

## June PREVIEW



*Bursting with live music and original songs the Rude Mechanicals have a new play, *Gentle Harry's Farm* touring in June*

### Fingers crossed—it's a great summer for [open.air.theatre](http://open.air.theatre).

SUMMER seems to have started early in 2025, and all of us who look out for an open air play or two have even more reason to be hopeful of fine weather than usual.

This year 15 companies have scheduled stops at the Dorset, Devon and Somerset venues, again bringing a wide variety of plays that, as always, include Shakespeare classics, and this year mark the Jane Austen anniversary, too. Over the years, the shows have become a big event in the social diary, and if you can't get to Glyndebourne or the Minack, the field next to the village hall or the garden of the big house will provide almost as atmospheric a setting for competitive picnics, clinking crystal and crunchy crisps, as well as the perennially popular strawberries and cream.

It starts off this summer with Folksy Theatre, coming to Chard School on 1st June with *Angela Sprocket's Pockets*, and returning to the region on 27th

July bringing *Twelfth Night* to the Marine Theatre in Lyme Regis (our own Minack!), to Forde Abbey on 29th, Burrow Farm Gardens at Axminster on 31st July and 1st August, Hestercombe Gardens on 3rd and Cannington Walled Garden on 6th August.

The enterprising musician/actors who are Three Inch Fools will perform *The Most Perilous Comedie of Elizabeth I* at Beaminster Manor on 3rd June and the following night at Lyme Regis Marine. The company's second 2025 show, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, will be performed on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, on 21st and 22nd August, now that the long-running Brownsea Open Air Theatre is late and lamented.

The all-male troupe The Lord Chamberlain's Men have chosen *Twelfth Night*, and will stage it at Athelhampton House on 5th June, and Killerton House near Exeter on 22nd July.

Ever-popular commedia dell'arte company The Rude Mechanicals have a new play, *Gentle Harry's Farm*, coming to the Square and Compass in Worth Matravers on 13th June and the following night at

Abbey House, Abbotsbury.

Then it's the turn of the HandleBards, the company that travels between venues on bicycles, this time with *Much Ado About Nothing* at Maumbury Rings in Dorchester on 15th June, and the Marine at Lyme Regis on 17th June.

Immersion Theatre's *The Wind in the Willow*, always a hit for family audiences, comes to Athelhampton House on 21st June.

The Pantaloons have two shows this year. *Robin Hood* will be transporting Sherwood Forrest to Barrington Court near Ilminster on 5th July and Maumbury Rings on 6th. And the second play, *Hamlet*, will be performed at Montacute House on 25th July.

One of the longest established companies, Illyria, comes to Sherborne House Garden on 17th July and Corfe Caste on 7th August with *Pride and Prejudice*. Their production of *HMS Pinafore* is at Sherborne House Garden on 29th July and Maumbury Rings on 1st August. They bring Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* to Sherborne House Garden on 8th July, and the *Merry Wives of Windsor* to Castle Gardens in Sherborne on 20th August and to the atmospheric Corfe Castle the following night.

Perhaps the best-named company for the English summer is Rain or Shine (and they mean JUST that). This year's production of *The Rivals* is on at Holme for Gardens near Wareham on 26th July, Prince Albert Gardens at Swanage on 11th August and Maumbury Rings in Dorchester on 28th August.

*A Midsummer Nights Dream* will be performed by Sun and Moon Theatre at Rougemont Gardens, Exeter, from 31st July to 3rd August, and there is more Shakespeare from ever-popular Cornish-based Miracle Theatre, whose *Twelfth Night* will be performed at the most dramatic of our settings, Kimmeridge Bay, on 1st August, and at Sandford Orcas near Sherborne the following night.

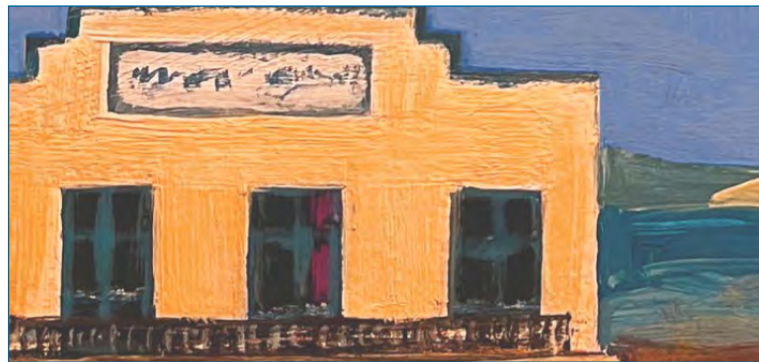
One of the newer companies, 440 Theatre has the novel idea of joining Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Macbeth* as one play, and they will perform it at Taunton Brewhouse on 13th and 14th August.

Another new company, Plandits Theatre, has chosen *The Big Bad Wolf* for its performance at Athelhampton on 16th August.

And as theatregoers in West Dorset know, there is a special connection between the long-established Festival Players and Beaminster. This year they bring their production of *As You Like It*, one of the most apt plays for open air performance, to Meerhay Manor on 17th August.

So book early, plan the picnic, pray for a balmy night and check out those folding chairs for sound ferrules and seams.

## Summer rep is back LYME REGIS



*Comedies, thrillers and classic drama in Lyme Regis*

THERE will be a second summer rep at the Marine Theatre, Lyme Regis, following last year's successful inaugural season. This year it will be an extended season of five popular plays, from 23rd July to 27th August.

There's something for everyone with comedies, thrillers and classic drama, including a Jane Austen adaptation, celebrating the great novelist's 250th anniversary this year.

The season opens with *Deathtrap*, a comedy-thriller by Ira Levin, of *Rosemary's Baby* fame. It's followed by an Alan Ayckbourn play, performed in-the-round as last time. *A Brief History of Women* is a funny story of one man and one house, over 60 years, and the women that he meets.

Next up is another thriller, *Strictly Murder*, set in France, just before the start of the Second World War. It's a good choice in this year when we have just marked the 80th anniversary of VE Day. In Brian Clemens' drama, the rumblings of the coming war make a menacing background for a dark and frightening story with plenty of twists and turns.

The 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth is celebrated with the fourth play, an adaptation of her last completed novel, *Persuasion*, which famously is set partly in Lyme Regis, with a key scene on the Cobb. Adapted by Mark Healy, it is a love story and a brilliant social satire, with snobs, fashionable visitors to Bath, naval officers, dramatic changes of fortune and unrequited love.

The season will end with Noël Coward's sparkling comedy *Fallen Angels*, in which two best friends, both married, fall out in the most hilarious way over an old flame coming to town.

Several of the actors from the 2024 season are returning—Victoria Porter, Neil Thomas, Andrew Fettes—as well as Jessica Olim and Alex Ansdell from the Marine's *A Christmas Carol*. They are once again joined by local actor Nickie Johnson.

Weekly rep used to be the staple fare of theatres



across the country, particularly in seaside ones, but is now very rare. Each play is performed for only a week, and as the first play is being performed, the second play is being rehearsed. Then when the second is being performed, the third is being rehearsed, and so on.

The Marshwood Vale area is fortunate to have not one but two summer rep seasons—Sidmouth's Manor Pavilion theatre has a long-standing summer rep season.

Lyme Regis's rep company, Gilroy Theatre, hopes to continue to meet the local community. Su Gilroy, who runs the company and has more than 35 years of experience of theatre, says: "We met so many lovely people last summer and over Christmas, at the theatre and in the wider community, who all made us feel so welcome. It's not only an honour to come back to Lyme Regis and the Marine Theatre—it's also a pleasure!"

The plays change midweek, on Wednesday or Thursday, so anyone on holiday for a week gets the chance to see two plays rather than just one. Theatre isn't something all seaside destinations can offer their visitors—and rep, with great traditional plays, is even rarer.

Tickets for performances are now available online at <https://www.marinetheatre.com/summer-season-of-plays-2/>

### ...and at the Manor Pavilion SIDMOUTH

SIDMOUTH's Manor Pavilion theatre hosts what is now said to be the longest running continuous summer rep season in the country. This year, the 12th season, again running for 12 weeks, opens on Monday 23rd June and runs to mid-September, with comedies, thrillers and some classic drama to satisfy every theatrical taste.

The season gets off to a chilling start with *A Touch of Danger*, a twisting tale of betrayal, murder and mistaken identity by Francis Durbridge. Like all the plays in the season, it runs to Saturday at 8pm each evening.

On 30th June, there is a popular farce, *Don't Dress for Dinner* by Marc Camoletti (of Boeing Boeing fame), followed on 7th July, by Ronald Harwood's warm and lovely play *Quartet*, set in a rest home for retired singers—it was successfully filmed by a cast including the late Dame Maggie Smith, Tom Courtenay, Pauline Collins and Billy Connolly.

Alan Ayckbourn's typically acerbic but laugh-out-loud comedy *Time and Time Again* is on for the week beginning 14th July, followed by another comedy, Richard Harris's *A Foot in the Door*, from 21st July.

A sharp-witted comedy with a dark underside, Tim Firth's *Neville's Island* is on from 28th July, with Frederick Knott's classic murder mystery *Dial M for*

*Murder*, from 11th August, and a period piece, Philip King's farce *See How They Run*, from 18th.

With a week out for Sidmouth Folk Festival, the rep season resumes on 25th August, with Torben Betts's psychological thriller *Murder in the Dark*.

The three September plays are Noel Coward's delightful *A Song at Twilight*, from Monday 1st, Sandy Rustin's *The Cottage*, a cheeky homage to Noel Coward, from 8th September, and the season ends with Ken Ludwig's adaptation of one of the all-time great chillers, *Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*, from 15th September.

### Women reclaim the stage EXETER

EXETER's Northcott Theatre hosts Reclaim festival, a celebration of women in the arts, from 9th to 14th June, at its partner city-centre Barnfield Theatre. The programme includes gatherings, workshops and performances, ranging from Bollywood dance to poetry performances and a daytime open mic gig for children.

It's the second year of the festival, described by Northcott joint chief executives Kelly Johnson, Emma Stephenson and Martin Berry as "a crucial platform for addressing the persistent under-representation of women in the arts, and embodies our commitment to creating meaningful opportunities for diverse talent to be seen, nurtured and celebrated on our stages"

Festival director, theatre maker and producer Katie Villa says Reclaim celebrates women "but is open to everyone and we have so many fantastic events to choose from. Reclaim brings together the very best of local, regional and national talent."

Highlights of the programme include *Happenings*, an evening of live art, spoken word, moving image and experimental music; Powerful Bodies dance workshop led by Maria Tarokh, artistic director of Exeter Northcott associate artists Company Scherazade; Reclaim the Mic, headlined by multi-award-winning poet Clare Ferguson-Walker; M/Others on the Mic, a daytime open mic gig where children are welcome to be themselves; and Manic, winner of FUSE International Best Solo Show.

Other communities opportunities are a Monday Mood Board Brunch, Drag King Workshop, Family Bollywood Dance Workshop and Life Drawing for the Terrified.

Scratch Night showcases four work-in-progress performances from local artists selected through an open call-out, and Scratch Saturday features new work from theatre company Beyond Face and Devon-based performer Micha Colombo.

Reclaim festival will end with *Dolly's Film Club Presents—Mean Girls Prom Party*, where themed cocktails, karaoke, fancy dress and crafting collide in a film screening like no other.



*Liz Grand brings Clementine to life in a one-woman play at Honiton's Beehive Centre*

## Married to Churchill HONITON

IF you watched the recent screening of the 2017 film *Darkest Hour*, with its Oscar-winning central performance by Gary Oldman as Churchill, you are sure to have been struck by the portrait of the wartime leader's relationship with his beautiful wife Clementine, played by Kristin Scott-Thomas (amusing casting for all those addicted to the duo's fascinating relationship in *Slow Horses*). But what was it like to be Clementine? Actress Liz Grand brings her to life in a one-woman play at Honiton's Beehive Centre on Saturday 14th June.

*Mrs Churchill—My Life with Winston* examines the life of a woman for whom the epithet "Behind every great man, there is a great woman" could have been written.

But did this beautiful woman, who was married for 56 years to one of the most famous Englishmen in history, actually have any influence on him, or was she just the elegant little woman at home?

As the film—screened appropriately during the week celebrating the 80th anniversary of VE Day—so clearly depicts, Churchill's inspirational leadership helped to keep the British fighting spirit alive during the dark days of 1940, and eventually to win the war. And over his 62-year parliamentary career he was responsible for many momentous decisions.

What was he like to live with? Did he bully Clementine as he did many other people? Was he as grumpy and irascible at home as he often was in the House of Commons? Given his strength and conviction, could Clementine actually make him change





*Pictured: Children at Broadmayne village hall enjoying a creative workshop, photo by Jayne Jackson Photography; James Wilton Dance at Drimpton village hall; the audience at Marnbull village hall waiting for an Artsreach event to start.*

his mind or look differently at a situation?

Liz Grand's moving and sensitive portrayal of Clementine Churchill seeks to answer some of these questions. Winston himself said: "My most brilliant achievement was my ability to be able to persuade my wife to marry me."

### Regional award for Artsreach

ARTSREACH, Dorset's rural touring arts charity, has been voted Best Arts, Culture and Theatre organisation in Somerset, Dorset and Bristol in this year's Muddy Stilettos Awards, which celebrate independent business across 35 counties throughout the UK. The various organisations and businesses are divided into multiple categories for the public top vote for their favourites.

There were more than half a million votes in the awards, which are in their 12th year, a remarkable indication of how the awards are a reflection of quality and local support.

Founded 35 years ago, Artsreach strives to enrich the lives of people in Dorset by connecting and empowering rural communities through creative and cultural experiences. It does so by working with community volunteers to present a vibrant programme of 150-plus live performance, workshops and events in more than 40 villages and towns across the county.

Kerry Bartlett, Artsreach executive director, says: "We are absolutely thrilled to have won the Muddy Stilettos award for Best Arts, Culture and Theatre in Dorset, Somerset and Bristol, having been shortlisted alongside some fantastic organisations.

"This award is truly deserved by our dedicated team of community volunteers, without whom Artsreach events simply wouldn't happen, plus our loyal audiences who support our programme and of course, the incredible touring artists and performers who keep us all entertained and inspired creatively.

"We are so very proud that what this incredible network achieves, and which so often goes under the radar, has been recognised in this way. We would like to thank everyone who voted. Keep your fingers crossed for us at the national awards - we hope to do Dorset proud!"

Artsreach is supported by Arts Council England and Dorset Council, and in 2024-25 alone, the charity invested more than £94,500 in artistic fees, showing significant support to the creative and cultural sector with a programme that reached audiences and participants totalling around 11,000 people. Financially, more than £32,000 was raised and retained by Dorset communities through Artsreach events and, with almost half of audiences travelling less than four miles to attend, over 90% of those surveyed agree that Artsreach helps to



*Yvain Calvo and Lorena Canto touring for Concerts in the West in June*

reduce loneliness and isolation in rural communities, something of which the charity is very proud.

Regional winners from every category will automatically go through to the national finals, where Muddy Stiletto's editors will judge the 'Best of the Best'—the national winners for each category will be announced on 25th June.

### [Starting from Scratch](#)

#### VILLAGES IN ACTION

VILLAGES in Action, Devon's rural arts charity, has announced the return of *From Devon With Love*, the annual artist development programme, with two Summer Scratch events, on Thursday 10th July and Friday 11th.

Innovative artists from Devon were invited to participate in this opportunity to develop and showcase early-stage new work. *From Devon With Love* was created to support live performance makers at all stages of creating new work for audiences. It offers space for experimentation, feedback and connection with rural communities across the county.

A Villages in Action spokesperson says: "It's about celebrating the creative process just as much as the final product, providing a platform for artists to test, share and shape their work alongside peers and audiences."

There are two dates for Summer Scratch—

Thursday 10th July, Moor Imagination Collective, at 7pm at Buckfastleigh (dance and spoken word/poetry), and Friday 11th at 7pm at The Barrel House, as part of Totnes Fringe Festival (theatre and comedy.)

### [Viola-piano.duo](#)

#### CONCERTS IN THE WEST

THE viola is in some ways the poor relation of the classical strings section—a bit less charismatic than the violin or the deeply emotional cello—but Spanish-Belgian musician Lorena Canto shows the versatility and beauty of the instrument in her Concerts in the West recitals with pianist Yvain Calvo, at Bridport Arts Centre at 11.30am for the coffee concert on Friday 27th June, at Ilminster Arts Centre that evening at 7.30pm and at Crewkerne Dance House on Saturday 28th at 7.30.

At Bridport, the duo will play two pieces for viola and piano by Frank Bridge and Brahms' *Sonata in F minor No 1, Op 120*. At Ilminster and Crewkerne, they will also play Robert Schumann's *Three Romances, Op 94* and Beethoven's *Seven Variations on Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen*, from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

Based in London, Lorena Cantó was for several years a member of the award-winning Jubilee String Quartet. She is now continuing her solo, chamber and orchestral career as a guest artist with ensembles





## Top Six at the Flix

### **Bridport Arts Centre**

#### ***Cottontail (2023)***

Kenzaburo, played by the remarkable Japanese actor Lily Franky (*Shoplifters*) in a performance that's a masterclass in understated anguish. Kenzaburo lost his wife to dementia before she lost her life, but, a lifelong fan of Beatrix Potter, she made him promise to take her ashes from Tokyo to the shores of Windermere in Cumbria. A delicate gem of a film, with a powerhouse turn from Franky. Wendy Ide. *The Observer*.

#### ***Layla (2024)***

It's carried by a winning performance from Hasna. Peter Bradshaw. *The Guardian*.

#### ***The Ghost and Mrs Muir (1947)***

*The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* goes down like a cup of hot tea on a cold night, a charming love story that asks only that its audience suspend disbelief and allow itself to fall under the spell of fantastical ghosts and romance.

### **Bridport Electric Palace**

#### ***The Salt Path (2025)***

Director Marianne Elliott crafts a movingly intimate drama that will continue to leave its marks on those who embark on Ray and Moth's inspiring journey. Mahan Zahiri. *Gazetelly*.

### **Plaza Cinema Dorchester**

#### ***How to Train your Dragon (2025)***

The beloved *How to Train Your Dragon* franchise is about to take its most daring flight yet. Universal Pictures is bringing Berk to life in a bold live-action adaptation set for release June 13. Helmed by original series director Dean DeBlois, the film aims to recapture the heart and adventure of the animated trilogy while expanding its mythology in exciting new directions. Jonathan Kao. *Everything We Know*.

### **Amazon Prime**

#### ***Sing Sing (2023)***

*Sing Sing* is a revelation. Fletcher Peters. *The Daily Beast*.

in the UK and internationally. Through her years of musical study, both at the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, she has played as a soloist in venues including the Berlin Konzerthaus and the Wigmore Hall, as well as appeared in BBC 3 and Classic Fm.

Yvain Calvo is a Spanish pianist with a career as soloist and chamber musician. He graduated from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 2021 under the tutelage of Peter Bithell and Caroline Palmer. Established in London, he has performed at the Oxford Philharmonic Friends Evening, recitals at Milton Court Concert Hall, and recorded at Abbey Road Studios. As an accompanist he has collaborated in the 2022 Proms at St Jude's.

### [Crusted characters on tour](#)

#### **VARIOUS VENUES**

DORCHESTER-based New Hardy Players are on tour in June with a new show, celebrating their 20th year, drawing on Thomas Hardy's famous series of short stories. *A Few Crusted Characters* will be performed at Abbotsbury Swannery, Maumbury Rings, Holme Gardens at Wareham and Minrterne House, from 6th to 15th June.

"It is a Saturday afternoon of blue and yellow autumn time, and the scene is the High Street of a well-known market-town. A large carrier's van stands in the quadrangular forecourt of the White Hart Inn, upon the sides of its spacious tilt being painted, in weather-beaten letters: Burthen, Carrier to Longpuddle ..."

Hardy's short stories could be described as the celebrated Dorset author's answer to *The Canterbury Tales*—a series of comic and tragic stories, with small scenes of village gossip from 200 years ago, told by an ensemble of authentic Dorset voices.

Suitable for all ages, the play is followed by country dancing with live music in the best tradition. It has been written by Victoria Bowles after Thomas Hardy and directed by Penny Levicree and Alastair Braidwood.

The tour is: Abbotsbury Swannery, Friday 6th and Saturday 7th June at 7.30pm, Sunday 8th, Maumbury Rings at 4pm, Friday 13th, Holme Gardens at 7.30, and Minrterne House, at 7.30pm on Saturday 14th and 4pm on Sunday 15th.

### [A dark and dangerous game](#)

#### **DORCHESTER, LYME REGIS AND TOURING**

FORGET *The Traitors*—the hottest, darkest game in town is *The Witching Hour!* ReBels Young Company, based at Plymouth's Barbican Theatre, will bring this exciting and very different show to the Marine Theatre at Lyme Regis on 19th June and Dorchester Corn Exchange on 29th June as part of a long national tour.

Black Cats, broomsticks and pentagrams? It sounds like a witch problem and the nation's new game show, *The Witching Hour*, is here to take justice to a whole new level. Survival hinges on one's ability to entertain, spin the best narrative, and sway the crowd's fickle loyalty.

As accusations fly, anyone can find themselves in the spotlight, cast as the next villain in a society obsessed with spectacle. As the audience cheers and the cauldron starts to bubble over, moral integrity is sacrificed at the altar of entertainment. (Pitchforks and torches, not included.)

Through biting satire and absurd humour, this explores themes of justice, celebrity culture and the fragility of reputation in a world where being "liked" can mean the difference between life and death.

Will the accused manage to turn their fate around with a well-timed joke

or a heart-wrenching tale ... or will they become the next victim of this insatiable hunger for drama?

For the full tour with several more West Country dates, visit [barbicantheatre.co.uk/young-company](http://barbicantheatre.co.uk/young-company).

### Celebrating queerness in the countryside

#### BRIDPORT

SINGER Douglas Dare returns to Bridport Arts Centre on Saturday 21st June, following his successful performance last year. This special event is part of BAC's season celebrating and championing LGBTQIA+ stories from Bridport and beyond. As a proud queer artist from the town, Douglas brings his distinctive sound and heartfelt storytelling back to his roots.

This event is part of the arts centre's Our Stories: Queer in the Countryside short season, which explores LGBTQIA+ lives and experiences and offers opportunities to hear from diverse and under-represented voices. Other events include The Loom, a spoken word evening on Monday 16th, celebrating women and gender-diverse voices, and comedian Kit Ford, on Friday 20th, with the show, *Narcissistic Reflections on a Queer Childhood*.

### Turning back the clocks

#### ATHELHAMPTON



*Cellist Lee MacKenzie and guitarist and mandola player Bob Whitley*

ANYONE with the faintest sense of history is transported back to the Tudor period when they step through the handsome doors of Athelhampton House. There is another opportunity to enjoy this time travel, when cellist Lee MacKenzie and guitarist and mandola player Bob Whitley bring their musical story of love and death, *Anne Boleyn, Wolf at the Door*, to the ancient house on Saturday 7th June at 7.30pm.

The performance follows the dark tragedy of the enigmatic Anne Boleyn who held King Henry VIII in thrall for six years and supplanted Katherine of Aragon as Queen of England on the promise that she would bear the king a son and royal heir.

In a Tudor court of scheming courtiers, religious fervour and feuding families, all fighting for the King's favour, a deadly battle of destinies and dynasties plays out—and is explored in this musical story, written and composed by Bob Whitley.

GPW

## The Young Lit Fix

### ***The Bookshop Dog* By Harriet Evans**

*Illustrated by Claire Shorrock*

*Published by Little Tiger  
Paperback £7.99*

***Reviewed by  
Nicky Mathewson***



LET'S kick off summer with a picture book that celebrates reading, bookshops, and the local community.

Scamper the dog lives with Paige at The Happy Tails Bookshop and although he is a little accident prone and at times a little too noisy, he is very welcome and very much a part of the bookselling team.

Scamper is well known in the neighbourhood and the residents love spending time with him, and giving him treats. Huan, who just moved in above the shop with his mum, gives the best belly rubs!

Scamper loves stories, particularly those full of adventure and he wonders if his friends in the neighbourhood would like them too. So as Paige becomes more and more snowed under with the running of the shop, Scamper helps out by taking books to the local residents in the hope that they will enjoy them.

Miss Castellano is confused when she finds a book left for her, but she reads it and loves it. When Mr Ackerman finds a gardening manual on his doorstep he starts to spend more and more time at his allotment.

If only he could find a book for Paige who is just too busy to read.

Can Scamper help Paige rediscover her passion for reading, and will the neighbours discover where their books came from?

This picture book is a bundle of joy and is so very uplifting. I absolutely love it and I highly recommend it for a read aloud to ages 3+ and for young learners looking for first books to read.

*10% off for Marshwood Vale readers at The Bookshop on South Street, Bridport. 01308 422964 [www.dorsetbooks.com](http://www.dorsetbooks.com)*