

**For immediate: 9 October, 2024**

## Audiobooks Studio Launched for North East

New Writing North and publishers Hachette UK have opened a dedicated new audiobook recording studio in the North East.

Sounds Good Audiobooks is based within Northumbria University's city centre campus in the heart of Newcastle.

The studio has officially announced commercial production with its first frontlist audiobook, *Barrowbeck* by the award-winning Lancashire author, Andrew Michael Hurley.

Andrew's debut novel, *The Loney* was a Costa Best First Novel Award winner and Book of the Year at the British Book Awards and his Yorkshire-set 2019 novel *Starve Acre* was released as feature film on 6 September.

*Barrowbeck* is a dark, suspenseful folk-horror story about the inhabitants of a remote valley on the Yorkshire-Lancashire border. It is read by actors Gabriella Pond and Matt Jamie, and produced by Lucie McNeil, who pitched the original concept of a collaborative audiobook studio to Northumbria University, New Writing North, and Hachette UK.

Lucie McNeil, Audio Development Producer for New Writing North and studio lead for Sounds Good said: "The North East has an incredible array of talent and graduates primed to work in audiobooks, and now we have a central hub where they can be created locally. The studio is right in the heart of Newcastle and all its transport links, so it's easy to get to."

Lucie added: "We are excited to continue working with our long-term partners Hachette to build publishing infrastructure and opportunity in the north, and New Writing North's partnership with Northumbria University has always had a creative, collaborative approach. We want to build our audio work into Northumbria University's MA in Publishing and other courses and provide industry experience for students and creatives."

Northumbria University and New Writing North have worked in partnership since 2012, delivering a wide range of teaching, community engagement and research activity. The two organisations are in the second year of a ground-breaking MA

Publishing, which is co-delivered with New Writing North and global publishers, Hachette.

The audiobook studio will open up opportunities for staff and students, with plans to incorporate writing for audio across a number of programmes in Humanities.

Neil Percival, Acting Director of Cultural Partnerships at Northumbria University said: “One of the reasons we have established strong cultural partnerships with local organisations such as New Writing North is to sustain and build the creative ecology of the region.

“We’re looking forward to providing new opportunities to our students through this collaboration, including co-designing and delivering a new undergraduate module alongside New Writing North across courses such as English Literature and Creative Writing.”

*Barrowbeck* is published by John Murray, an imprint of John Murray Press (a division of Hachette UK) and is out on 24 October in its print hardback edition.

Dominic Gribben, co-Audio Content Director at Hachette, said: “*Barrowbeck* was at the top of my list when Lucie and I originally discussed books that could be recorded as part of the partnership. I’m delighted that we’re kicking things off with this production, and I’m looking forward to many more audiobooks coming out of Newcastle later this year and through 2025.”

Author, Andrew Michael Hurley, said: “It’s such an honour to know that *Barrowbeck* will be recorded and produced by Sounds Good Audiobooks. It’s a wonderful, collaborative venture that will give writers, publishers, actors, and sound technicians across the North so many opportunities.”

The UK’s publishing industry contributes £11 billion to the economy.

The number of UK audiobook downloads increased by 17% between 2022 and 2023, according to data from the Publishers Association (PA). Revenue from audiobooks rose 24% across the same period to £206m in 2023, reflecting an increase in the number of audiobook downloads from 50m to 59m and the growth in the audiobook market.

New Writing North leads the development of creative writing and reading in the North of England.

The charity has worked with Hachette, one of the largest publishing groups in the UK, on various initiatives to rebalance career opportunities in publishing and the writing industries in the north.

Claire Malcolm MBE, CEO of New Writing North, said: “The audio studio is a practical and tangible way of expanding the creative industries in the North East. We’re incredibly grateful to Creative UK who have supported this venture and associated talent programmes for writers and producers.

“The studio supports our mission to increase content production in the region which in turn supports Newcastle City’s Council’s industrial strategy and the creative and cultural ambitions of the North East Combined Authority.”

In 2024, Creative UK partnered with New Writing North to establish the Sounds Good Audiobooks, it aims to run workshops and training with experienced audiobook narrators, commissioners and editors training acting talent to become narrators and producers, as well as creating collaborative new research about the audio industry.

The studio booth was part-funded by Creative UK’s Cultural and Creative Investment programme with funding from North East Combined Authority. The new studio’s ambition is to work with an array of publishers across the UK who are keen to have talent working effectively and cost efficiently in studios close to their home base.

Carol Bell, OBE, Associate Regional Director for Creative UK said “We were delighted to collaborate on this project to support the creation of the studio, and enable talented writers to have the opportunity to gain new skills and diversify their skills. We’re pleased to be supporting creative ambition in the region, and look forward to seeing the opportunities this will create in the future.”

In addition to creating audiobooks, New Writing North is running an eight-month audio-making development programme for six writers with *Shadows At The Door* writer-producer, Mark Nixon culminating with each writer creating their first episode.

The charity also runs a range of courses and masterclasses as part of Sounds Good audio programming and, to date, over 50 local writers have been supported via bursaries and courses to adapt their written work for audio.

Sounds Good has also created a corporate and academic podcasting course, supporting regional universities to broadcast their research work.

## ENDS

For further media info, please contact [ann@causeuk.com](mailto:ann@causeuk.com) m: 0753 489 2715

## Notes to Editors

Images for press use:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/8m8g5s34agjlnylzvj90b/AM5w9tKUxQtt-78XWRKKHo?rlkey=ymjgz4gx14rzbd96momxi5t97&st=0vdue27l&dl=0>

## Andrew Michael Hurley

Andrew Michael Hurley lives in Lancashire with his family. His first novel, *The Loney*, was originally published by Tartarus Press as a 300-copy limited edition, before being republished by John Murray. It went on to sell in twenty languages, win the Costa Best First Novel Award and the Book of the Year 2015 at the British Book Awards and TV rights have been sold to New Regency Television with Jonathan van Tulleken (*Shogun*) attached to direct. *Devil's Day*, his second novel, was picked as a Book of the Year in five newspapers, and won the Encore Award. His 2019 novel *Starve Acre* was published in 2019 and has been adapted for the screen by director Daniel Kokotajlo for cinema release this autumn. *Barrowbeck*, his new book, will be published on 24 October 2024 by John Murray, an imprint of John Murray Press (a division of Hachette UK).

## New Writing North

New Writing North leads the development of creative writing and reading in the North of England. We are based in Newcastle upon Tyne, where we have produced nationally significant work since 1996.

We are proud to be a charity and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

We believe that writing talent is everywhere, but that opportunities are not. We work hard to both identify talent and create fantastic career-changing opportunities for people from across society.

We develop programmes and activities that inspire people to engage with creative writing and reading, whether this is to develop their skills and professional ambitions or for pleasure and wellbeing.

We help excellent writing find local, regional, national, and international audiences.

[Home - New Writing North](#)

## Northumbria University

Northumbria is a research-intensive university that unlocks potential for all, changing lives regionally, nationally and internationally.

Two thirds of Northumbria's undergraduate students come from the North East region and go into employment in the region when they graduate, demonstrating Northumbria's significant contribution to social mobility and levelling up in the North East of England.

Find out more about us at [www.northumbria.ac.uk](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk)

Please contact [media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk) with any media enquiries or interview requests.

## Creative UK

Creative UK is a not-for-profit company that supports the development of the creative industries across the UK. We champion, convene, support and invest in creative businesses and practitioners, recognising creativity is the driving force of our present and our future. In addition to our national work, Creative UK works with regional partners in the North East to deliver tailored business support and investment opportunities for creative and cultural practitioners, freelancers, organisations, and SMEs based in the region.

<https://www.wearecreative.uk/support/regional-growth-programmes/north-east/>

Our programmes are led by industry experts, provide practical and valuable business support at every stage of the growth journey, and tailored support that suits all creative aspirations. The overall aim of our work has been to encourage a sustainable cultural and creative industries (CCI) sector in the region.