

Paul rises to the challenge with a boot on the other foot

He is a familiar face on our TV screens and is also a successful author. Now, Paul Heiney has turned his hand to a different kind of writing – and penned a play to be performed as part of the INK Festival in Suffolk. He told **Rachel Banham** all about it.

Writing his first play was, admits Paul Heiney, “an enormous challenge”.

The result, entitled *The Boot On The Other Foot*, will be performed as part of the INK festival in Suffolk this April.

Paul and his wife Libby Purves, who live near Southwold, are great believers in the event.

“We live on the Suffolk coast and the INK Festival takes place in Halesworth and both my wife and I have been supporters of it ever since it started,” Paul says.

“It’s a very important event for new writers to be able to get their work performed and directed by professionals.

“If you’ve never had a play performed before you have no idea what it is like, I imagine, to see it performed on a stage, properly directed.

“And what the INK Festival does is provides that opportunity, so for a new writer, a young writer, it’s a fantastic opportunity.”

INK is a theatre company and registered charity, that sources, develops, and produces the best new short plays for stage, and radio, from writers with an East Anglian connection and each year showcases the new work at The INK Festival and on tour.





Paul Heiney speaking at the Suffolk Creating the Greenest County conference.



After a sell-out festival in 2018, INK Festival 2019 has been extended to three days on April 12, 13 and 14,

before a nine venue tour around East Anglia.

During the three days of the festival, more than 40 new, short plays for stage and radio will be performed at The Cut, Halesworth, showcasing East Anglia's brightest talent including Scarlett Curtis, Shappi Khorsandi and Greg Mosse.

The festival will also feature performance poetry, curated by one of its patrons, Luke Wright, talks and workshops by prominent writers and theatre practitioners, and children's activities.

Paul's play is about an elderly pig farmer and his grumpy carer, who have little respect, and less time, for the other's point of view.

He explains how he became involved in the festival.

"They had this slot for five-minute plays written by, I hate to use the word 'celebrity' but you

know what I mean - and I was asked to be one of those this year," he says.

"And so I had to sit down and come up with an idea. And I don't know if I was in a bit of a miserable mood but it all ended up rather poignant. It's only five minutes, so not a lot goes on, but let's just say it is about a pig farmer who is not happy to find himself in a retirement home.

"That's probably because at the

time I was writing a book about pigs. Pigs were on my mind!"

Paul's TV broadcasting has ranged from 'That's Life' to 'Countrywise' and many programmes on East Anglian themes.

His writings have encompassed his decade as a farmer, and more recently his experiences as an ocean-going sailor, and many other topics along the way from popular science to the history of fire.

Suffolk always feels just like home

Paul and his wife Libby have lived in Suffolk since 1983.

"It just always feels like home," Paul says.

"I don't come from Suffolk, but my wife was brought up in Suffolk, so we have some connection there.

"I've always felt very comfortable there and I've always felt very comfortable with Suffolk people.

"I come from Yorkshire... industrial Yorkshire, which is a completely different place.

"I've always felt very relaxed and very at home in Suffolk - I have no plans to leave."

Paul says he has different favourite places in the county depending on his frame of mind.

"We live on the coast, so I love the coast and all its aspects," he says.

"There was a period of my life when I was farming and we kept our Suffolk Punches, so I've also got a very keen eye for farmland."

He adds: "There is such a rich variety of landscape in Suffolk, with the exception of mountains, which I must admit I miss now and again.

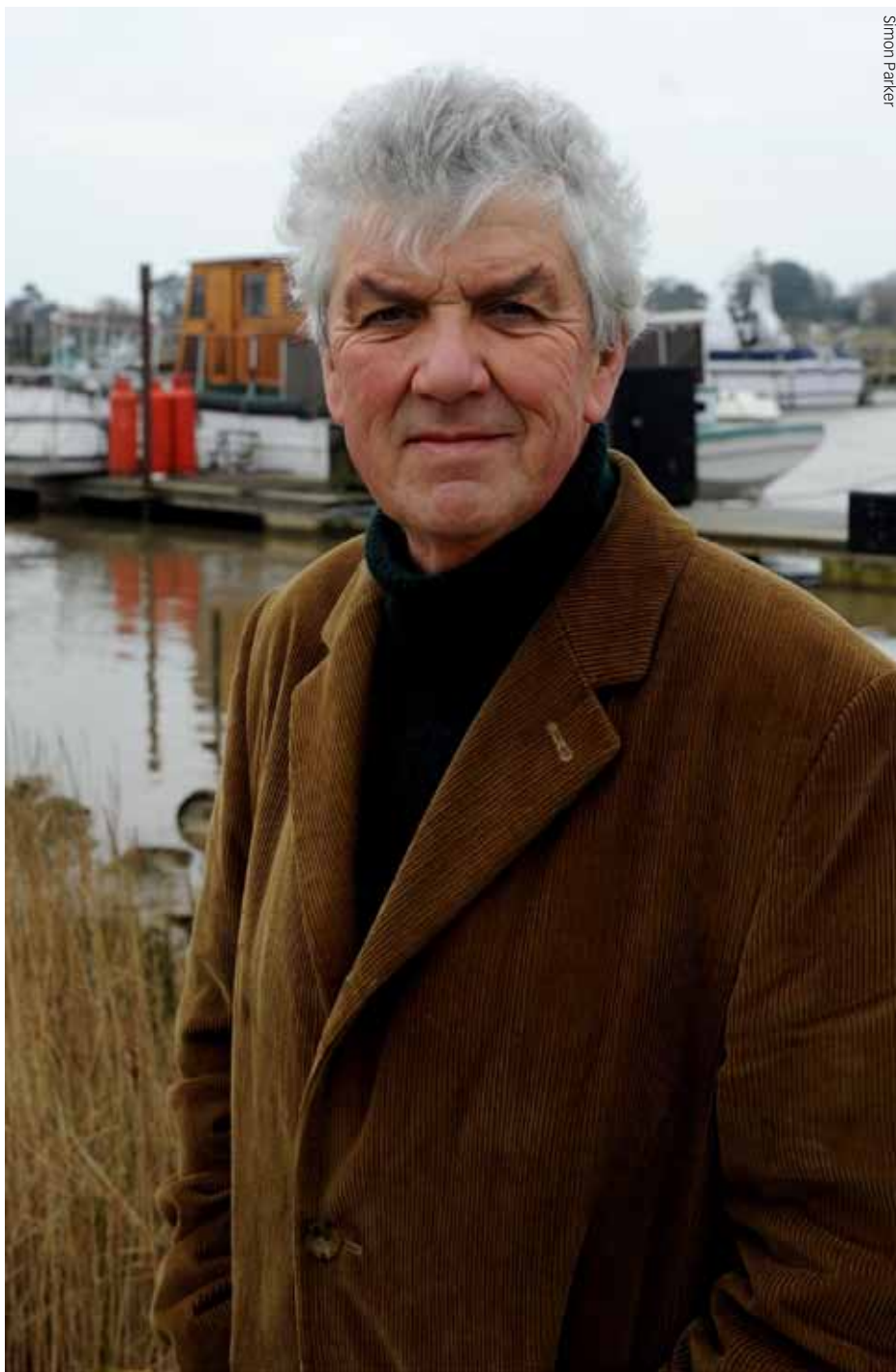
"I can enjoy that. I always look at it with a bit of a farmer's eye, if you know what I mean."



Paul's wife, Libby Purves, at the launch of Blyth Valley Community Radio.



At the wheel of his boat, The Ayesha.



Simon Parker

Paul Heiney, who has written a short play for the INK Festival.

That's Life, 40 years on

It's 40 years since Paul made his debut on BBC TV's *That's Life* in 1978.

"That's Life was very fortunate for me because I was a radio reporter for BBC current affairs and I was suddenly propelled into this television programme which had a massive weekly audience of 16 million people," he recalls.

"When you tell people that 16 million souls used to sit down and

watch the television on a Sunday night they don't believe you these days, because compared with the modern television programmes that is an absolutely colossal audience, but we did that.

"I was only there for three years, but at least once a week someone will mention it – in the street, or the supermarket or wherever.

"So after all those years people are still mentioning it. I find that quite remarkable."

But writing a play is very new to him.

"I was going to say it's not a huge amount of work. But in some ways the art of the short story I reckon is far more difficult to pull off than if you're going to write a long and rambling novel," he says.

"And in the same way, to be able to just hold an audience's attention, and give them something to take away from it in just five minutes is asking quite a lot.

"So actually I found it an enormous challenge.

"I thought: 'This won't take very long to do', but I found out I had to give it an enormous amount of thought over the period I was sort of sketching it."

He adds: "I have no ambitions at all to be a playwright – I think it's an incredibly difficult job.

"But for people who do want to write in this way the INK Festival is a fabulous thing. If you are new to writing plays the sheer impossibility of getting them on the stage these days is just colossal because of the costs - the costs of theatres and casts and sets and everything that goes with it.

"Theatres have to be pretty certain that they're going to make a bit of money out of it, whatever they're putting on. That's enormous pressure on a playwright. It can't be fair to dump it on to a novice playwright – so that's why I think the INK Festival is so important."

Recently, Paul has been writing a book about why he loves pigs.

He has also completed a book about ocean sailing.

Both books are due to be published this year.

First though, his play will be performed at the INK Festival.

So what would Paul like the audience to take away from his play?

"I would just like to them to come out of my play and say: 'Oh, that was interesting, wasn't it?'" he says.

"That's good enough! I would be very happy with that."

The INK Festival takes place at The Cut, Halesworth, on April 12, 13 and 14. Call the box office on 01986 872555, or visit: inkfestival.org