the poetry of Barry Smith set to music by Linda Kelsall-Barnett on classical guitar. We maintained our partnership with the Shelley Memorial Project, contributing to the words and music programme with settings of Shelley at St Mary's Church, Warnham, which contains memorials to the Shelley family. Sasha Dugdale was the special guest poet with support from South Downs writers. Blakefest hosted Poetry in Motion on Bognor Regis pier with Chris Hardy on guitar, Charlotte Glasson on sax and Barry Smith with words featuring Blake

and the Beats, as well as the iconic 1960s counter-culture band, the BonzoBills. This year saw the SDPF again on tour for Springtime Special at Dimbola Museum/gallery and teashop, Freshwater, Isle of Wight. And the jailhouse? That was part of the Arundel Festival – Jazz and Poetry at the Jailhouse. We finished the year in style with a packed house at grade 1 listed Guildhall in Priory Park, Chichester, with the Festive Jazz Cafe featuring actors Gareth Williams, Paula Tinker, poets and Big House jazz.

2025 saw the publication of the seventeenth issue of Poetry & All That Jazz magazine featuring new work by South Downs poets and special guests including Penelope Shuttle, Maura Dooley and Frieda Hughes. A complimentary review by Sam Smith appeared in The Journal magazine online.

Poets featured in the 2025 festival included Wendy Klein, Sasha Dugdale, Zoe Mitchell who read at Chichester Library on National Poetry Day, Stephanie Norgate, Jeremy Page, Timothy Ades, James Simpson, Amanda Waring, Robert Hamberger, Matthew Stewart, Richard Hawtree, Lou Beckerman, Barry Smith, Chris Hardy, Naomi Foyle, Joan Secombe, Mandy Pannett, Camilla Lambert, Patrick Osada, Denise Bennett and Yvonne Baker amongst others. Actors included Steven Berkoff, Emily Rose Smith, Gareth Williams and Paula Tinker. Musicians included classical pianist Elena Toponogova, guitarists Linda Kelsall-Barnett and Chris Hardy, jazz saxophonist Charlotte Glasson, and Mike Carey's Big House Jazz Ensemble. All in all, it was certainly another hectic and thoroughly enjoyable poetical year in the South Downs.

We continued the annual South Downs Poetry Festival poetry competition for the Binsted Prize with Chris Hardy as judge at St Johns Chapel. First prize was awarded to Wendy Klein.

Additionally, we maintained our monthly Open Mic Poetry events in the Jubilee Hall, New Park Centre, Chichester, putting the focus on developing the appreciation of poetry within the community. After a reading by a visiting guest poet, local poets of all ages read their own new work to a supportive audience. The festival also contributed to the poetry element of Arts Junction at Arundel, a mix of the arts including music, theatre and spoken word. Each month, two poets read their work bringing the best of new writing to the local community.

Barry Smith

Festival Director

ACCOUNTS

Income: (£'s)

Donations	830
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Charitable Activities	4822
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TOTAL INCOME	5652
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Expenditure: (£'s)

Public Liability Insurance	279
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Events costs	5448
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TOTAL EXPENDITURE	5727
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Cash at Bank: (£'s)	4549
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