

The Big Blake Project is hosting three magnificent Poetry Events this summer to raise funds for Blake's Cottage. The first will be in St Mary's Church, Felpham near Bognor Regis, 18 July, when three highly acclaimed poets: Richard Skinner (Faber Academy), Iain Duhig and Martin Malone join with two award-winning writers to read from original works (written for this project) inspired by Blake, some of Blake's own works and lead a discussion. The second is also in Felpham – a 50-minute performance by Ruth Rosen where she will mesmerise the audience by reading extracts from every one of Blake's poems, letters and prose. The third is in London where Richard and Ian will be joined by George Szirtes and Kate Tempest (Hip-Hop poet). The poetry book will be for sale at all events and at the London event copies will be included in the higher priced ticket. Waterstones are supporting the London event and we hope to find out this week whether they will be supporting the Felpham event. If not, there is an independent bookstore in Littlehampton who may be able to help.

The Big Blake Project was started two years ago as a community regeneration project that saw the potential to use Blake and his vision of Beulah/Jerusalem to help re-brand Bognor Regis alongside improving cultural wellbeing and adding to the tourism offer. Our roots are in education and we have already set up three projects involving five schools in the Bognor Regis area and partly the Big Blake Project is a school without walls or admission criteria! We have particularly focussed on promoting poetry with the setting up of the William Blake Poetry Prize. Last year, with the cottage coming up for sale, we have been running in a state of emergency and very grateful to those who have stepped up to help us – including the University of Chichester whose grant from the English Department made the Felpham Blake Festival last September possible. We are very hopeful the Cottage will soon be secured as a Trust.

We are looking for two or three community partners to help us advance to the next stage. Lord Egremont at Petworth House has been particularly helpful, as have West Sussex County Council who would also like us to work much more closely with the University of Chichester if possible. Specifically, we are looking for support to help cover the expenses of the Felpham Poetry Events and to publish the book of original Blake-inspired poetry being created for the campaign. We are also looking for support with this year's poetry prize (George Szirtes has agreed to judge!) and the Felpham Festival which, this year, will be focussing on Blake as outsider.

The final area that I would like to meet and discuss with the University is our plans for a Centre of Imagination in Bognor Regis. This would be an iconic building to display the premier output of the cottage, works of Blake and other cultural exhibits of international interest with a school projects area. But, because Blake was an innovator, we also want to exhibit creative technologies – yes, hopefully Google and Rolls Royce, but linked to live technological projects within the town.

Michael DaCosta Babb is a key member of our committee and very keen to support this side of the project. Michael has worked within the creative industries for over twenty years, and as VP of ATTIC, has consulted to tech companies and works within the areas of innovation and creativity and has worked with PlayStation, Nike, X-Box, MTV, Diageo, Cockspur Rum, BMW, Tate Modern, Channel 4, SONAR, Nokia. He also has a significant media track record having worked for City Limits, RPM (MIRO), Generator, Tank Girl, Deadline, Observer Life magazine, Art & Architecture Journal. In 2009, Michael was appointed founder CEO of Creative Industries Portugal which was funded by the Ministry of Economy.