An introduction to...
Michael Morpurgo

“I admire the way Seven Stories has filled a gap in our culture by founding a national children’s literature archive. It is a most extraordinary achievement for the country and for Newcastle. It made sense to me that it should be the home for my stuff.” Michael Morpurgo

In 2015, Michael Morpurgo donated his entire archive to Seven Stories. It contains manuscripts, photographs, notebooks and correspondence relating to almost every book he has written.

The Story Maker
Michael Morpurgo is one of Britain’s greatest living authors for children. His work spans 40 years and a career that has seen the publication of over 150 books for children, exploring wide-ranging topics including historical events, war and conflict, farming and nature, and family life.

Michael considers himself a storyteller rather than a writer which is an idea that crops up in a lot of his books. Included in the archive are hundreds of orange exercise books crammed with drafts for many of Michael’s stories.

Michael has become a true champion of children and young people’s culture, creativity and their right to read and enjoy stories. He was instrumental in setting up the Children’s Laureateship in 1997, and he himself was appointed Laureate from 2003 to 2005. His services to children’s literature were recognised in 2006 when he was awarded an OBE.

Biography
Born in 1943, Michael spent his early years in London with his brother Pieter, mother Kippe and stepfather Jack. His happiest memories are of his mother reading to him at bedtime from Aesop’s Fables and Kipling’s Just So Stories, and from poets like Walter de la Mare and John Masefield.

At the age of seven, Michael was sent to boarding school and his life was turned upside down.

Homesickness and academic struggles made Michael miserable for much of his primary school life, but by the time he moved to secondary school he had discovered great personal attributes of charisma and friendliness. A natural leader and keen sportsman, he became Captain of School and seemed perfectly suited for a career as British Army officer. He began his training at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst in 1962, only to find it was absolutely not for him.
Teaching
By 1964 Michael had quite a different future ahead of him – as a husband, a father and a teacher. Teaching provided Michael with the opportunity to develop his ideas on how to communicate with and inspire children: he reflected on the results-driven education that had deprived him of the joy of reading and writing; he examined what inspired the children he taught; he criticised the system that prevented children from exploring the world just outside the classroom door. He soon discovered that he could fire the children’s imaginations best with stories he made up himself.

Against a backdrop of war
Michael is often asked why he writes books set during times of war and conflict. His answer is twofold. Firstly, his mother’s grief for the brother she lost during the Second World War was ever present during Michael’s childhood. It was a hole in the family that could never be filled and made clear the tragedy of war. Secondly, he has always felt a passionate concern about the devastating effects of war on children in particular.

A sense of place
Michael has lived near the village of Iddesleigh in Devon for over thirty years. He has immersed himself in the local community, and its people, animals and landscape have shaped and nurtured his writing. It is of critical importance to Michael to feel that he belongs and has a spiritual connection to the landscape that has inspired so many of his books.

Farms for City Children
From what started as Michael and Clare Morpurgo’s optimistic dream, Farms for City Children has grown into an established charity that welcomes three thousand children every year to its three working farms in Devon, Wales and Gloucestershire. The charity offers urban children from all over the country a unique opportunity to live and work together for a week at a time on a real farm in the heart of the countryside.