

West Midlands Railway to celebrate “Spirit of Shakespeare” following community grant

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Visitors and residents heading to Stratford-upon-Avon by train will be able to savour the ‘Spirit of Shakespeare’ with poems and art boards thanks to a community grant from West Midlands Railway.

Eighteen poets from across the Midlands have been commissioned to pen an ode for each local station on the Shakespeare Line, which connects Stratford to Birmingham city centre.

In addition, Birmingham’s own poet laureate Casey Bailey is creating a celebratory piece for the whole line with its diverse communities and Shakespearean heritage.

The ‘People’s Poetry’ project has been designed and delivered by Poets, Prattlers, and Pandemonialists, the Black Country collective of three West Midlands poets. It has been designed with returning rail passengers in mind, while also aiming to attract new visitors to destinations along this line.

Casey’s poem, celebrating the line, will be launched on Friday – 23 April – to coincide with Shakespeare’s birthday. Poems for each of the stations along the line will follow and members of the public will be invited to write their own short poems inspired by travelling along the Shakespeare Line.

Fay Easton, head of community and stakeholder for West Midlands Railway, said: “The ‘People’s Poetry’ project builds on the success of the ‘Pride of Place’ poem commissioned in 2019 to thank the army of volunteers who help care for our stations.

“The Shakespeare Line is a wonderful example of the community spirit the railway can foster with every station on the route formally adopted by a small army of volunteers who will be thrilled to see poems published on art boards at their stations.

“Poetry can bring people together and we are so pleased to have been able to support this project, celebrating our communities in a powerful and engaging way whilst putting a smile on the faces of our passengers.”

The grant has been awarded as part of the Your Community, Your Fund scheme, financed by the Department for Transport. Under the scheme, West Midlands Railway and sister company London Northwestern Railway will invest in dozens of community projects across the network over the coming months.

Steve Pottinger, from Poets, Prattlers, and Pandemonialists, said: “This project will bring together diverse voices from the Midlands poetry scene to celebrate and champion the Shakespeare Line.

“It will highlight the work done by volunteers at the stations, encourage people to explore the hidden gems along the line, and inspire folk to try writing their own poetry too.

“We’re delighted to be working with West Midlands Railway to make it happen.”

For more information visit www.pandemonialists.co.uk

Photo credit: Gaynor Steele