

Love our Ouse - 24th January 2024

Winterbourne Chalk Stream to be celebrated in Lewes community festival

Community initiative Love our Ouse and local partners have been awarded funds to deliver a festival on the 1st to the 9th of March dedicated to the Winterbourne Stream that flows through Lewes. The project was conceived after mounting local enthusiasm, concern for the stream's health and emerging restoration plans. Natasha Padbury, Love our Ouse Director, explained:

'Despite the Winterbourne being central to Lewes life through the ages and being a globally rare chalk stream, we've found limited publications, artworks or focused civic cultural activities about it. We know locals connect with the stream in all kinds of ways and it feels long overdue to have a focused community effort on its behalf.'

The festival is packed with a variety of events for the local community to take part in drawing upon the stream's rich heritage, ecology and source of creative inspiration. Everyone is welcome and there is something for everyone. Most events are completely free; however, some should be booked in advance where places are limited.

On the first weekend there will be an afternoon talks programme on Saturday 1st March at the Railway Land Wildlife Reserve, where the Winterbourne meets the Ouse, that will dive into the stream's past, present day and future and ending with special tributes to the tributary.

Local historian Marcus Taylor will draw on a range of visual sources to demonstrate how this short but significant stream has shaped Lewes life over time. The Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust will discuss the extensive pressures the stream faces and the potential solutions for revitalising the stream, benefiting both local communities and wildlife alike. You can find out how you can get involved in these efforts.

Local artists will draw upon their creative projects inspired by the stream. This will include a screening of the short film *Attention is the Beginning of Devotion* directed by Railway Land artist in residence Ruthie Martin who, the following morning, who will also be offering a community workshop *Echoes of the Stream* exploring the sounds of the Winterbourne using hydrophones to express its unique voice using watercolour and chalk art.

Two guided walks along the stream route, on both Saturday and Sunday, will feature live poetry recitals by the Chalk and Stream Collective. This follows the recent publication of the beautifully illustrated booklet *Winterbourne Poems*. Copies are available for purchase by the general public from the Lewes Climate Hub. A limited number are being gifted to Lewes based community, educational and environmental based groups. Be in touch with Love our Ouse to request a copy if you think your group may qualify.

Also, on Sunday 2nd March a litter pick event will help invigorate community action. In 2021 families collected 21 rubble sacks of litter from a half mile stretch of the stream's bed. Rubbish collections and the removal of invasive non-native plant species are still an ongoing necessity. Let's keep the stream clean!

On Wednesday 5th March a film screening of *Pure Clean Water* at Depot about the history and degradation of the Cambridge chalk stream will spark post film discussion about the challenges and opportunities to restore the Winterbourne presented by key local stakeholders the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust, South Downs National Park, Lewes District Council and the Railway Land Wildlife Trust.

On the weekend of 8th and 9th March the old Gorrings Auction Huts on Garden St will host *Of the Winter Born*, a free exhibition of photography by Adam Luszniak and linocut prints by Michelle Hockey. Both bodies of work have been created through extensive observations of the stream, its surrounding localities, species, flora and fauna. You can also take part in an interactive community mapping activity. Contribute your personal reflections, memories, stories, hopes and concerns to help bring together our connections with the stream. Do you have photos, objects or archive materials to contribute? Be in touch! Contributions will be included in a heritage legacy report to be publicly available as an ongoing resource.

Lastly Intrepid Productions are delivering a bespoke after school drama club *Welcoming the Winterbourne* over the next two terms for local children at both Western Road Community Primary and South Malling CE Primary Schools enabling children to devise and showcase story scenes and blessing offerings to the stream.

The Festival has been generously supported by the National Trust and the Changing Chalk Community Grants Scheme, and funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, with thanks to National Lottery players, grant funding from Friends of Lewes and Lewes Town Council.

Natasha Padbury concludes:

'We are delighted to be able to give the Winterbourne Stream the pride of place it deserves in our hearts and landscape. We look forward to invigorating awareness and appreciation, fostering a more caring approach to nature on our doorstep and creating a creative legacy. Programme contributors are warmly thanked for their generosity and enthusiasm in making it such a vibrant festival. We hope you will join us'

To find out more and how to get involved and book tickets, visit the festival page on Love our Ouse's website: <https://loveourouse.org/winterbourne-chalk-stream-community-festival/>.

Regular updates will also be sent via their free e-newsletter subscription and social platforms.

Festival Programme cover image credit: 'An evening walk' by Michelle Hockey

Natasha Padbury
<https://loveourouse.org/>
info@loveourouse.org