

Each month we will focus on an inspiring author based in or writing about Wales! You'll have an introduction to their latest book, what inspires them to write, and any advice they have for young writers!

Get to know

Angela Graham

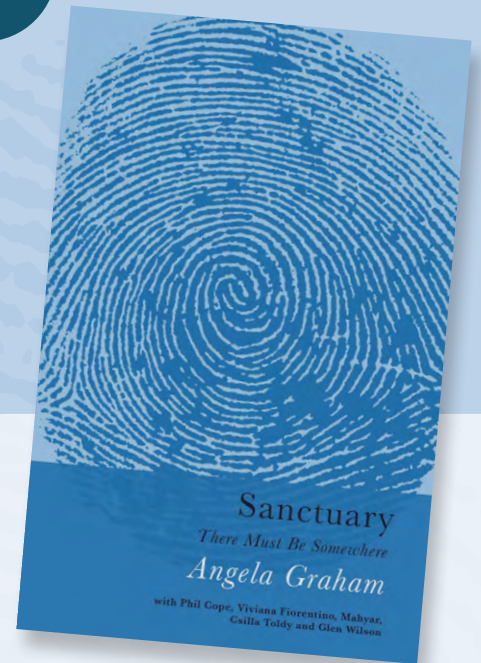


Angela Graham is from Belfast. A fluent Welsh-speaker, she is an award-winning tv producer and film maker. Seren Books published her poetry collection *Sanctuary: There Must Be Somewhere* in May 2022. Her debut collection of short stories *A City Burning* (Seren Books) appeared in 2020 and was longlisted for the Edge Hill Short Story Prize 2021. Her poetry is widely published. She won first prize for poetry in this year's Linen Hall Ulster-Scots Writing Competition.

Summary:

Sanctuary is urgent. The pandemic has made people crave it; political crises and war deny it to millions; the earth is no longer our haven. Even our minds and bodies are not refuges we can rely on. Angela Graham explores themes of sanctuary from the inside. We encounter the personal, the political, the global, and the divine, and discover that sanctuary is not only a place, but also something that can be lived.

Angela Graham divides her time between Wales and Northern Ireland and has invited five other writers from these places, each with their own experience of sanctuary, to contribute a poem to the collection, written collaboratively with Angela. In this way the book becomes a sanctuary in itself.



What inspired you to write *Sanctuary: There Must Be Somewhere*?

The book was inspired by the circumstances of the pandemic and of the crisis of forced migration. It seemed to me that we, locally, were all experiencing the fragility of our lives, with a heightened sense of peril and of safety while also being aware of the enormous challenges being faced by people in many parts of the world who were risking their lives in the hope of living safely.

Sanctuary is also a concept which has a deep religious foundation – the conviction that certain places are sacrosanct. They offer protection, reprieve, restoration because the divine dwells there or holds sway in that place. I perceived that a sanctuary brings together power and love: the power to protect, motivated by love. However, human beings are always tempted to emphasise the power at the expense of the love. Certainly, in Northern Ireland, where I come from, this has been the case. So I wanted to look these circumstances in the eye.

Tell us a little about the format...

As soon as I had the idea, I also felt that I wanted to embody the hosting aspect of sanctuary in the construction of the book itself by inviting some poets to join me in writing for it. So I looked for two poets in Wales and two in Northern Ireland (since I now live half the year in each place) who have some experience of or interest in the theme and who would be willing to write a poem collaboratively with me.

In Wales I invited Phil Cope, a writer and photographer who is an expert on the holy wells and shrines of the British Isles, and Mahyar, an Iranian who has made his home in Wales. In Northern Ireland I got to know Csilla Toldy, a Hungarian who fled Communist Hungary before the fall of the Berlin wall, seeking sanctuary in the 'free west', and Viviana Fiorentino, an economic migrant from Italy who is a novelist and poet and campaigns for the rights of prisoners of conscience and refugees. In addition, the Portadown poet, Glen Wilson acted as my mentor and contributes a poem.

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