



■ Keiron Pim, left, with Louis de Bernières at the event.

Picture: SIMON FINLAY

Literary names under spotlight at cathedral

Some of the county's literary names have been cast into the spotlight at the Hostry Festival's Norfolk Authors in Profile event.

Presented in association with Jarrold, the celebration of the written word yesterday at Norwich Cathedral's Hostry saw four locally-based authors interviewed by writer Keiron Pim about their work.

Among the writers taking part was best-selling novelist and chancellor of the UEA, Rose Tremain, who said it was great to have an event like this bringing together some of the authors living in a such a "writer-rich region."

Ms Tremain spoke about her novel *Merivel - A Man Of His Time* in front of the 100-strong audience.

She was joined by Louis de Bernières, winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize

for his novel *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, who read from his debut poetry collection *Imagining Alexandria*.

Norwich-based civil servant and magistrate Hilton Pashley talked about his debut children's novel *Gabriel's Clock*, while Andrew Cowan, the director of the UEA's creative writing programme, spoke about his book *Worthless Men*.

Afterwards, Ms Tremain said: "I think we had a very good afternoon with a very varied programme because we are all so different."

"We have all got books about to be published or recently published, and there was a great diversity."

"Andrew Cowan was talking about his book, *Worthless Men*, set in the first world war; Louis de Bernières was reading poetry, and Hilton Pashley was talking about his teen novel full

of monsters and scary people. I was talking about my historical novel set in the 17th century.

"There was lots of varied discussion. It was an afternoon of great variety with a very appreciative audience."

Keiron Pim, a Norwich-based author and journalist, said: "It was a pleasure to speak with all four of these writers while hosting the Norfolk Authors in Profile event."

"It displayed the range of literary talent at work in the county, from some of the most popular British novelists of the last 20 years through to emerging talent."

"As one of the organisers of the EDP-Jarrold East Anglian Book Awards I never fail to be amazed by the number of writers that call this region home."

"This afternoon proved that once again."

Baroness on her life as potential choice for Tory's next Iron Lady

She polarised opinions like no other British prime minister and had a ferocious reputation for dressing down members of her cabinet, but what was it actually like to work for Margaret Thatcher?

Gillian Shephard, the former Conservative cabinet member and South West Norfolk MP, who was once billed as Baroness Thatcher's successor, gave an intriguing insight into that question during the opening of the Burnham Market Book Festival yesterday.

Her overall portrait of the Iron Lady was affectionate but Baroness Shephard admitted Baroness Thatcher could be very harsh.

She said: "People often said she was great to work for and hell to work with."

"I don't think all of her colleagues would agree she was hell to work with but she could be very tough on cabinet ministers, especially if they didn't know all of their facts."

"There was once case where a minister was escorted to the door in tears after she had given him a dressing down."

"I was very junior in Mrs Thatcher's government and she was never harsh with me personally."

"She was in fact very supportive of me as a junior minister and as a woman MP."

In the mid-1990s Baroness Shephard gained praise for defusing

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a threatened teachers' strike.

She was nicknamed Iron Lady Mark II and talked up as the woman who could replace Baroness Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party.

Baroness Thatcher, however, was reported to have said of this suggestion: "Are we really that desperate?"

Baroness Shephard, who now lives in Swaffham, said: "I took no offence to that at all and if I had been in her position I would have thought exactly the same thing."

"I had only been in parliament for five minutes."

"I went into politics at 47 and I wouldn't have had the body of knowledge or the support that was needed."

"I had other interests outside politics, so I don't think I would have had the complete and utter focus that was required."

Baroness Shephard, who under John Major, became the first woman minister at the Treasury and went on to hold high cabinet posts including employment, agriculture and education, spoke at length of her admiration of Baroness Thatcher.

She said: "She was a great strategist and had an exceptional eye for detail and having both of those things together is very rare. Ministers working for her were often tripped up for not knowing all of the

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Baroness Gillian Shephard



■ Baroness Gillian Shephard, left, with Whitehouse Bookshop owner and festival organiser Kate Bennett at the Burnham Market Book Festival.

Picture: MATTHEW USHER

details.

"And she never liked the idea of wasting a minute in small talk."

"When she went to Ireland with Robert Armstrong to sign the Anglo-Irish Agreement, they arrived half an hour early."

"It was a real time for celebration but she insisted that they spent that time rehearsing answers to the ques-

tions the press would ask."

She added: "Mrs Thatcher had this mixture of authority and femininity that fascinated people."

"Her appearance was important to her, not just because of her job."

"She often took her rollers around with her and sometimes offered them to other people if she thought they looked untidy."

Baroness Shephard was promoting her book *The Real Iron Lady: Working with Margaret Thatcher*, which is now available.

The Burnham Market Book Festival, being held at The Hoste, continues throughout the weekend.

■ For more information, visit www.burnhambookfestival.co.uk