

The Elmbridge LitFest

2026

30 May-7 June

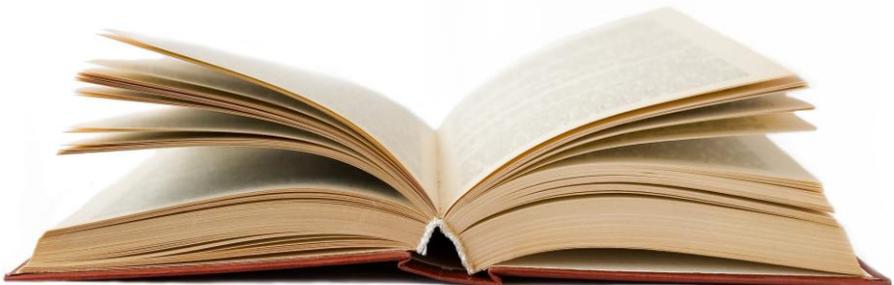
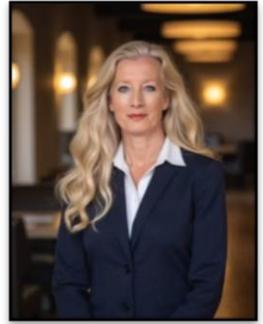
Guest Speakers

Events

Workshops

Poetry & Short

Story Competition



...once you've tasted the joy and excitement of writing you can never give it up. You can kid yourself that you've finished, but you can't stop new ideas from floating in. They whisper their temptations and nudge your elbow and go on exciting you until at last you give way. You go to your study and draw the curtains. You sharpen your old blunt pencils, take that enticing little story by the hand and begin another journey into the land of make-believe. Whether the story lasts the course doesn't matter, for nothing measures up to the excitement of the night when you begin it.

R C Sherriff 'No Leading Lady' 1968

Elmbridge is a place with a long and illustrious place in literature. Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sir Nigel* met his end in a field in Weybridge. From St George's Hill, H G Wells' Martians launched attacks on Esher and the Dittons. Mathew Shardlake, the Tudor lawyer, is found taking lunch in Esher, in C J Samsom's *Heartstone*. Elsa Fennen, John Le Carre's femme fatale was a member of the Weybridge Repertory Club. Groucho's Last Stand, as reported by T S Eliot, was on the river at Molesey and Conan-Doyle's most famous creation was summoned to Oxshott for *The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge*. And alongside these fictitious connections, Elmbridge has attracted an extraordinary array of literary figures; Fanny Kemble, E M Forster, Robert Louis Stevenson, Emile Zola, Matthew Arnold, Alexander Kent, Ronald Segal and R C Sherriff. The Elmbridge LitFest 2026 aims to continue the Borough's great tradition in literature and is brought to you through the partnership of The Elmbridge u3a and The R C Sherriff Trust.

Elmbridge u3a - Learn, Laugh, Live

Elmbridge u3a is part of a worldwide movement that brings people together in retirement or semi-retirement to learn new things, share interests and enjoy life. With over 1600 members and more than 100 interest groups, there are opportunities to explore a wide range of subjects, hobbies and activities. All groups are run by members, creating a friendly environment where people share skills, knowledge and enthusiasm. Our motto, "Learn, Laugh, Live" captures the spirit of Elmbridge u3a - encouraging lifelong learning, friendship and fun. We also work closely with local organisations to create additional opportunities for our members. Current partners include The Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre, Walton Charity, Walton Bowling Club, and the Cecil Hepworth Playhouse.

Interested in joining?

Find out more at: <https://elmbridge.u3asite.uk/>

The R C Sherriff Trust

The R C Sherriff Trust was established through the will of the writer R C Sherriff. Most famous for writing "Journey's End", the play based on his experiences in the First World War, he would go on to become, at one stage, the highest paid British screenwriter in Hollywood, scripting some of the most famous films of Hollywood's Golden Age, including 'The Invisible Man', 'Goodbye Mr Chips', 'The Four Feathers', 'That Hamilton Woman' (Winston Churchill's favourite film) and most famously, one of the greatest films about the Second World War, "The Dambusters". His novels are regarded as classics of their time. 'The Hopkins Manuscript', a tale about a lunar catastrophe in which the moon collides with the Earth, considered the 'missing link' between H G Wells and John Wyndham. In 2020, The Guardian asked authors to suggest a novel that would help people get through the first Lockdown and Nobel and Booker Prize winning author, Kazuo Ishiguro, chose Sherriff's 1930 novel, 'The Fortnight in September'.

Since 1993, The Trust has spent over £3 million running projects and providing grants to arts venues, schools, community groups, arts organisations and individuals. The Trust has spent over 30 years, not only fulfilling the wish of R C Sherriff to advance the arts in Elmbridge, but also in bringing thousands of residents together to encourage their creativity and highlight the importance of music, theatre, dance, visual arts and literary arts in their everyday lives.

Find out more at www.rcsherrifftrust.org.uk

The Elmbridge LitFest 2026 Diary of Events

- Saturday 30 May:** **Literary Walk of Walton - *The Hidden Stories***
Start: Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre
- Saturday 30 May:** **Helen of Four Gates,**
The Cecil Hepworth Playhouse,
- Saturday 30 May:** **Paper Making Workshop,**
Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre
- Sunday 31 May:** **Artist Book Binding by Artistic Stitches,**
Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre
- Friday 5 June:** **Our Lives and Loves: Memoir Writing and
Self Publishing Workshop**
Claygate Village Hall
- Friday 5 June:** **Spilling the Beans**
Claygate Village Hall
- Friday 5 June:** **She's Electric: *Performance Storytelling***
Walton Bowling Club
- Saturday 6 June:** **From Page to Screen: Adaptations and the
Art of Trying to Please Everyone**
The Cecil Hepworth Playhouse
- Saturday 6 June:** **Mystery: A Celebration of the
2026 Elmbridge Literary Competition**
Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre
- Saturday 6 June:** **Helen Field & Merle Nygate
No Alibis: Crime Writers Unmasked
A Q&A with two of Britain's leading crime-writers.**
Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre
- Sunday 7 June:** **Meet the Authors: Coffee and Conversation**
Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre
- Sunday 7 June:** **Anne Fletcher: From the Mill to Monte Carlo
The story of the man who broke the bank**
Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre
- Sunday 7 June:** **The Booming Lovelies and Open Mic Poets**
Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre
- Sunday 7 June:** **Tony Birtley: Whose Truth Is It Anyway?**
Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre

Saturday 30 May

Literary Walk of Walton - *The Hidden Stories*

10.30 - 12.30

Tickets: £10

www.ticketsource.co.uk/the-r-c-sherriff-trust

Step into Walton's surprisingly rich literary past on this relaxed two-hour walk along the Thames and its historic streets. From the riverbanks immortalized in *Three Men in a Boat* to homes linked with Arthur Sullivan, the walk reveals how this quiet town inspired words, music and wit. Your guide will be local resident Steve, a qualified City of London and Westminster guide as well as having a deep interest in the Elmbridge area. The walk is on pavements and has some gentle slopes.



Where: The walk will start and finish at the Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre

Saturday 30 May

Helen of Four Gates

A tale of Treachery, Madness and Thwarted Love

Doors open 19.00 Performance starts 19.30

Tickets: £12

<https://www.cecilhepworthplayhouse.co.uk>



A rare chance to see this classic 1920 British silent film directed by Walton based cinema pioneer Cecil Hepworth. Starring Alma Taylor (in a dual role as mother and daughter), James Carew, and Gerald Ames, this tale of treachery, madness and thwarted love is one of the few remaining works of Hepworth, and one of the only surviving films that make up the birth of the British Film Industry. **The film is screened with live musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne.**

<https://stephenhorne.co.uk/biography/>

Where: Cecil Hepworth Playhouse

Saturday 30 May

Paper Making Workshop

13:00-17:00

<https://www.riverhousebarn.co.uk/>

In this hands-on session, you'll learn how to make your own paper from pulp, exploring texture, thickness, and surface quality. The focus is on creating strong, tactile sheets suitable for embroidery, drawing, and zine-making. You'll experiment with fibres and inclusions to produce unique papers that invite mark-making and stitch.

£40 per person

Sunday 31 May

Artist Book Binding by Artistic Stitches

13:00 to 16:00

<https://www.riverhousebarn.co.uk/>

This session explores creative bookbinding techniques for turning handmade (or found) papers into artist books and zines. You'll learn simple, adaptable binding methods using thread and hand processes, creating book forms designed for embroidery, textiles, and mixed media. Ideal for craft lovers interested in combining paper, stitch, and storytelling. **£30 per person**

Booking both Paper-Making & Book-Binding sessions: £60

Suitable for all levels — no prior experience required. All materials and tools included.

Where: Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre



Our Lives and Loves

Memoir Writing and Self Publishing Workshop

12.00 - 13.30

Tickets: £10 (includes workbook to take away).

www.ticketsource.co.uk/the-r-c-sherriff-trust

Autobiography can take many forms, from intimate writings not necessarily intended for publication - letters, diaries, journals, poetry and reminiscences - to a formal memoir. In this workshop, Sue Heightman and Christina Preston will explore memoir writing sharing a variety of approaches to this writing journey and offering techniques for self-publishing.

Dr Christina Preston

Dr Christina Preston, retired Professor of Education Innovation, is a published poet and education journalist, who has written in a variety of genres during her career as well as editing a professional journal, *Advancing Education*. Christina has won six international awards for her contribution to education innovation and 'e-community of practice' research and development.



Dr Sue Heightman

Dr Sue Heightman has built a diverse career spanning education and marketing. Alongside her professional work her creative writing includes short stories, novellas, and poetry. She recently completed a Master's degree in Creative Writing and is currently developing a commonplace book that weaves together memoir, poetry, and storytelling.



Where: Claygate Village Hall

Spilling the Beans

14.00 - 15.30

Tickets: £10

www.ticketsource.co.uk/the-r-c-sherriff-trust

Spilling the Beans is an adventure in crafting poems that sneakily convey the personal. The workshop will explore devices to help catch truths we long to tell. The session will give participants a chance to draft poems and explore further ideas that can be worked on at their own leisure. No previous experience is necessary – just an urge to unleash the mischief and magic of words. Katie Griffiths is author of *The Attitudes* and the prize-winning *My Shrink is Pregnant*. She came second in 2018's National Poetry Competition, and in 2024 won the Gregory O'Donoghue International Poetry Prize. Her next book *Mindset Mindrise* is due in autumn 2026.

Where: Claygate Village Hall



Friday 5 June



She's Electric: *Performance Storytelling*

16.45 - 18.15

Tickets: £12

This performance is suitable for over 15s.

www.ticketsource.co.uk/the-r-c-sherriff-trust

Vanessa Woolf has led trailblazing storytelling performances for adults and children in major museums and for cultural organisations. She's had a partnership with Time Out Magazine, a TEDx talk in Stormont NI and many TV and radio performances. But before she was a professional storyteller her life was completely different...For ten years Vanessa was the only woman working successfully as an electrician in the UK film industry. She powered up, she turned on, she lit some of Hollywood's biggest stars ...and when she was done, she went out in a blaze of darkness. This is her true story.

Where: Walton Bowling Club

BBQ & Drinks will be available following the performance.

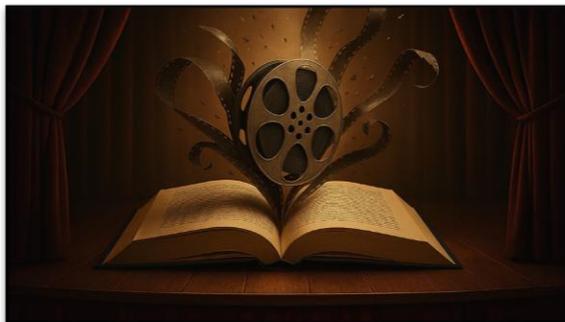
Saturday 6 June

From Page to Screen: Adaptations and the Art of Trying to Please Everyone

10.30 - 13.00

Tickets: £10

www.ticketsource.co.uk/the-r-c-sherriff-trust



This short workshop looks at the art of adapting stories for the stage and screen. It will look at how to translate prose into visual storytelling and the shift from how a novel tells you what happens inside a character to performance, where you show what happens in front of an audience. The workshop is led by Pete Allen who, as a theatre director, had adapted the works of Heinrich Hoffman, Edgar Allan Poe and Stella Gibbons.

Where: Cecil Hepworth Playhouse

Saturday 6 June

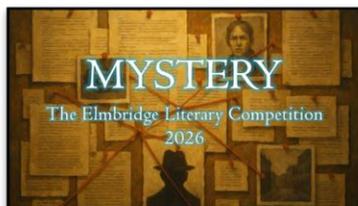
Mystery: A Celebration of the 2026 Elmbridge Literary Competition

14.00 - 15.30

Tickets: Free

<https://www.riverhousebarn.co.uk/>

Where: Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre



Helen Field & Merle Nygate

No Alibis: Crime Writers Unmasked

A Q&A with two of Britain's leading writers of crime and espionage.

19.30 - 21.00 (doors open 19.00)

Tickets: £12

<https://www.riverhousebarn.co.uk/>

Helen Field

A former criminal and family law barrister, with a background as both a prosecutor and defense counsel, Helen Field is a Sunday Times Best Seller and has been twice long listed for the McIlvanney Scottish Crime Book of the Year. The 'Perfect' series, set in Edinburgh, introduced the world to DI Luc Callanach. Helen's latest character creation is Dr Connie Woolwine, an American forensic psychologist and profiler, based on a real FBI Agent who consulted on the first book. You can follow Connie's investigations in *The Shadow Man*, *One for Sorrow* and *The Institution*.



Merle Nygate

Merle Nygate is a novelist and screenwriter. Her career has taken her from working on BAFTA winning TV to New York Festival audio drama to writing original sitcoms. She previously worked for BBC Comedy Commissioning. She has been a writer and script editor across multiple genres. Her first espionage novel, *The Righteous Spy* won the Little Brown/UEA Crime Fiction Award. Her second, *Honour Among Spies* was a Sunday Times Thriller of 2024. Her third novel in the series, *The Protocols of Spying* was a Financial Times Thriller of 2025.



Where: Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre

Sunday 7 June

Meet the Authors

Coffee and Conversation

10.30 - 12.30

Tickets: Free

<https://www.riverhousebarn.co.uk/>



2026 is the National Year of Book Reading. But some great reads could be a lot closer than you think. Come and join us for a coffee, tea, and and some great conversation about books written by local authors. This is a great opportunity to discover the writers and poets who live in Elmbridge.

Where: Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre

Sunday 7 June

From the Mill to Monte Carlo -

The Story of the Man Who Broke The Bank

14.00 - 15.30

Tickets: £5

<https://www.riverhousebarn.co.uk/>

Anne Fletcher is an historian and a tour guide. She is also the great-great-great niece of Joseph Hobson Jagger and in this true-life detective story she uncovers how he was able to win a fortune and what happened to his millions. Amongst the men 'who broke the bank at Monte Carlo', Jagger is unique. He is the only one known to have devised an infallible and completely legal system to defeat the odds at roulette and win a fortune. But he was not what might be expected. He wasn't a gentleman or an aristocrat, he wasn't a professional gambler, he was a Yorkshire textile worker who had laboured in the Victorian mills of Bradford since childhood.

Where: Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre



Sunday 7 June

The Booming Lovelies and Open Mic Poets

16.00 - 18.00

Tickets: £8

<https://www.riverhousebarn.co.uk>

Join host Katie Griffiths and friends for a well-versed afternoon. Her special guests today are the incorrigible and incomparable **Booming Lovelies**: ladies of a certain age, unafraid to share their wealth of life experience with anyone brave enough to listen and curious to hear. They're poetically primed and eager to charm with verses on everything from nostalgia for the last century to lost loves, the menopause, gin, and the joys and complexities of modern life. All welcome – there's something for everyone – so relax and enjoy a wonderful performance.

Where: Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre

Sunday 7 June

Whose Truth is it anyway?

19.30 - 21.00 (doors open at 19.00)

Tickets: £15

<https://www.riverhousebarn.co.uk/>

Tony Birtley is a multi-award-winning TV journalist who has covered some of the biggest conflicts since the Second World War. His book, "The Edge of Madness", is set during the Balkan's conflict. It is a story of love and hate, blood and betrayal, laying bare the true extent of war that is often kept away from viewers in the developed world. Tony Birtley's thought provoking talk looks at the pitfalls of how we receive the news and highlights the double standards of governments that say they are pursuing justice and democracy.

Where: Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre



Full details about the Festival can be found on The R C Sherriff Trust and Elmbridge U3A websites:

www.rcsherrifftrust.org.uk <https://elmbridge.u3asite.uk/>

R C Sherriff Trust



Elmbridge U3A



Venue Addresses

Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre

Manor Road, Walton on Thames, KT12 2PF

Cecil Hepworth Playhouse

Hurst Grove, Hepworth Way, Walton on Thames, KT12 1AU

Claygate Village Hall

Church Rd, Claygate, Esher, KT10 0JP

Walton Bowling Club

Elmbridge Grove Recreation Ground, Walton on Thames, KT12 1LH

Box Office

For events held at Riverhouse Arts Centre

www.riverhousebarn.co.uk

For The Cecil Hepworth Playhouse

www.cecilhepworthplayhouse.co.uk

All other events & workshops

www.ticketsource.co.uk/the-r-c-sherriff-trust

MYSTERY

The Elmbridge Literary Competition 2026

“In an English village, you turn over a stone and have no idea what will crawl out”

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Agatha Christie, the 2026 Elmbridge Literary Competition is asking Elmbridge writers to get their little grey cells working and create poems and short stories that celebrate the most popular genre in literature today.

The closing date for entries is Monday 27 April 2026.

Full details, terms and conditions are available at www.rcsherrifftrust.org.uk or emailing arts@rcsherrifftrust.org.uk