

Emma Purshouse's

New Novel, 'Dogged', Hits the Shelves

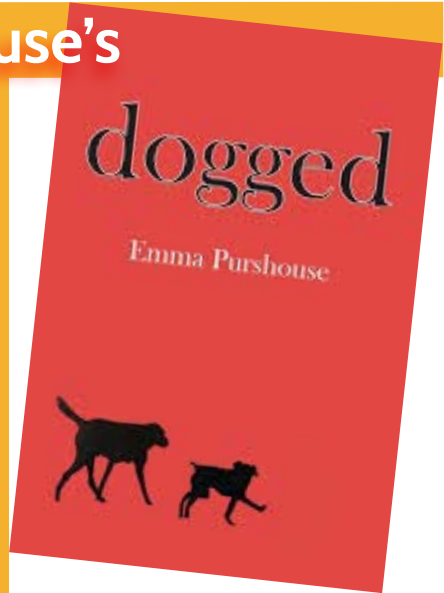
Our very own Emma Purshouse talks about her new novel: 'Dogged' published by Ignite Books.

You're Wolverhampton's first Poet Laureate, what made you decide to write a novel?

Even though I'm known as a poet, I've always written prose alongside my poetry and have had a few short stories published and done quite well in flash fiction competitions from time to time.

'Dogged' is actually my second novel. My first completed novel, 'Scratters', was shortlisted for the Mslexia unpublished novel prize a few years ago, but it didn't go on to find a publisher. In part that was because it was set in Wolverhampton. The people in publishing that I was talking to at that time wanted me to change that because they didn't think there would be a market for it.

I actually began novel writing when I was in my early twenties, which was back in the 1980s. I've been working on this novel, 'Dogged', for about 15 years.



In my writing I've always wanted to tell the stories of the place where I live, using the language that I hear.

The usual question to all novelists is this: 'What's it about?'

Well, the blurb on the back says...

"Marilyn Grundy is a little bit scared of Nancy Maddox, but then everyone is. Nancy may be seventy-nine, but she's a force to be reckoned with, and even the local dealers tread warily round her. Who better to look after Marilyn's tartan shopping trolley when she needs to keep it hidden away?

Nancy's got a lot on her mind, though, and a cough that's getting worse. Is she really going to be able to keep the trolley and its contents safe?

What will the old goat have to say about it all? And what will happen to Toby, Marilyn's little white dog?"

I think that gives you a gist of what to expect. It's a fairly fast paced book, at

least that's the feedback I'm getting. It's also a story about friendship, love, and determination.

Where did the idea come from?

The book is fairly character driven, and Nancy Maddox is a recurring character in my work. She's based very loosely on somebody I knew and admired. In the past I have created poems that are very much about Nancy. For me, I think she's my personification of the Black Country.

In the book I also wanted to explore a little of what it can be like for family and friends of people with addictions, and how trying to support a person with these sort of problems can impact dramatically on a person's life, so I decided to put Nancy in that situation to see what she'd do.

Your novel is set in Wolverhampton - tell us why you set it there.

I live in Wolverhampton so I know the area. I love the city and its people. They say to write what you know, so I have. Having said that, although it is recognisably a representation of aspects of Wolverhampton it is still a fictional world. When I start writing novels they are contemporary, but by the time I finish they're almost historical fiction! They take me that long. With that in mind, if you were to read it, there are scenes in pubs that have long gone, there are houses in which characters live which are actually patches of waste ground in the real world. If you're from Wolverhampton you'll recognise things, but when I'm writing I create a world from memory. I might include things that are Wolverhampton now and things that were Wolverhampton once as though they both exist simultaneously.



Author Emma Purshouse

How different did you find writing a novel compared to writing your poetry?

A novel is a huge undertaking and needs a lot of headspace to create. One of the reasons it's taken so long to write is that I have to earn a living. I do that from my poetry and related activities. That means poetry takes priority.

Poetry is something you can work on much more easily than a novel. That's not to say poetry is easy, I just mean that a poem, for me, is often a world in miniature or a single idea so I can work on it between other things, like waiting for a bus or a train, or while I'm waiting for the tea to cook (although that does sometimes lead to burnt offerings if I get a bit engrossed). I can't do that with a novel. It's not easy to slot a novel between other things. To work on a novel I need four or five hours of time each day over consecutive days. I used to work on my novels in the summer when I had less school work or fewer poetry performances on, meaning I didn't have to be anywhere.

Is there likely to be a sequel?

As I said, there is already a prequel, but whether or not that'll ever get published I'm not sure. I'm not even sure it's representative of my writing anymore, or

what I want to say. I think there would need to be revision of that work if it were to be publishable. I also think perhaps I needed to write that first book to learn about how the novel as a form works.

I don't know that I would write another novel from scratch, never say never of course, but it would need to be something that kept pestering away at me to be written, because of that investment of time and energy that's needed.

I've got a half finished children's book somewhere, and I do keep thinking about it. Maybe I should go back to that.

What writing are you working on now?

Since lockdown I've had a lot of poetry commissions which has been great. I've mostly produced stuff for Poetry on Loan, and the fantastic people at Multi-story who are based in West Brom. I also did a piece for the Mid Wales Arts Centre based upon a piece of sculpture, which was really interesting to research.

All of my schools work and the performances I had in my diary disappeared overnight in March 2020, so it's been a case of re-building all of the work for an online format. I've managed to do this, but it's been a steep learning curve and is also time consuming. It involves hours staring at a screen, so staring at a screen for even longer in order to write another novel is perhaps not something I'm looking to do at the moment.

Where can we buy your novel (and your poetry?)

My novel is published by Ignite Books, and is available here...

<https://ignitebooks.co.uk/products-page/emma-purshouse-books/>

Thanks in advance if you decide to buy it. I really hope you like it.

My poetry is published by Offa's Press.
www.offaspress.co.uk

And I have a children's collection of poetry with Fair Acre Press.

<https://fairacrepress.co.uk/shop/i-once-knew-a-poem-who-wore-a-hat/>

Are there any (virtual) performances of your novel or poetry we can see?

The launch of the novel takes/took place on Valentine's day 2021 at Wolverhampton Literature Festival. I'll be reading/I read extracts and talked/talking about the process of creating it. The official publication date is 5th April 2021, but the publisher has been taking pre-orders, so it is off the leash and out in the world now.

Anything else you want to say.

Anybody who has had a novel published knows it's not all about the writer, and there is such a lot of behind the scenes support which goes to help you make it the best you can. I've been very lucky to have had people who have acted as readers before it was published, I've had mentoring from the novelist Helen Cross, I've had encouragement from friends and family in the 'not giving up' department, and kind words from respected writers who helped me to believe in myself. I've also been lucky to find a small press who understood what I was trying to do, and have gone the extra mile to make that a reality.

If you're writing a novel my advice would be to keep going, find your local writing community who can be great by way of support, and take positive help where it's available. Writing a novel can be a lonely business otherwise. We have Writing West Midlands in our region, who offer a great service and wonderful opportunities for local writers. It's definitely worth checking out their website www.writingwestmidlands.org. Of course, it's all worth it when you get to hold your own book in your hands.