

A new chapter at village inn

Top publishing house Picador is celebrating its 40th anniversary with a literary festival in Berkshire.

Caroline Cook opened the book

THE Olde Bell in Hurley has been called all manner of things by journalists who have found themselves at its door – the perfect romantic getaway, the ideal spot for a quintessentially English wedding, a beautiful village coaching inn.

But never before has it been home to a literary festival celebrating 40 years of one of the country's top publishing houses, Picador.

On Sunday, the five star inn will see its timber-framed walls filled with book-lovers eager to hear stories and interviews from four of Picador's best new voices.

Paul Parley, Howard Cunnell, Stuart Evers, and Anna Raverat will be taking a seat in a 16th Century Tudor barn and an 18th Century malt house to talk about their novels and engage in discussion with readers.

Journalist and author Jon Ronson, whose work includes *The Men Who Stare at Goats*, will also be at the event, headlining a day of bookish treats.

"It's going to be lovely," says Anna, whose novel *Signs of Life* made the Waterstones list of recommended debut novels of 2012.

"I have heard great things about The Olde Bell. It seems very luxurious and glamorous."



The picturesque setting of The Olde Bell coaching inn in Hurley

The Cambridge-born writer has just returned from another literary festival in Stoke Newington and says she is looking forward to chatting to readers about her work on Sunday.

"I did a literary death match at Stoke Newington," she laughs. "It was a read-off with another author, sort of fun and light-hearted."

"It's really great to do these events because you realise the book has a life of its own, outside of your kitchen, and it's really interesting to hear people's different reactions and responses to it."

At the festival, Anna will be reading from *Signs of Life*, which she wrote on-and-off for around 14 years while

working full-time and raising her three children.

In the novel, Rachel is struggling to put the pieces of her past back together after an affair 10 years ago which spiralled out of control and left her life in shreds.

As she writes at her window, she tries to piece her memories and recollections together but there is something else troubling her, something which happened to her lover.

"I had the idea a really long time ago," explains Anna. "I had this story of an office romance that goes badly wrong and I heard some real life stories that had happened to people



Anna Raverat is one of the authors who will be speaking at the festival in Hurley

which I thought were interesting and it just sort of came together."

Although Anna says she had a couple of false starts – "I wrote half and it was terrible, and then I wrote another half and that was pretty bad so I threw them in the bin" – and wrote in secret for a year, she gradually saw her story take shape. "It's a real sense of relief," she says.

"And it's more the satisfaction that comes from it – thinking, well just feeling, that I have really written the book I wanted to write."

Anna will be discussing the themes and ideas behind the book at the literary festival, which will also see

London author Stuart Evers discuss his much-awaited novel *If This Is Home*.

The Bell Stories sessions will run from 11am to 6pm and guests can pre-order Champagne picnics and Jacobs wool blankets to enjoy in the picturesque grounds and wooded meadows. The Olde Bell dining room will serve a menu of British classics using seasonal and local produce, 50 per cent of which is grown on the premises.

Homemade baked goods will be available from The Olde Bell shop and a vintage ice-cream vending tricycle will serve ices created by pastry chef Jason Farr.

Bell Stories is the first in a series of events around the country being held to mark Picador's 40th anniversary.

With stunning grounds, timber beams and a village atmosphere that could almost come straight out of a book, The Olde Bell will be an ideal setting for a literary celebration.

■ Bell Stories will run at The Olde Bell in High Street, Hurley, on Sunday.

Tickets for the event are between £5 and £10 and can be bought from The Olde Bell reception.

Rooms are available and prices start at £185. For more information call (01628) 825 881 or contact oldebellreception@coachinginn.co.uk.

All aboard for regatta fun...

THE date has been set for the third Regatta for the Disabled and visitors can expect more water fun than ever before.

Organisers are hoping to have a specialist Mobiboat for the event at Phyllis Court in Henley on Saturday, September 1, which allows disabled people and wheelchair users the

opportunity to take the wheel and enjoy the waterways at the helm. "Last year we had a wonderful day, with more than 600 people coming along and many disabled adults and children taking to the water for the first time, which was fantastic to see," said regatta trustee Lucy Walton.

"This year should be better than ever, so put the date in your diary and look forward to a fun-filled day for the whole family."

The first regatta, organised by Twyford-based Building for the Future, Headway Thames Valley, and the Rivertime Boat Trust, was held in 2010 to make the river accessible to all.

The regatta aims to encourage everyone to get on the water, regardless of their age or

ability, and organisers hope it will offer many disabled people their first experience on the water.

On the day, families will be able to enjoy dragon boat racing, with businesses, rowers and celebrities racing down the river in teams of 11.

Younger children and those less able to row will be taken on the water in an adapted river cruiser called Rivertime, while two electric launches will be provided by Hobbs of Henley for walk-on passengers. There will also be land-based activities, including a farm, a fully accessible climbing wall, Punch and Judy, and refreshments. The regatta starts at 10am. Tickets are £3 or free for carers. Parking is also free and there will be space reserved for blue badge holders.

■ For more information visit www.regattaforthedisabled.org.uk or email info@regattaforthedisabled.org.



Henley Regatta for the Disabled additional needs dragon boat team

Grieving Parents Support Group
Saturday Car Boot Sale & Market
Prospect Park, Reading RG30 2ND
June 16th, July 14th,
August 11th, September 8th
Time 7:30am - 1pm
Stalls £8 and £10
• No need to book • No Egg Traders or Caterers
• All other trades welcome
Tel: **07773 539172**
Registered Charity 1150677 All proceeds to charity