

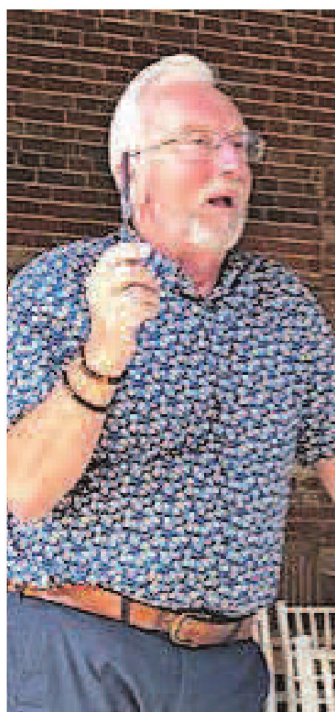
Escape to the countryside with this rural writing workshop

Alice Pawsey will be hosting a series of writing workshops on her Suffolk farm - with professional writers Tom Henry and Shaun McCarthy leading the day. **Danielle Lett** reports

As a writer, I might be biased, but one of the greatest joys in life surely has to be putting pen to paper. It's such an enjoyable way to spend time, whiling away the hours as you let your words spill out and flow.

And one local woman - with the help of two professional writers - wants to help others explore that very same joy this summer through a series of workshops taking place this year and next here in Suffolk.

Alice Pawsey is the owner of Shimpling Park Farm, a sprawling, rural estate and organic farm situated between



Stagewriter Shaun McCarthy leading a previous workshop at Shimpling Park Farm

Picture: ALICE PAWSEY

Bury St Edmunds and Sudbury.

Its idyllic settings mean it's the ideal place to escape - and before too long, Alice realised it would make for the perfect setting for immersive and creative writing workshops hosted by writers Tom Henry and Shaun McCarthy.

Explaining the inspiration behind it, she says: "Sadly, a mutual friend of mine and Tom's passed away, and one of things he said he never had the confidence to do was make writing his second career - which we both felt he should've done. It got us talking about the role of creative works on people's wellbeing, and eventually we decided to set something up in the space I had here on the farm."

Shimpling Farm is home to a purpose-built barn which plays host to a variety of school visits, meetings, conferences, weddings, and parties - so something like a writing workshop only made sense.

"We held one last year, and I actually took part in it. I'm not a writer but I found it incredibly useful to take time out - and it's in fact bettered my own viewing of films and television. It was a very recharging exercise.

"When people come here, they're well away from a motorway or a car, and they almost forget the need to go and do something else. A farm can be a liberating place to be because there's no boundaries, and if the day is right, then you've got infinite inspiration around you."

And the first workshop was such a success, Alice, Tom, and Shaun decided to roll out more.

"The two came together to deliver these workshops as a pair, covering every core skill suitable for all writers. Story structure rules are the same as they are for a script - as is your understanding of why things work and why they don't," adds Alice.



The next workshop - which will take place Saturday May 7 - is entitled 'How to write compelling stories', and describes itself as 'an intensive but enjoyable day for anyone who has ever contemplated writing a story for the page or a script for stage or screen, or who has wanted to share dramatized real life or lived events.'

Co-run by both Tom and Shaun, the two have years of writing and teaching expertise to their names, and cannot wait to bring their skills to Suffolk this summer.

Tom is a former newspaper journalist who became a freelancer then ghostwriter in the early 2000s. With 25 books under his belt, he's always felt a desire and a passion to share his skills with other budding wordsmiths.

"I think teaching is something I've always wanted to do. After becoming an author, people started to ask if I would talk to school or college groups about the work I do, and from there I thought I could probably teach some of these skills. So from there, I branched out into sharing all of the things I've learned along the way about creative writing, such how to put a good story over using narrative and character."

Shaun, on the other hand, comes from a stagewriting background.

"I actually started life as a poet, but on the advice of Nobel Prize-winning poet Derek Walcott who I worked with, I decided in my early



The first Stage and Page writing workshop at Shimpling Park Farm

Picture: ALICE PAWSEY

30s to try writing my first play. And it was absolutely rubbish! But I was lucky enough to come across a West End actress who wanted to get involved as a director. To cut a long story short, my first play ended up being performed on the West End, and it's gone from there, really."

Shaun has since been a professional playwright for stage and radio for 30 years - and has spent 15 of those teaching others the art of stagewriting in a number of institutions based in Geneva, Strasbourg, and more

recently Oxford.

Explaining what drew the duo to Alice's farm, Shaun says: "When Tom and I had this idea of doing a series of workshops, we thought to ourselves: 'Where would we like to go if we were teaching, and what could inspire our students?'"

"And when Tom and Alice reconnected, her farm was the perfect place. Yes, you can go to a library or to the pub, but how much nicer is it to have access to somewhere as beautiful as a barn on a farm?"

Feature

Alice Pawsey of Shimpling Park Farm will play host to a series of writing workshops during 2022 and 2023



Tom agrees, adding: "I think the farm is amazing, and there's lots of stories associated with it. They've got old farm letters and ledgers, and there's so much inspiration to be had. I think once you've got an interesting location to start with, it puts you in that inspirational state of mind."

So who are the workshops suitable for?

Anyone and everyone – regardless of genres, ability, or previous experience, according to Alice.

"At the first workshop, we had a lovely mix of people who all really got a lot from it. We had someone who was working on an agriculture book, someone who was three-quarters of the way through her autobiography, and someone who wrote a novel about 20 years ago and picked it up again during lockdown. A lot of people who came were curious and had never done anything like this before, but wanted to try something different," says Alice.

"The aim is essentially to get people thinking creatively. My view is that we're all born storytellers – we were when we little kids. But as we grow older, we push that aside, and I think it's important that we connect with that again. I'm a great believer in doing workshops like this, where people come away with something they couldn't have imagine when they first arrived at 9am," adds Tom.

For Shaun, he says it's all about the process – and not the product. "You don't have to come along already knowing how to write a short story – you just have to come along thinking 'How do good stories work? Maybe I'll have a go at writing my own'. And by the end of the day, you will no doubt feel more empowered and stimulated creatively."

Capping the sessions to around 15 or 16 students, Tom and Shaun find they can spread their time more evenly, helping their students really get to the root of their story.

"We find with that number, it's big enough that people can spark off each other. And we think we have a unique offering. With many creative writing workshops, they're often run by one tutor who's usually a specialist. But as there's two of us, we can split off into groups. Some students may wish to work on a story, so will go with Tom, and if any want to work on a script, they'll come with me," says Shaun.

This year's first writing workshop will take place at Shimpling Park Farm on Saturday May 7 from 9am until 5pm. Later in the year, a workshop focussing on short stories will happen on Saturday October 8, and a series of four more yet-to-be-announced workshops are scheduled to take place in 2023.

To find out more, visit stageandpage.co.uk

Top, writer Tom Henry leading a workshop

Picture: ALICE PAWSEY

Above, Alice's farm provides the perfect setting for budding writers who wish to get away from it all

Picture: SARAH LUCY BROWN

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