

Light over Water Festival of Arts, Idea and Books

Friday 27 February – Sunday 1 March 2026

Introduction (Angela Locke)

Cumbria's west coast 'bijou' festival, Maryport LitFest, kicks off again at the end of February/beginning of March with the usual sparkling jewels of interesting speakers and an exciting theme; Light over Water: a Journey of Discovery- everything from wild swimming across all the Lakes, the experiences of a prisoner of war in Libya, the memoir of a lighthouse keeper, and the powerful poetry of a mountaineer, while one event uses live music and projected images to explore how the movement and exchange of cultures across oceans and borders have shaped the music we hear today.

So much more too! Ideas swirl about at this intimate festival, where authors can talk to audience on a one-to-one basis, and there is an informal and talkative atmosphere. Taking place at Senhouse Roman Museum, high on the cliffs in Maryport overlooking the Solway, it is the perfect place to contemplate Light and Water and to take a voyage across the world!

Steve Watts MBE

A Year Like No Other

Steve Watts MBE is a British endurance runner, former Grenadier Guardsman and lifelong fundraiser. Based in Cumbria, he has raised millions for charity through extreme challenges, including completing the Everest Marathon with a pacemaker, a World First - he continues to inspire the next generation of Lakeland lovers through his walks and talks.

A Year Like No Other is a visual record of his daily runs around Grasmere and the Lake District. The proceeds from the book's sales are donated to charity, supporting the Evelina Children's Hospital, Tony Hudgell Foundation, and other causes.

John Little

The Light Over the Solway

Workington in 1915 and a family caught up in the First World War.

Dr John Little was born in Whitehaven and has always been interested in the history of the area. After almost forty years of teaching, he retired to Cumberland, and is now intent on bringing some of its history back to life through novels. Currently he is working on his eighteenth book.

Angela Locke

Finding Myrddin: The River Holds a Tragic Secret

Angela's third novel is set on a marginal farm in Cumbria. What is the power which draws a young sheep farmer to a mysterious river on his land? Back to the scene of a tragedy in his past and the secret of his true identity.

Angela Locke is the author of nine books, including three novels. She runs Creative Writing Workshops and Retreats, is Writer-in-Residence for Senhouse Roman Museum, and co-organises Maryport LitFest every year. She lives on the edge of the Northern Lakes. Angela Locke's new novel *Finding Myrddin* is set on a Cumbrian farm and is part mystery, part thriller.

Film/lunch break – The Brendan Voyage

Take a break and watch the film of Tim Severin's 'Brendan Voyage'. 2026 is the 50th anniversary of his epic voyage across the Atlantic in a leather boat.

Gerald Bonington

Twisted Vistas – from freedom to captive in Britain's 20th century Empire

Gerald Bonington worked in the agricultural industry and has lived in North Cumbria for 40+ years. He has travelled extensively. His local leisure interests are rock-climbing and the Lake District fells. In 2016 the discovery of a stash of family papers provoked the motivation to write two biographies *Captive Islands*, and more recently, *Twisted Vistas*.

John Porter

A Path of Shadows

A Path of Shadows is writer and mountaineer John Porter's first poetry collection. Exploring the natural world, family ties and physical science as well his climbing life. This collection is a reflection of Porter's sharp and broad intellect, and of his desire and ability to express his feelings, beliefs and life experiences through poetry.

John Porter was born in Massachusetts in 1946 and learned to climb with the Appalachian Mountain Club in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Moving to the UK to study, Porter was an integral member of the infamous Leeds University Mountaineering Club of the 1970s. His notable mountaineering achievements include pioneering alpine style ascents of the NE Face of Bandaka (1977), the South Buttress of Changabang (1978), South Face Ranrapulka (1979) and SE Ridge Tarke Kang (1982). Published to great acclaim in 2014, Porter's biography of Alex MacIntyre *One Day as a Tiger* won the Grand Prize at the Banff Mountain Book Festival.

Richard Valentine

A Greek Odyssey: A Journey of Myth, Medicine and Psychology.

The voyage of Greek hero Odysseus, his manifestations in literature and his psychological relevance for our models of intelligence, gender, culture and the metaphor of the soul's journey.

David Ashworth

Stepping Westward: Journeys of Discovery

Using live music and projected images, David Ashworth reflects on a lifetime of musical exploration. This evocative journey explores how the movement and exchange of cultures across oceans and borders have shaped the music we hear today.

Our embracing theme is around 'Land over water' - the view across the Solway from our home area, the otherness of land on the other side, the coast as both a barrier hemming us in and a place from which we can launch ourselves into the wider world, with the sea as the link, holding places together.

We were concerned with how a sense of belonging, a connection between person and place, emerges across a lifetime. Why and how do places come to have such meaning for us and how do they and we change over time? Coastlines, the sea and the worlds beyond, both imaginary and real, provoke similar responses in we humans.

David Ashworth grew up in Cockermouth in the 1960s/70s, fully embracing the local landscape and culture. Since those times, he had lived a life in music making and musical exploration - performing and teaching across the UK. Recent projects have had a multimedia dimension, with the Cocker Valley Project being a recent example.

Robert Farrah

From the Lighthouse: A Lighthouse Keeper's Memoir

Robert Farrah moved to Cumbria in 1984 from Souter Point Lighthouse on the north-east coast, having joined the service in 1970 at the age of nineteen. He took voluntary redundancy in 1997, having served 27 years, one year before the completion of automation. During this time, he saw the service progress from a 'traditional' based service with keepers to the de-manning of the lighthouses. In the final years he began a journal recording in detail something of the keepers' lives and the process of automation, which became this book *From the Lighthouse*.

Guiding lights for centuries, lighthouses have helped mariners avoid danger and bring them to safe harbours. They are beacons of hope and the men who risked their lives to save others are recognised as heroes. The rocky shores of the British Isles are graced with many spectacular lighthouses, which inspire admiration for their builders and their keepers who faced great challenges including ferocious gales, long periods of quiet maintenance work and isolation, especially in the days before modern communications.

This book explores all this and more as the author writes from 27 years of personal experience plus research of records from earlier times. *From the Lighthouse* is the second book from the author of the best-selling guide to *The Stone Circles of Cumbria* winner of an award at the Lakeland Book of the Year competition.

Katie Hale

The Edge of Solitude

A lone ship journeys south, heading for the furthest reaches of Antarctica. Exhilarating, terrifying and thought-provoking at once, This is a story of climate emergency and human

fallibility, of the clash of ambition and principle, and of the choices we make when we know that time is running out.

Katie Hale is a novelist and poet, based in Cumbria. She won a Northern Debut Award for her poetry collection, *White Ghosts*, and is the author of two novels: *The Edge of Solitude* and *My Name is Monster*. She is a former MacDowell Fellow, and winner of the Palette Poetry Prize, Munster Chapbook Prize, and Aesthetica Creative Writing Prize. Her short fiction has been longlisted for the BBC National Short Story Award, and she has held Writer in Residence positions in numerous countries, including Australia, the US and Svalbard. Katie also mentors young writers through Writing Squad.

John Mather

Challenging Waters

To celebrate his 60th birthday, John thought it would be a good idea to swim the length of all seventeen lakes in the Lake District. This proved to be quite an undertaking, requiring a much greater deal of time, effort and planning than he had anticipated!

From Brothers Water to Windermere, John's icy endeavours were rewarded with tantalising glimpses of wildlife amidst the awesome mountainscape and variable weather that was thrown at him. Indeed not everything went to plan, however the beautiful fragility of this wonderful land made its mark in many ways, as recounted in this illustrated account of his journey.

John has swum in many places in the UK and abroad. His coldest swim was in the freezing waters of Siberia's Lake Baikal!

Rosie de Mello

Explore!

Conservation for young people on the Solway Coast National Landscape. Cumberland Coastal School promotes our local beaches to people of all ages. Rosie worked in schools for over thirty years and with Cumbria Wildlife Trust. Her passion is connecting people back to their natural environment, the outdoors, to improve their mental and physical health, and to encourage care for our beautiful corner of the world. She is joined by Joe Harper, the Engagement Officer for the Highly Protected Marine Area, Allonby Bay.

The Solway Coast, running along the northern shore of Cumbria, is one of the nation's most celebrated landscapes. Designated and protected by UK law in 1964, it is one of 46 other National Landscapes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Along with National Parks, the distinctive character and natural beauty of the landscape in these places make them some of the most special and cherished places in the whole country.