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The Leeds Library



Speaks Volumes 24

The Bi-Monthly Newsletter of The Leeds Library

December 2020



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From Your CEO and Chair of Trustees

Dear Member

As the year draws to an end, we hope you are all safe and well. As this is the last edition of Speaks Volumes for 2020, we wanted to reflect briefly on the last 12 months and look forward to the year ahead which will be hopefully a less challenging experience for all of us.

2020 has been one of the most difficult years in the 252 years of the Library. The impact of Covid-19 on the day-to-day operation of the Library and the life of our Members has been profound, requiring us to shut the Library for two extended periods and introduce new measures to minimise the risk of the virus spreading. At the same time, it has stimulated us to quickly extend our membership offer to include many services that can be enjoyed from home including our eBooks Library, access to PressReader, our development of a delivery and collection service as well as a postal loans service and most recently a subscription to Drama Online enabling Members to enjoy theatre performances from the Royal Shakespeare Company, Globe Theatre and the National Theatre. Only a week ago the National Theatre announced that members of the public could subscribe directly to them for £10 a month to watch the same performances that we are providing Library members at no extra cost to membership subscriptions. We have also sought to engage Members through our online community Forum and online events and activities including our book club, Nowt But Verse poetry events and Members' Quiz of which a special Christmas edition will take place on 16th December. We are also planning a livestream from the Library of silent movie shorts with live piano accompaniment by Jonny Best on 19th December. These events and many more will continue into 2021.



We used the two Covid-19 lockdown periods to complete several pieces of work in the Library, funded through the assistance of the National Lottery Heritage Fund. These have included the repairing of the main Library roof, the decoration of two or three areas in the Library, investment in new furniture, the installation of a CCTV system and new fire alarm system. All of this work was undertaken whilst making preparations for the Library to reopen to Members which necessitated the introduction of screens, a one way system, face coverings, hand gel and the quarantining of handled books for the first time ever.

We realise that the year has been challenging for everyone and we would like to say thank you to all of our Members for their patience, understanding and support throughout the year. We have never taken our Members for granted and have appreciated the fact that the vast majority of Members have been committed to continuing their association with and membership of the Library.

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From Your CEO and Chair of Trustees, cont'd

In the coming year we have a number of plans that we hope will engage our membership even more as we slowly move on from the Covid-19 crisis. These will include an enriched events programme, further investment in our Member services and improvement to the fabric of the Library building. We cannot wait to see you in the Library over the coming months to join us in what we hope will be an exciting year for all of us as the Library makes plans for the future starting with the development of a new strategic plan for 2022.

Finally, throughout the year, many Members, staff and Trustees have been touched by illness and loss either through the direct impact of Covid-19 or from other illness and sickness. To all those who have been affected in this way, we send our best wishes and hope that next year is a happier one for you. Most recently, we had the very sad news of the death of Kevin Riley, the husband of our Librarian Jane, after a short illness. Many of you will know Kevin as he very kindly undertook deliveries for the Library during the first lockdown period. His passing has been a shock to us all.

We know that some Members would like to send their condolences to Jane and we are, therefore, asking that any cards, letters or flowers be addressed to the Library and we will pass them on to Jane with whom we are in regular contact at this difficult time.

We hope for all of the Library family that the festive season and next year bring calmer waters, more smiles and fewer struggles.

Best wishes

Carl Hutton and Martin Staniforth

On behalf of the staff team and Trustees of the Leeds Library





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From Your Editor

I have really enjoyed putting together this year's editions of Speaks Volumes and I really hope they have helped keep you connected to the Library, staff team and Trustees during what has been such a difficult year for everyone. It's been lovely receiving your articles and news and I hope we have reciprocated in an equally interesting and informative way. Speaks 24 is our festive edition and whilst we are unable to celebrate as we have done in past years in the Library itself, we hope that this, in a small way, contributes to spreading some hope and good cheer for the future when we can meet up again in person and enjoy everything that the Library has to offer.

Meanwhile, we're contributing to making Commercial Street a more colourful and arty location with our ground level windows which have morphed from their Autumn artwork to a Winter scene thanks to local artist [Jenny Tribillon](#). They are really beautiful and there's even glitter to add some sparkle for the festive season! The front cover shows one of the windows. Next time you are calling in linger for a moment and have a closer look at them all. Jenny is appearing on Countryfile this Sunday when the programme filmed her in Skipton as she was painting a mural on the High Street.

We hope that you can join us online for our December programme of events. Our monthly Lockdown Quiz night will be a special Christmas edition so dust off your baubles and tinsel and join us for some quizzing fun. There will be a silent film screening with live piano accompaniment from the Library by Jonny Best and we'll be adding more events to this programme so please keep checking the events page on our [website](#).

We've lots of [online services](#) that you can now access so there's plenty of material to keep you entertained. Full details are in the following pages and we urge you to make use of these fabulous resources. If you have any difficulties using them please contact us and we'll do our best to help you.

My thanks to Lucy Evans for her book review of *The King of Sunlight: How William Lever Cleaned Up the World*, to Bob Duckett for his review of *The Girl at the Window* and to Bob Hamilton and Emma Storr for sharing their creative collaboration *Offcumdens*.

The next issue of Speaks Volumes will be published in February and I'd be delighted to receive your articles for inclusion by Monday 25th January by email to gellf@theleedslibrary.org.uk.

With my best wishes for a peaceful Christmas and I hope to see you soon.

Fiona Gell, Marketing & Communications Officer





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Library News -Trustees

Ring Out The Old, Ring In The New by Martin Staniforth (Chair)

This year's AGM saw some changes to the Library's Board of Trustees.



First we said farewell to two of our longest-serving trustees, Richard Hainsworth and Michael Meadowcroft (left), both of whom were on the committee of the Library before it converted to a charity in 2008 and have been Trustees continuously since then. They have both played important roles on the Trustee Board, Michael as Chair of Trustees and Chair of the Books Committee and Richard as Vice-Chair of Trustees and Chair of the Staffing Committee. And both have willingly given their advice and expertise to help the Library over the years. We asked them if they would reflect on their time as Trustees and their involvement with the Library more generally, and Michael's article which follows gives a

marvellous overview of half a century's membership of, and commitment to, the Library. We wish him and Richard well for the future and look forward to seeing them in the Library again soon.

Three Trustees – Simone Ivatts, Christine Stead and Philip Walker – were re-elected to the Board where they are joined by two new Trustees, Alex Hutchinson (below left) and Alan Wallace (below right). As you will see from their articles introducing themselves they bring valuable experience and skills to the Board, Alex with her background in archives, libraries and business as well as being a writer, and Alan with his career in the charity and social enterprise sectors. More important, perhaps, both bring energy, enthusiasm and a real love of the Library, as well as ideas about how this magnificent institution can continue to develop and thrive in the future.

We shall be looking for some more new Trustees over the coming years so please do think about joining the Board – I'd be happy to talk to you about what is involved.





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Library News -Trustees

Retiring Trustee - Michael Meadowcroft

I've always loved libraries. Even as a child my regular visits to the local library were eagerly awaited. My recollection is that the staff were very helpful and even indulgent to us early readers. There was one curious rule which, of course, we all accepted as being normal but, in retrospect, was somewhat paternalistic: we were issued with five library cards, three were orange and two were blue. With the blue cards one could only borrow non-fiction! The idea being presumably that 40% of our borrowed books ought to be serious!

I mention this as an introduction to my involvement in the Leeds Library. By 1973 I had already begun to research what eventually became my MPhil thesis: how Leeds changed from being an entirely Liberal-Conservative council to being almost entirely Labour-Conservative over a mere fifty years. Someone mentioned the Leeds Library to me and I entered into its hallowed portals straightaway. I was immediately at home, not least amongst the Leeds material. I discovered the bound volumes of *Morrison's Blue Book and City Record* published only for the years 1903 to 1930 but containing a wealth of political and electoral material. Fortunately no-one else needed these and I kept renewing them for some two years. In those days one had to be one of the elite 500 proprietors. I must have arrived at a rare slack moment because I was able to buy a share straightaway.

I have never willingly let apparently questionable decisions go unchallenged and in 1976 came the proposal to sell the head lease of the Library to a property company for a 99 year lease with an initial premium and half the shop rents to the Library. There were aspects of the deal which alerted my political antennae and I endeavoured to ask critical questions but with only one supporter in the room the Library "establishment" regarded me as an impertinence and blocked me! Later my concerns were proved correct.

I eventually came on to the Committee in 2006 and was immediately faced with the crucial issue of preparing the change to a charity. By the decision of a High Court judge we had to secure a two-thirds majority of all the existing proprietors and we had to pursue determined canvassing to obtain proxies from many who had been dormant for years. Following the change in the constitution we pushed through changes in personnel with the aim of modernising the Library without harming its heritage. Despite some resistance key changes were made and I believe that we are seeing the benefits each day. In addition persuading the Thoresby Society to join us has developed a superb local history collection.

I do not believe in hanging on to office and I retired first as Chair and now as a Trustee when I felt that my particular experience of organising strategies for change was no longer on the Trustees' agenda. We have a remarkable Library and all of us need to cherish it!



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Library News

New Trustees

Alex Hutchinson

I am delighted to have been elected a Trustee of the Leeds Library, and I feel especially honoured given my relatively new membership.

We find ourselves in troubling times as we all adjust to life in a pandemic, but our Library continues to offer a much-needed escape for Members who – like me – long to be lost in a book. I will be glad to offer whatever skills and energy I have to keep the Library thriving through these challenging times, and beyond.

My background is in libraries, archives, and business; I spent six years working in public libraries before joining Nestlé as their full-time Archivist and Historian running a vast collection of documents, packaging, works of art, antique machinery, antique chocolate samples, and hundreds of hours of film stock. Not to mention being the occasional mechanic of a five foot tall 1920s advertising robot called Plain Mr York.

I retired from Nestlé in 2018 and am now a part-time broadcaster/part-time writer of novels for HarperCollins under the pen name Penny Thorpe. I bring a diverse skillset to the Board, but most importantly I bring an enthusiasm for the Library itself. It is a treasure and I want to preserve it.

Alan Wallace

I managed to get through 38 of the 42 years I have spent in Leeds without knowing that The Leeds Library sat serenely above the Co-operative Bank on Commercial Street. An impressive achievement given that for most of this time I banked with the Co-op! It has been a pleasure to get to know the Library over the last few years and is an honour to join the Board. A long standing friend, fellow book group member and Leeds Library enthusiast introduced me and I now find myself telling others and wondering how they too have survived for so long without knowing about it.

I grew up in Dublin and came to Leeds after five years in Canada. For the most part I have worked here as a manager in social enterprise and the voluntary sector in organisations in Scotland, Moss Side, Barnsley and for the Coalfields Regeneration Trust where I was the first CEO. In Harehills I was part of the CIC company which bought the former Harehills Middle School from the Council and set up SHINE enterprise centre. After that I spent 18 months with VSO in Nepal and then came back to various voluntary sector roles which, looking back on it now, was a kind of slow motion retirement. These days I find myself grappling with macroeconomics, singing with commoners choir (an anarchic bunch with no capital letters or possessive apostrophe), and an a cappella trio; being an active Trustee on the board of BRELMS (a Yorkshire grant-making charity), and now here at the Library as a Trustee I look forward to making whatever small contribution I can.



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Library News

Your Membership Committee Needs You! By Philip Walker, Chair

The creation of the Membership Committee in late 2019 demonstrated the importance Members have in the future development of the Library. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of Covid-19 and the restrictions this placed on the ability of Library committees to function, the development of the Committee didn't really get much beyond holding a couple of meetings and agreeing the terms of reference. Hopefully, as we start to see the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, we will be able to meet again and start our work in earnest.

As a reminder, the purpose of the Membership Committee is to act as a communication channel between Members of the Library and the management and Board of Trustees. The Committee will focus on the needs of Members to ensure the Library continues to offer a range of benefits and activities that are attractive to existing Members and will appeal to prospective ones.

The main aims of the Membership Committee are as follows:

- 1) To ensure the Library communicates effectively with all Member groups
- 2) To listen to Member suggestions for the development of the Library and to respond to these appropriately
- 3) To identify opportunities to extend the diversity of the Library's membership to reflect the wider community
- 4) To improve access to the Library and its collections for Members.

There are currently four Library Members on the Committee – me, Chris Stead and Bobbie and David Broadhead – but we are looking for more Members to become involved. If you are interested in joining the Committee please pass your contact details to any of the Library staff and I'll contact you with more information.





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Services You Can Access From Home

New - Drama Library

The latest addition to our online services provision is our annual subscription to **Drama Online** allowing all Library Members access to over 80 streamed productions from the National Theatre, The Globe Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company as well as a number of live audio recordings from LA Theatre Works. We are providing this service for Members at no additional cost and we hope that it will provide you all with hours of theatrical entertainment at a time when some Members are restricted in visiting the Library to access our audio-visual collections.

To access Drama Online please follow the following instructions:

1. Go to the www.dramaonlinelibrary.com website.
2. Click on the login button at the top of the screen.
3. Scroll down to the **Library Card Number** box (ignore the Username/ Password boxes) and type in TheLeedsLibraryxxxx. Where the xxxx is shown here, replace it with your 4 digit membership number, ignore any "A" letters. Membership numbers with less than 4 digits need to have a zero or zeros in front of them to make them up to 4 digits. For example: 12 needs to be 0012, 123 needs to be 0123 but 1234 is fine. This access is unique to your membership and cannot be used by anyone else.
4. When you have accessed the Leeds Library sponsored page, clicking on the **Video** link will provide access to the theatre performances, whilst clicking on **Audio** will give access to the LA Theatre works plays.

The National Theatre collection of performances alone are stunning to watch and we are really pleased that we have been able to extend the benefits of your Library membership in this way.





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Services You Can Access From Home

eBooks Library

Did you know that we have an eBooks library? Many of you have already signed up and are using the service. Currently we have over 470 titles available (including some audiobooks) and we are adding more books regularly, all of which you can download for free.

Most of our selections so far have been informed by your requests and reading habits, as well as some classics, but please let us have your suggestions and we will see what we can do. Recent popular reads have been *A Month in the Country* by J.L. Carr, *Why I'm No Longer Talking To White People About Race* by Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Redhead by the Side of the Road* by Anne Tyler, *Stoner : a novel* by John Williams and *The Girl with Seven Names : A North Korean Defector's Story* by Hyeonseoo Lee.



We have set a limit of 3 books per Member to ensure that as many of you as possible can borrow and we would ask that once you have read a book, you return it to the collection so that other Members can access it.

To access the eBooks library:

Download the Libby app which is the e-reader (unfortunately, you can't use Kindle): google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.overdrive.mobile.android.libby&hl=en_GB

To go straight to our online library click on this link: <https://theleedslibrary.overdrive.com/>

Or go through Libby <https://libbyapp.com/library/theleedslibrary> and follow the prompts to find **The Leeds Library**.

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Services You Can Access From Home

eBooks Library, cont'd

Sign in using your email address (as your card number) and your 4-digit membership number as your PIN (*see below for more help on this), then browse the eBooks library collection and borrow a title.

N.B. If you have a couple or family membership and have only ever provided us with one email address and you want your own eBooks account, you will need to give us a second email address.

*If you can't remember your membership number, it may be on a sticky label on your door card. Let us know if you need to be reminded of the number or the email address we have for you. Membership numbers with less than 4 digits need to have a zero or zeros in front of them to make them up to 4 digits. For example: 12 needs to be 0012, 123 needs to be 0123 but 1234 is fine. If you have a couple or family membership, you need to include the letter in the membership number also. For example: 12A needs to change to 0012A and 123A needs to be 0123A.



Members' Forum

Join our online community Forum and stay in touch with each other and exchange news and ideas. We have dozens of threads created by staff and Members. Examples are current reading, book reviews, free resources to do from home, Library memories and our popular Word of the Day. We now have over 130 Members and we would love you to join us there too.

It takes just seconds to register here: <https://theleedslibrary.freeforums.net>



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Services You Can Access From Home

PressReader

The excellent PressReader database gives you instant online access to over 7,000 magazines and newspapers straight to whatever device/s you use.

Please contact counter@theleedslibrary.org.uk and the Library Services team will send you the link to access this fantastic resource.

Postal Loans



The Postal Loans service allows you to have up to 10 items (books, DVDs, magazines, talking books) delivered to your door by the Royal Mail. There is a small charge to cover the costs of packaging and postage only.

These are the charges: £3.00 for up to 3 items to be posted to you; £6.00 for between 4 and 10 items to be posted to you.

This is how to request a postal loan:

1. Reserve items from our catalogue via the website in the usual way, ensuring you add a note specifying that your request is for a postal loan: <https://www.theleedslibrary.org.uk/search/>

Or

Email counter@theleedslibrary.org.uk with your list of requests.

Instructions on how to log on and make a request can be found on the Search the catalogue page on the website.

N.B. Some items may be on loan, reserved for another Member or offsite, but we will inform you if this is the case to allow you to select another item.

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Services You Can Access From Home

Postal Loans, cont'd

2. Once you have selected the items you would like, please make your payment by clicking on the red DONATE button at the top right hand corner of the website home page and using a bank or charge card, adding a note identifying your membership number and name.

3. Your parcel will be sent to you as soon as possible by 2nd class post.

Click and Collect

We are now providing a Click and Collect service during Library opening hours. Please contact the Library first before arriving so we can make sure that your items are ready to collect from the entrance foyer. You may also return books to the crate in the foyer.

We are unable to process any book requests at the time of your visit so please contact us in advance with any requests, either by reserving through the catalogue or by email or phone. We will need 48 hours' notice in order to retrieve items for you and get them ready to collect.

We have found that sometimes we have had requests for items which turn out to be on loan, if this happens we will contact you and ask if there is an alternative title you would like instead or perhaps we could recommend books for you based on your borrowing record if you are stuck for ideas.

Delivery and Collection

If you can't get into the Library yourself and you live in an area where Leeds City Council collects your bins, we can offer you a delivery and collection service. Contact the Library Counter team for more details.





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Services You Can Access From Home

Returning Books to the Library

If you are using the Click and Collect service you may return loaned items to the drop box in the foyer where they will be quarantined for 72 hours.

If it is safe for you to do so, you may return any loaned items to the Library during opening hours.

Anyone can return loaned items on your behalf – they do not have to be a Member. Please let us know if you will have a problem returning items to us and we will arrange collection.

If you are unable to get to the Library and would like an extension on your loans at any point, please get in touch and we will arrange that for you.



Library Opening Hours

From December, the Library will be open:

Monday - Wednesday, Friday, Saturday:
10am to 4pm.

Thursday-12-6pm.

Sunday- closed.

Exceptions to this are:

Open Christmas Eve, 10-4pm.

Closed Christmas Day - 28th inclusive.

Reopen Tuesday 29th - Thursday 31st
December, 10-4pm.

Closed Friday 1st- Saturday 2nd
January inclusive.

Reopen Monday 4th January, 10-4pm.

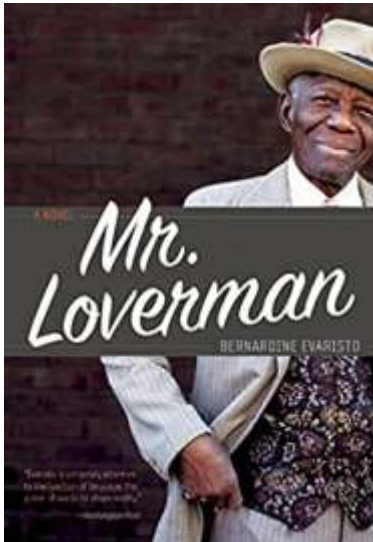


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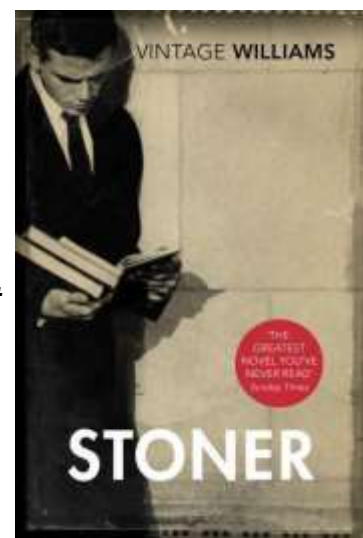
Zooming with the Leeds Library Book Club

Since the last edition of *Speaks* we've enjoyed two more Book Club choices and in October celebrated our first year anniversary!



October was ***Mr Loverman*** by Bernadine Evaristo (2013). It is her 7th novel and precedes her Booker winning novel *Girl, Woman, Other*. Essentially it is a novel about Barry, a closet gay septuagenarian Antiguan-Londoner who has arrived at a crisis point in his life. If that doesn't hook you in then read it because it is clever, beautifully written and laugh out loud funny. One of our readers said, "*Song of Desire* was an absolutely fabulous chapter, its eroticising of stationery and office equipment ensures I will never look at a stapler or fax machine in the same way again!" The main characters are all deeply flawed but intensely human and it is this that really draws the reader in even though you might not like them. Barry was not universally liked by any means. Themes running through the novel are homophobia, aging, love and pain, regret, marriage, parental relationships. The novel does give us a good insight as to what it might be like to be an older gay man in Caribbean society and how difficult that still is today. Homosexuality is still illegal in Antigua and several other Caribbean islands and homophobia is widespread which might help to explain why Barry lived his life as he did.

This month we read ***Stoner*** by John Williams (1965). William Stoner is a farm boy who enters the University of Missouri to study agriculture in 1910, had an epiphany during a class and switched his studies to English Literature which he then went on to teach at the University until his death in 1956. *Stoner* is the story of his life. So far so boring, I hear you cry. On proposing it for the Book Club, it definitely had a mixed reception from *brilliant. I really want to read that/ re-read it to oh, God, no. Don't make me read that again!* However, we persevered and in the main we are glad that we did although one reader still disliked it intensely. There, you have been warned! Whatever you think of the book, Williams' writing is beautiful, quiet and very compelling and worth reading for that alone.



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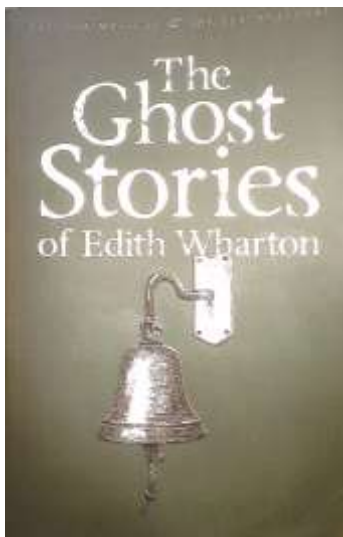


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Zooming with the Leeds Library Book Club, cont'd

The themes covered range from love in different forms, personal fulfilment, resignation to what life brings you alongside misogyny, mental illness, bullying and fighting in academia. There are some very sad passages, upsetting scenes and some reading between the lines is needed to make sense of the behaviour of some of the characters. Williams might have helped the reader more by making some of this explicit. It's unlikely that you will like the characters but you will feel sympathy for them even though you might want to shake them from time to time or all of the time. Underlying the whole story we decided was the theme of stoicism which Stoner learned from his parents and his harsh life on the farm but was also what he came to teach his students and how he lived his life. He might not have had a happy life but he lived a morally good one.



Our next Book Club is on Monday 14th December, 5.30pm, ***The Ghost Stories of Edith Wharton*** (Wordsworth Editions, 2008). Copies under the title of *The Complete Supernatural Stories* are available for free download on our [eBooks Library](#) platform.

We'll Zoom our discussion and if you would like to join us then please email me and I'll send you a Zoom link nearer the time: gellf@theleedslibrary.org.uk.

You can find out more about what we thought about all the books we have read on the Members' [Forum](#) in the Book Club thread. Please feel free to post your own comments there too if you have read any of the books we have covered.

The following pages, 18-20, hold reports from the Library's Reading Group which now meets via Zoom at 10.30am on the first Tuesday of each month. All Library Members are welcome. Please email suter.pamelaann@gmail.com to register your interest.

The next books are:

1st December *Adam Bede* By George Elliot

5th January *New Grub Street* by George Gissing

2nd February *Days Without End* by Sebastian Barry

2nd March *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf

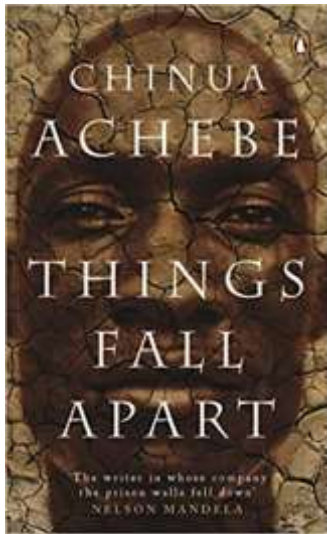


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The Leeds Library Reading Group - Still Active On Zoom - 1!

For September, the Reading Group discussed *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Chinua Achebe. With it he wanted to challenge the flawed literary representations of Africa and its people in the books he read whilst studying English Literature at University College, Nigeria. His aim was to write a story from an African perspective.



He argued that Europeans did not write credible and convincing characters, only caricatures of the real people he knew because they did not speak African languages, nor understand the culture and philosophy of the local people.

The novel chronicles pre and post-colonial life in Nigeria at the turn of the 19th century and the changes accompanying and arising from the arrival of English colonists and missionaries. It focuses on the central character Okonkwo, a member of a fictional Igbo clan living in the village of Umuofia in the southeast of the country. Famous throughout the area for his strength and wrestling ability, he was a rich and successful farmer, powerful warrior and community leader. He harboured a fear of being compared to his father whose failure and weakness cast a shadow over his life.

The first part of this book recounts Okonkwo's family and personal history and the customs of the complex patriarchal society of the Igbo people. The second and third sections depict the effects of colonisation, the arrival of the missionaries and the introduction of Christianity on Okonkwo, his family and the wider community.

This deceptively simple story written in a realistic, understated style introduces proverbs, myths and folk tales into the narrative reflecting the important oral tradition of the Igbo people. It brings to life a long established society with a vibrant and complex alternative indigenous culture, rich in the powerful forces of nature and magic.

Umuofia's world on the verge of change is portrayed realistically by the author without idealism and depicts a balanced view of the negative and positive aspects of the community. It succeeds in challenging the racial stereotypes held by Europeans that Africa was a dark and savage continent and makes a strong case for the validity of an alternative culture seen through African eyes.

The unanimous conclusion of the group was that this was an interesting and important book when it was published which is still relevant today.

Nelson Mandela said of Achebe when he read *Things Fall Apart* on Robben Island, "He is a writer in whose company the prison walls fall down."

By Julie Trueman.



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The Leeds Library Reading Group - Still Active On Zoom - 2!

Our choice for October was Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915).

Ford regarded this as his best book (out of around eighty), his 'great auk's egg'. It was profoundly autobiographical, reflecting both the extreme emotional entanglements of his life and his Jamesian fascination with uncertainty, doubt and meaning, how language in describing conceals rather than reveals.

Even the title is layered being the sarcastic alternative Ford suggested to the publisher John Lane. Ford's original title *The Saddest Story* was felt to be inappropriate in wartime.

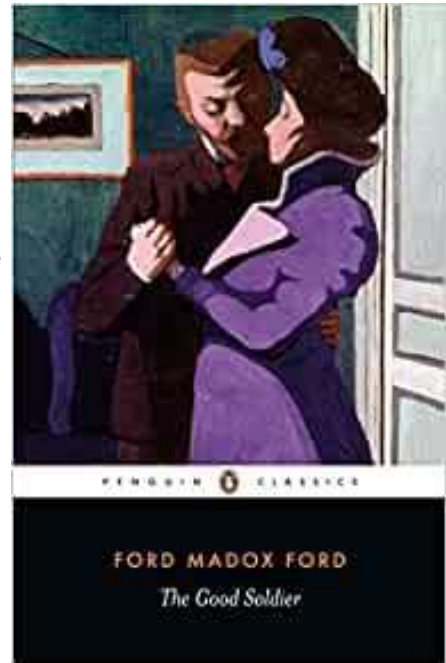
The book, the 'Good Soldier' himself being a libertine, then became regarded by some as an insult to the British Army. The novel was also published under a version of Ford's birth name, Ford Madox Hueffer. Everything about Ford is complicated!

The Good Soldier must rank as one of the most discussed and analysed novels of all time. It has its own entry on Wikipedia. Its ambiguities, double-binds and ironies lend themselves to endless interpretations, including the extremes of dark comedy and even of intricate murder.

So what did the Reading Group make of this highly literary and intriguing work? We all admired Ford's skill, style and intellect, and the intricate construction of the narrative. Yet while some of us were deeply enthralled and felt they had discovered the perfect novel, others could not warm to it or be interested in what was happening with the main characters, feeling none of them were remotely sympathetic.

Unusually some of us had read *The Good Soldier* through twice before the discussion and intend to go back to it again. Further reading revealed clues or possibilities that were not apparent at first. Ultimately there is no more of an answer to be found than there is with *The Turn of the Screw*. It is initially quite challenging to follow through the shifting time frame and to work out what may or may not be going on with the four main protagonists and the victims entangled with them. Yet on another level the narrator's informal and colloquial style makes it deceptively easy to read.

There are a series of shocks that knock you off balance and our ideas varied considerably as might be expected with a novel of such deliberate uncertainty.



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The Leeds Library Reading Group - Still Active On Zoom - 3!

Is the narrator as innocent as he portrays himself? Is the 'Good Soldier' really decent or destructive, and what of the death in the jaws of the wardrobe? The strange themes and patterns of the novel certainly stimulated our discussion. We covered the mysterious heart diseases, the incident in Martin Luther's historic bedroom, the sudden violence of the narrator, the conflict over the exploitation of a country estate and its tenants, the striking use of August 4 as a repeatedly significant date (though the novel was written prior to WW1) as well as why the narrator sees it all as 'the saddest story I have ever heard'.

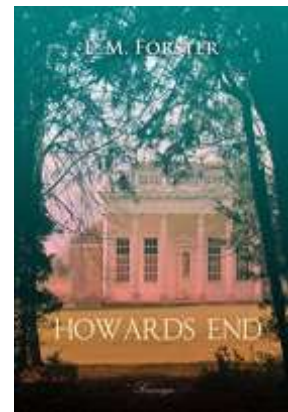
Ford Madox Ford is remembered primarily for this novel and for *Parade's End* which some of us were also reading. His huge trilogy *The Fifth Queen* is now a curiosity of historical fiction. We briefly talked round these as well as his fascinating memoirs of his Pre-Raphaelite childhood, his friendships as a young man with Henry James, Joseph Conrad (with whom he collaborated) and John Galsworthy.

An author well worth discovering. By Lucy Evans.

Our November read was ***Howards End*** (1910) by E M Forster.

Written when the author was only 31, it is considered to be his masterpiece. *Howards End* is a novel of its time dealing with social conventions and codes of conduct and is set in the south of England in the period just prior to WW1.

The story revolves around three families and their interconnections and ideas: the Wilcoxes, the Anglo German Schlegels, and the Bastis. Succinctly put, those who make money, those who have money and those who don't have any money.



The book was generally greatly enjoyed with comments like 'a terrific read', 'a rich novel', 'beautifully put together' and promoted a very lively discussion.

The novel has great social comedy especially the dialogue between the two sisters, Helen and Margaret and the scene at the concert was also considered to be a piece of excellent writing.

Forster also deals with themes such as encroaching suburbia and the idea of a rural idyll plus the hunt for a home as exemplified by the house itself, Howards End.

The failure to address any kind of social issues of the time such as poverty or industrialisation and colonialism was pointed out but it was generally felt that Forster was only describing the middle/upper class world he knew prior to the many changes brought about by WW1. It is a novel with many flaws (especially the rather unbelievable ending) but it was felt that the quality of Forster's writing carried the book through. By Ann Suter.



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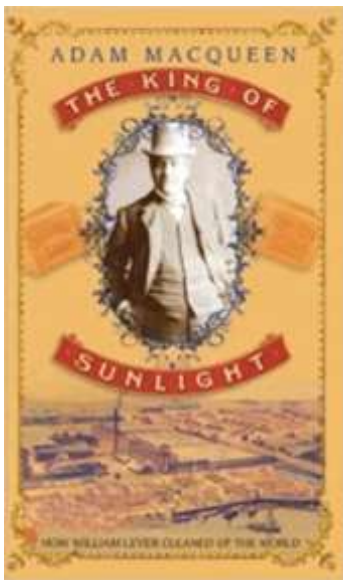
Book Reviews

The King of Sunlight: How William Lever Cleaned Up the World by Adam Macqueen, Bantam, 2004, 336 pp. Reviewed by Lucy Evans.

One of my favourite library experiences is browsing the shelves in random pursuit of intriguing finds. I am so grateful to The Leeds Library staff for reuniting us with the collections.

My first discovery when The Leeds Library re-opened was this entertaining and somehow touching biography of the Bolton lad, son of a local grocer, whose energetic salesmanship, inventiveness, determination and decency led to the foundation of the Lever empire, now evolved into the giant Unilever. William Lever would surely be appalled to see the protests against Unilever for their role in the extermination of orangutans.

Lever himself was autocratic, kind and decent, creating the utopia of Port Sunlight from a marsh (if you've never visited, I highly recommend a trip), bringing in the eight hour day and pensions for his employees way ahead of legislation. In fact in his brief and reluctant period as MP (he was only persuaded to stand on the understanding he would lose), he proposed the old age pension that is normally attributed to Lloyd George.



Adam Macqueen writes lightly and amusingly as might be expected of a Private Eye journalist. There is much to be entertained by – the incredible architectural mixes Lever adored, his obsession with sleeping open to the sky, ideas which were ‘fantastically bonkers’, his total failure to persuade the crofters of Harris and Lewis to change their ancient ways, his encounters with artists, and his dreadful WW1 margarine Plate. He was a magnificent social engineer and philanthropist though his efforts were not always appreciated. Given the impact of the modern palm oil industry, it is fascinating to read of the early evolution in Lever’s hands. Impressively it was King Albert of Belgium who turned to Lever to help him restore the Congo after the indescribable evil and genocide his uncle Leopold wrought there. Lever established plantations on Port Sunlight lines with hospitals, schools and special rubber boots he invented

to protect workers’ feet. Lever was as deeply racist as his peers but he was always fair, generous with his wages and paternally concerned for his staff whether in Africa or Britain. Only the Lewis crofters defeated him.

Highly entertaining as it is, there is much to be learnt from this biography. It’s been borrowed quite a few times and deserves to be a popular read.



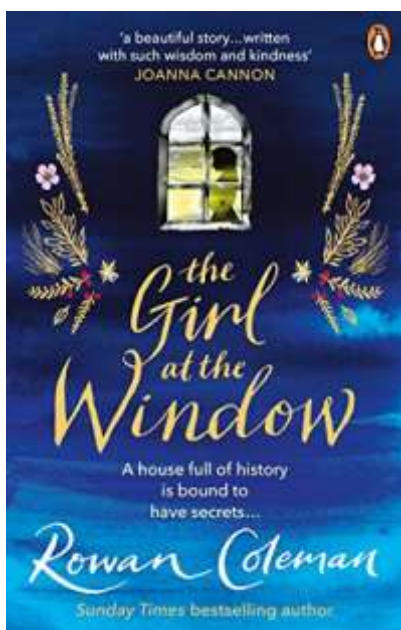
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Book Reviews

**The Girl at the Window by Rowan Coleman, Penguin, 2019. 447 pp.
Reviewed by Bob Duckett.**

There's a spiral staircase at each end, leading to railed landings for each floor; and, on each landing, ladders on runners grant access to every single one of what must be thousands of editions (p. 204).



Ponden Hall is a centuries old farmhouse on a hillside west of Haworth. Recently a conference centre and bed and breakfast stop on the Pennine Way, it was once home to the Heaton family, land owners, farmers, mill owners and trustees of the parish church for four hundred years. The Brontë family were familiar with Ponden Hall, whether it was running errands on church business, taking tea with the shy bachelor Heaton brothers, or using their fine library. It is said Robert Heaton was particularly fond of Emily and planted a pear tree in her memory. The house captured Emily's imagination when she was writing *Wuthering Heights*, immortalising an old box bed by a window as the setting for Cathy's ghostly return. Following in Emily's literary footsteps, Rowan Coleman has also chosen the old farmhouse as the setting for her novel, a haunting love story spanning the centuries.

When Trudy Jones loses her beloved husband in a plane crash, she and her eight-year-old son seek sanctuary and solace in Yorkshire, returning to her childhood home of Ponden Hall to stay with her reclusive mother. While starting the task of restoring the neglected and decaying hall, Trudy discovers some page fragments telling the story of a seventeenth-century servant names Agnes, wrapped in a letter from Emily who hoped to give voice to Agnes in a second novel. This sets Trudy on a somewhat spooky treasure trail. But she is not the only one!

Drawing on the documented history of Ponden Hall and the Heaton family, Coleman cleverly intertwines fact and fiction. Centuries earlier a Henry Casson usurped the rightful owner of the house and banished the young Robert Heaton (fact). Shades of Heathcliff anyone? The fate of Agnes (fiction), purchased from her destitute mother by the brutal Casson, is revealed, scrap by discovered scrap, as are pieces of Emily's second novel, often with the help of strange lights, cold spots and other mysterious happenings. The local ghostly Gytrash, who appears when a death is due, also puts in an appearance. Meanwhile, the improving relationships between Trudy, her confused son, and her resentful mother are disturbed by an over-friendly architect over-seeing the hall renovations.

Cont/



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Book Reviews

The Girl at the Window by Rowan Coleman. Reviewed by Bob Duckett, cont'd.

The story is well-paced with many thoughtful observations, though some suspensions of belief are called for! A side-interest to Members of the Leeds Library will be the accounts of two libraries, the lost library of Ponden, of which an auctioneer's catalogue survives and whose books Trudy wishes to recover; and the futuristic library of the creepy architect from which an extract is quoted above. Below, I can't resist a brief quote about the value of libraries:

Trapped within every page is a lost world, captured moments from ages past ... only within pages of books like these ... can we find what cannot be found elsewhere: the exact contents of the minds of people who lived hundreds of years ago. (p. 393)

Editor's note: Bob tells me he spent several years up-grading the scrappy listing of Ponden's library for the benefit of Brontë scholars. The 1385-volume library was sold off in 1898 and only one book – a Shakespeare First Folio – is known to survive. This can be seen in the Craven Museum & Gallery in Skipton.

Image: Ponden Hall. Courtesy of Ponden Hall Bed and Breakfast.





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Members' Articles

Offcumdens

Photography by Bob Hamilton, poetry by Emma Storr.

In The Leeds Library

I can't remember when a searching hand
reached up to touch my covers, run a finger
down my spine embossed with golden letters.
Stories stay within my brittle pages,
worlds in chapters no one will explore.
I have no eyes, no ears to hear the words
but in my paper heart I long for Jane
to lift me down, release my printed voice
from dust and dark. Indexed, stamped and stuck
on a lofty shelf, I haven't moved in years.
My vellum neighbours keep me shut, upright.
When footsteps on the spiral stairs approach,
the metal walkway quivers and I hope
to be retrieved, removed and browsed, chosen.





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Members' Articles

*Offcumdens, cont'd.

*A Yorkshire term typically used to describe someone not born in the county.

The preceding photograph and poem are from a book being developed as a personal perspective on Yorkshire as seen through the lens and the words of two offcumdens, Bob Hamilton and Emma Storr. They were both born in the south but have chosen to make Yorkshire their home because of a love of its landscapes and people. They're interested in exploring the symbiotic possibilities of combining the visual with the verbal. The book represents places that have significance for both of them, captured in photographs and in poetry.

They hope that as well as the poems offering a context to lift the photographs above being merely pretty or arresting images, this collection will also serve to introduce accessible poetry to a new set of readers. Each image and poem will be referenced with details of the location and date of the photograph, background information and whether the poem was inspired by the photograph or the photograph chosen to accompany the poem.

They don't presume to compare themselves with such giants in their fields as Ted Hughes and Fay Godwin, but suggest that over forty years later, there is time to revisit the concept pioneered in *Remains of Elmet*, published in 1979. Digital photography techniques and processing have opened up new realms of possibility. Poetry has also developed during this time. The book is still a work in progress but is now at a point where Bob and Emma have begun the process of looking for a publisher.

Emma Storr is a Londoner who moved to Leeds in 1993. She has a background in medicine but is now turning her attention to poetry. She completed an MPhil in Writing at the University of South Wales in 2018 and has since been widely published in poetry anthologies and magazines. Her debut pamphlet *Heart Murmur* was published by Calder Valley Poetry in 2019 and has a medical theme, based on her work as a GP. Find out more about Emma here: emmastorr.co.uk.

Bob Hamilton is also a Londoner who moved to Ilkley in 1988. He has a background in mathematics and spent his working life as a software developer. Somewhere in the middle of all that coding he took a sabbatical to write a nonfiction book called *Earthdream* (Green Books, 1990), a work of ecophilosophy. More recently, he has found the space to pick up his camera and his pen again, pursuing a number of photography and writing projects. He has won a number of open photography competitions and has had his photographs exhibited nationwide. Find out more about Bob here: earthdreamery.co.uk



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A warm welcome awaits you!

