

Edinburgh International Book Festival has a new home

The 2024 Edinburgh International Book Festival has a new home in the newly refurbished 18th century building which was home to the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, and is now called the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI).



Edinburgh Futures Institute © 2024 Martin McAdam

The big news of the last week has been the end of the festival's 20-year sponsorship deal with Baillie Gifford, and

it was probably a good idea for the board to get that news out of the way first before unveiling the exciting programme on Tuesday.



Jenny Niven Chief Executive of the Edinburgh International Book Festival

Tickets go on sale on 20 June for the festival which runs from 10 to 25 August on the theme of [Future Tense](#), looking at the complex political and economic issues the world may have to face. Other strands include How to Live a Meaningful Life with authors offering their own take on what it's all about, and Voterama – especially important in a year when there will be 64 elections taking place around the world. Andy Burnham, Alistair Campbell, Jess Phillips and Caroline Lucas have all been involved in Westminster politics in one form or another in recent times, and will be on hand to digest the aftermath of the 2024 General Election. The programme is extensive and we will pull out other parts of it for attention in the next few days.

Broaching the Baillie Gifford topic first seemed best when we

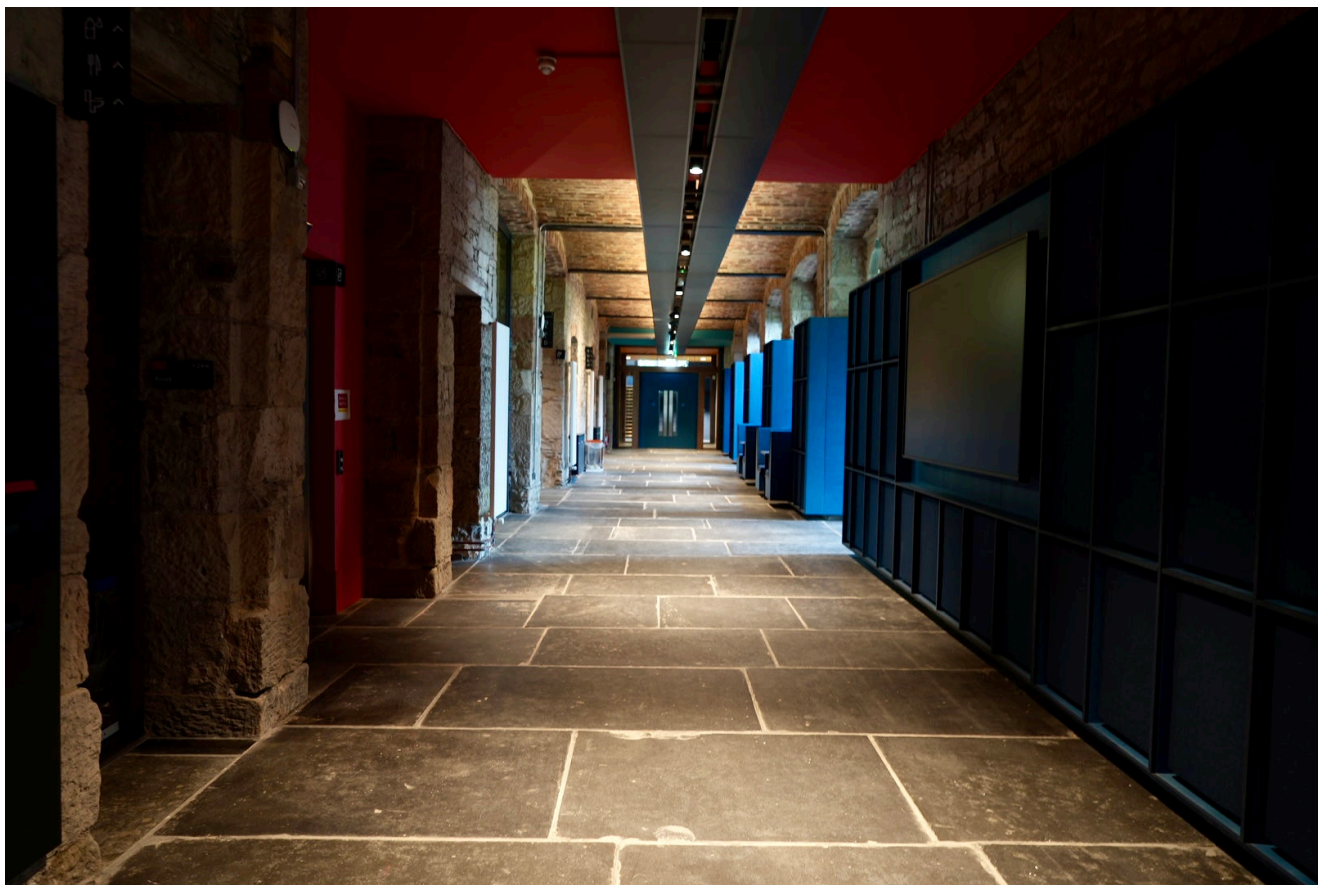
met Chief Executive, Jenny Niven, who is taking over for her first programme this year. Jenny said it had indeed been a “pretty difficult time over the past few weeks and months” but she explained that it had meant that as authors dropped out she and her team were left trying to recast the programme again and again, so the decision was ultimately a pragmatic one. She said it got to a point where things “ramped up” after the news about the Hay Festival breaking their agreement with the firm. She said: “It became almost impossible to say which events were going to go ahead and which were not. The pressure that created on the team, and the financial implications, made it impossible to work out what we would be able to put on sale. The second part of that is how that would change over the summer with a constant drop out towards August.”

The board said last week that they were reacting to authors withdrawing from the event and threats of disruption from activists similar to walkouts and protests last year. Baillie Gifford are accused of unethical investment amid claims that the firm also have significant sums of money in the Occupied Palestinian Territories which Nick Thomas, a partner with the firm, said was “offensively misleading”. He said the firm is not a significant fossil fuel investor with only 2% of clients funds under management invested in the sector. Mr Ward said: “Baillie Gifford is a large investor in several multinational technology companies, including Amazon, NVIDIA, and Meta. Demanding divestment from these global companies, used by millions of people around the world, is unreasonable and serves no purpose. Much as it would be unreasonable to demand authors boycott Instagram or stop selling books on Amazon.”

Jenny said that they could have ended up without a festival to protect this year – when it is “so important in their new venue and a new chapter” they decided to prioritise going ahead safely.

The funding has already been allocated by Baillie Gifford for this year – and it will be used by the charity – but Jenny

confirmed they are always looking to create new partnerships and will do this moving ahead. She said: "I think what we have to offer at the festival is really valuable and it is really valued and we will deal with new funding just as soon as we can." In the programme while Baillie Gifford have been named as the lead sponsor there are about 30 to 40 others of varying sizes including the University of Edinburgh and The City of Edinburgh Council.



Jenny unveiled the details of the Festival at a press conference held in the EFI, and was keen that the emphasis is focused squarely on what the 500 events featuring authors from 40 countries will offer audiences this August.

The overarching importance of the [building](#) to everyone in Edinburgh cannot be ignored, and it will lend itself to being a very different, but still compact, site. The festival will occupy indoor spaces on levels 0 and 1 where there are a few different sized spaces, a café and restaurant, with the outdoor lawned areas to the rear used for the Spiegel tent which is coming back along with a separate 200-seater venue.

Some events in the Front List are being produced along with Underbelly at McEwan Hall – just a short distance from the EFI. The list there is stellar with Alan Cumming and Forbes Masson speaking to former Makar, Jackie Kay, James O'Brien the LBC presenter, Alice Oseman, Dolly Alderton, Salman Rushdie who will join remotely, Sarah Crossan, Philippa Gregory speaking to Val McDermid, Richard Osman speaking to Sir Ian Rankin (presumably about crafting plots for crime novels), and Matt Haig in conversation with Chitra Ramaswamy. These tickets have been on sale since 25 April. edbookfest.co.uk

Adult events make up only one part of the programme. There are late night events in the Back to Ours programme in the Spiegeltent, featuring music and spoken word, and children's events celebrating a quarter century of Julia Donaldson's Gruffalo with the usual 10am every morning story time event. For the news hounds among you there will be a free daily news based event in the Spiegeltent discussing headlines and issues of the day with members of the media.

The Justified Sinner 200 strand will celebrate the work written 200 years ago by James Hogg who Jenny thinks is of equal importance to Sir Walter Scott or Stevenson. This will comprise six events taking a look at the story of Robert Wringhim, a Calvinist who believes there is little wrong with killing those already damned by God, which explored the "darkest parts of the human soul". There will be an interactive audio and video journey bringing the book to life while walking around the Old Town, and music specially composed by Edinburgh harpist Esther Swift and folksinger Kirsty Law reimagining the novel in contemporary times. And we are promised that part of the site will become a tennis court for one day only for a performance related to the novel.

Watch our short interview with Jenny Niven here and find out the books to read before August.

The [@edbookfest](http://edbookfest) programme is now online and most events will

take place at [@UoE_EFI](#) where we spoke to Chief Executive Jenny Niven who gave us her reading recommendations ahead of the festival in August. pic.twitter.com/CGvtQNIvuo

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [June 4, 2024](#)



This is an important festival in Edinburgh, one of the tapestry of world leading cultural events which attracts attention to the city each summer as well as visitors from near and far. The authors who are taking part in person will be used for other events, justifying their trip to the capital – but the Book Festival is a great deal more sustainable than it was. Jenny Niven said it used to take 17 articulated lorries to deliver everything they needed for the Charlotte Square Gardens site. Now it will take just two.

The Edinburgh International Book Festival 2024 will run from 10 to 25 August at the Edinburgh Futures Institute Lauriston Place (with a separate entrance from Porters Way).

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



