



# SPEAKS VOLUMES

31

the magazine of  
**THE LEEDS LIBRARY**



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# The Leeds Library

In this issue of Speaks Volumes:

<i>PAGE NUMBER</i>	<i>CONTENTS</i>
3	<a href="#">Update from our CEO</a>
5	<a href="#">Forthcoming events</a>
8	<a href="#">An update from Library Services</a>
9	<a href="#">Updates from the Trustees</a>
13	<a href="#">Old Chapters and New</a>
18	<a href="#">Museums and Heritage Conference retrospective</a>
19	<a href="#">Book reviews from the Tuesday Morning Book Club</a>
24	<a href="#">A review from Bob Duckett</a>

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## **OPENING HOURS**

Monday—Wednesday: 10AM-6PM

Thursday: 10AM-7pm

Friday: 10AM-5PM

Saturday: 10AM-4PM

Sunday: CLOSED



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# The Leeds Library

## Update from our CEO

Dear Member

Since the last edition of Speaks Volumes, many things have happened in the Library and the outside world.

Following an extended period of consultation, the Library submitted the planning application for 15 Commercial Street, with a decision on the application expected in November. We hope as many members as possible take the opportunity to look at the plans and provide supporting letters for the scheme.



Now that the planning application has been submitted, the Library is launching a fundraising appeal for the Next Chapter Project this week which is aiming to raise £1million from grants, donations and financial support to complete the expansion of the Library into 15 Commercial Street. The launch will include information on the plans for the new building presented on our website, and announcements communicated in local media and on all of our social media channels. The fundraising campaign will include donation boxes being located in the foyer and on the counter, and a fundraising leaflet for members and visitors to read. At the same time, the Library will be applying for funding from a range of trusts and grant-giving bodies. We will endeavour to provide regular updates to members as to how the fundraising appeal is progressing.

Over the last couple of weeks the Library has been balancing our participation in the annual National Heritage Open Day Festival alongside showing appropriate reflection on the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, which included the Library closing on the day of the funeral. For the National Heritage Open Day festival, we ran daily tours of the Library, curated an exhibition on 'Amazing Inventions' which was the theme of the festival, and opened the Library to the public on the two Sundays during the festival period. The Library also hosted an exhibition curated by the Thoresby Society for the last 4 days of the festival. Over 230 people attended a tour or an open day, and the total number of people who visited the Library throughout the Heritage Open Days will have been considerably higher. Thank you to everyone who helped with the delivery of this programme of work.



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# The Leeds Library

## ...Update from our CEO continued...

Looking forward, the Library over the coming weeks will be hosting a broad range of events and activities, including comedy, film, theatre performances, and literature talks. Our Members' Film Club, book clubs and Craft Club will also continue. We are also working with our colleagues from other libraries in the Independent Library Association to host a couple of events for the first ever ILA Festival which is scheduled to take place in November. We will also be confirming arrangements for our programme of member events over the Christmas period. Details on forthcoming events can be found in this issue of Speaks Volumes, on our website, and on Eventbrite.

We hope that we see you in the coming weeks in the Library; please do not hesitate to ask any of the Library team about any information that is presented in this or future editions of Speaks Volumes.

Best wishes

Carl Hutton

CEO

The planning application can be viewed at <https://publicaccess.leeds.gov.uk/online-applications/> using reference **22/06010/LI** to find the application in question.



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# The Leeds Library

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

<p>Scalarama presents: Cast a Dark Shadow Thurs 29 Sept 7pm—10pm Tickets £3—£10</p>	<p>Film screening of this under-appreciated British Noir starring Dirk Bogarde as a ruthless fortune hunter. But has he met his match?</p>
<p>Members' Film Club Saturday 1 Oct 3pm—5pm Tickets free or £4 with buffet</p>	<p>EXCLUSIVE TO MEMBERS Join fellow Members of the Library for an afternoon in front of the silver screen.</p> <p>The chosen film will be part of the "Not my type (cast)" season, featuring films with famous actors playing against type.</p>
<p>Craft Club Monday 3 Oct 5pm—7pm Free</p>	<p>EXCLUSIVE TO MEMBERS Craft Club welcomes knitters, sketchers, calligraphers, felters, bead-ers, embroiderers, calligraphers, model makers, jewellery makers, cross-stitchers and others at all levels of ability.</p> <p>We provide free tea and coffee, and all we ask is that your craft is portable as we can't store things for you.</p> <p>Please register your interest by emailing or speaking to Sarah (<a href="mailto:wests@theleedslibrary.org.uk">wests@theleedslibrary.org.uk</a>) or Jane (<a href="mailto:rileyj@theleedslibrary.org.uk">rileyj@theleedslibrary.org.uk</a>)</p>
<p>Tuesday Morning Book Group Tuesday 4 Oct 10:30am—12pm Free</p>	<p>EXCLUSIVE TO MEMBERS Meeting on the first Tuesday of every month, titles for discussion are chosen by members of the group. The book for this meeting is <b>If not now, when?</b> By Primo Levi.</p>



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# The Leeds Library

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

<p>Overdue Comedy Thursday 6 Oct 7pm—10pm Tickets £8</p>	<p>The launch of the Overdue Comedy Club: it promises to be a truly unique night of first class entertainment. The show will feature some of the best TV acts on the circuit as well as a few new faces taking the comedy scene by storm.</p>
<p>Vaughan Williams in Love Thurs 7 October 7pm—8:30pm Free</p>	<p>In 1938, composer Ralph Vaughan Williams met Ursula Wood, his second great love. They began an affair, and after the death of Ursula's husband, Ralph's wife invited Ursula to move in with them. In this unusual ménage à trois, how much did Adeline know about her husband's infidelity? Did Ralph love both women equally? And how did each of them influence his music?</p>
<p>Leeds Light Night: Arup installation Thurs 13 &amp; Fri 14 Oct 6:30pm—10:30pm Free</p>	<p>An installation in the New Room, <b>Bubbles</b> imagines two orbs floating close to each other in space, almost touching but not quite. There are two openings, one into each bubble and the installation allows visitors to enter, and playfully interact in a unique way. Bubbles imagines two orbs floating close to each other in space, almost touching but not quite. There are two openings, one into each bubble and the installation allows visitors to enter, and playfully interact in a unique way.</p>
<p>Monday evening book club Mon 17 Oct 6pm—7pm</p>	<p>A relaxed and friendly group, one of the Library's two book clubs and reading mainly fiction, this month the book up for discussion is Andrei Kurkov's <b>Death and the Penguin</b>.</p>
<p>Members' Film Club Wed 19 Oct 6pm—8pm</p>	<p><b>EXCLUSIVE TO MEMBERS</b> Join fellow Members of the Library for an afternoon in front of the silver screen.</p> <p>The chosen film will be part of the "Not my type (cast)" season, featuring films with famous actors playing against type.</p>



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# The Leeds Library

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

<p>Nowt But Verse Friday 21 Oct 1pm—2pm PAYF</p>	<p>Hannah Stone talks to poet Dalton Harrison.</p>
<p>Nunkie Theatre presents: The Death of Arthur Fri 21 Oct 8pm—9:30pm Tickets £10</p>	<p>A new version of a very old story, an interactive twist on the timeless tales of Arthur and his knights.</p> <p>Sit back and enjoy or actively take part in the decisions that guide the story. Each show is unique, depending on the audience's choices... bringing a lost Britain back to life and asking what the old tales can tell us in these complicated times.</p>
<p>Three Daggers Drawn Wed 26 Oct 7pm—8:30pm PAYF</p>	<p>Join Frances Brody, Rowan Coleman and Chris Nickson in the atmospheric surroundings of the Georgian Leeds Library for a triple launch of three crime fiction books set in Yorkshire.</p>
<p>Tuesday Morning Book Club Tue 1 Nov 10:30am—12pm</p>	<p><b>EXCLUSIVE TO MEMBERS</b> Meeting on the first Tuesday of every month, titles for discussion are chosen by members of the group. The book for this meeting is <b>Drive your Plow Over The</b></p>
<p>Overdue Comedy Club Thurs 3 November 7pm—10pm</p>	<p>The second instalment of the Library's comedy club, the show will feature some of the best TV acts on the circuit as well as a few new faces taking the comedy scene by storm.</p>



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# The Leeds Library

## **An update from Jane and the Library Services team**

### **BOOK SALE**

We are holding a book sale on Saturday 26 November from 10am to 3pm. If you have any books, DVDs or CDs to donate, we would be very grateful. Please bring them to the Counter before mid-November.

### **CATALOGUING**

Our focus continues to be our retrospective cataloguing project and so far this year, the team have added or modified over 13000 items!

### **EXHIBITIONS**

We hope you have enjoyed our Summer Holidays exhibition. Aidan, Finn and Anna are working on our next display to tie in with Heritage Open Days. The theme is inventions and innovations, and will feature Leeds civil engineer John Smeaton, so do look out for it.



### **ANNIVERSARIES**

Assistant Librarian Anna celebrated her 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary at the library in July and Aidan marked his 10th year as Library Assistant this month. Assistant Librarian Helen will have been working here 20 years on Sunday 4 September and Jane's 20<sup>th</sup> will be in late October! That's 71 years of expertise at your disposal!





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# The Leeds Library

## Updates from the Trustees

### **LIBRARY RULES**

Alongside revising the Library's Articles of Association, Trustees have revisited the Library's Rules to ensure that they are up to date and consistent with the new Articles. The new Rules are also intended to be simpler and clearer than the previous Rules.

The main changes are that we have removed some of the material in the current Rules which sets out how the Library is run and managed and quotes extensively from the Articles. The new Rules concentrate on issues relevant to membership – how to join the Library and how membership can be ended, the different categories of membership, membership rights, and rules of conduct.

At the same time we have clarified a number of points which had previously been unclear such as the voting arrangements for household memberships and updated the provisions about the action Trustees may take in cases of serious misconduct by a member.

You can find the draft revised Rules [here](#) and I would welcome any comments or questions on the proposed new Rules. Please send any comments to me via the Library e-mail, [enquiries@theleedslibrary.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@theleedslibrary.org.uk), or by post to The Leeds Library, 18 Commercial Street, LEEDS, LS1 6AL by the end of October.

Martin Staniforth

Chair of Trustees

### **JOIN THE BOARD**

Following the AGM, we have two vacancies on the Board of Trustees which we are keen to fill, not least because the Library has a busy year ahead. The Trustees are responsible for setting the strategic direction for the Library, for overseeing the development and delivery of annual plans and budgets, and for ensuring that the Library uses its money appropriately. It is an important role, particularly at present as we manage the expansion into 15 Commercial Street, and one in which you can make a real difference to the way in which the Library runs.



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# The Leeds Library

## **...Join the Board continued...**

We are looking for people who are enthusiastic about the Library and are willing to contribute their time and their ideas to shaping its future, rather than for particular skills and expertise. Previous Board or trustee experience is not required, and trustees will receive induction, training and support. We are also looking to increase the diversity of our Trustee Board so that we benefit from a wide range of lived experience and views around the table. We would particularly welcome interest from people under 40, people from minority ethnic communities, and LGBT+ people, who are currently under-represented on the Board.

As for the time needed, the Board normally meets for two hours six to eight times a year, though it is meeting more often at the moment. Meetings are usually held at the Library though often with a Zoom option. Trustees are also encouraged to join one or more of the sub-committees which focus on different areas of the Library's business and which normally meet three or four times a year, though again some are meeting more frequently at present. The current sub-committees are Books and Collections, Buildings, Membership, Outreach and Partnerships, Research, and Resources, so they cater for a wide range of interests. Meeting times are arranged to suit the needs of trustees. Please consider joining the Board as a co-opted Member and playing a big part in the Library's future. If you would like further information or to discuss what is involved in being a Trustee, please get in touch with me and I'll be happy to help.

You can contact me via the Library e-mail: [enquiries@theleedslibrary.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@theleedslibrary.org.uk) or by calling the Library: 0113 245 3071 and the message will be passed to me or you will be given my details to contact me directly, if that is preferable.

Martin Staniforth  
Chair of Trustees



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# The Leeds Library

## **...Updates from the Trustees continued...**

### **Helping members write the next chapter**

*Now that Autumn is upon us, Philip Walker, Chair of the Membership Committee, looks back at a busy month of member consultations and the approval of building plans for 15 Commercial Street.*

It's been a busy few weeks at the Library as plans for how 15 Commercial Street will be integrated into the existing Library footprint start to take shape and I'm pleased to say that members have been at the forefront of this.

Three consultation meetings took place during the first week of August during which over 80 members saw a presentation led by Garnett Netherwood Architects outlining various options for the layout and interior design for 15 Commercial Street. After the presentations, members were given the opportunity to ask questions on the various options and then tour the 15 Commercial Street building to help visualise how things will look. So that we could capture and respond to members feedback on the various options, members were asked to complete a feedback form outlining what they liked and didn't like about what they had seen and I'm pleased to say that many of you took this opportunity.

It was great to see so many members engaging in this process and ensuring that the voice of members is heard as the Library heads into The Next Chapter of its development. I want to add my thanks to those of you who took part, your enthusiasm for the 15 Commercial Street project, and the honesty in the feedback you gave.

The feedback from members was as varied and eclectic as the membership; some of you went into great detail, some were more succinct but all the views gathered were relevant. It was mentioned during the presentations that all feedback was valid and that no comments would be censored and I can assure you that this was the case – all the comments you gave were included in a document given to the Project Board who are overseeing the development of the plans.



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## **...The Next Chapter continued...**

The major difference between the various options shared during the consultations was the need for both stairs and a lift from the ground floor of 15 Commercial Street or whether just a lift was sufficient and the opinion of members was divided on this. Some of you felt that the lift option would be the preferred approach considering that it maximises the space for the retail unit on the ground floor and the Library space on the first floor. Other members pointed out the need for both a lift and staircase suggesting that having both would be more welcoming and practical whilst accepting the reduction to retail and Library space. Overall the feedback given was pretty evenly split on which option members preferred.

With regard to the interior design options, opinion was split over whether or not the new building should emulate the existing Library or instead be reflective of a new, more modern build. The darker options presented were supported by those members who wish to see the new building in harmony with and reflecting the existing Library, whereas the lighter options were generally supported by those who wanted a completely new, modern and fresh style. Feedback also touched on the need for the new interior design to not date too quickly and stand the test of time.

Other feedback given covered a wide range of topics including shelving space, toilets, cloak room facilities, staff space, access between 15 and 18 Commercial Street etc. All of this feedback will be considered.

Obviously it will not be possible or practicable to act on all the feedback given by members. There will have to be compromises, but Library staff and Trustees are committed to making sure that the feedback you gave and continue to give guides our plans.

Thank you for making the time to get involved in this consultation - your input will ensure we make 15 Commercial Street the best place we can.

Philip Walker  
Trustee  
Chair, Membership Committee



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# The Leeds Library

## Old Chapters and New: Looking at the Library's face through our archives

Despite the 254 years the Library has existed, one near-constant we have enjoyed is our home on Commercial Street. As we prepare to write our next chapter in 15 Commercial Street, I thought it was the perfect time to take a stroll down memory lane and share some images of the Library's home; from our humble beginnings to exciting future. Let's embark!



NOTE V. The Leeds Library's premises 1781-1808; the Leeds Library moved rooms on the first floor of this house in Kirkgate, formerly the home of Sir James Watson.

In the 40 years before the Library found its Commercial Street abode, we rented rooms in two different buildings. Our first, as decided in our first meeting in August 1768, was in Joseph Ogle's bookshop on upper Kirkgate. He was also our first librarian, and his daughter Mary (only 24 at the time!) was our second after his death in 1774.

The Library remained in the back room of Ogle's bookshop on Kirkgate until 1781. It was then that a monster that continues to haunt us for the rest of our existence reared its inevitable head: we ran out of space for more books. In a (doomed) attempt to conquer it we rented rooms in the building shown here, on Kirkgate (left).

It wasn't until 1804 that the denizens of the Library unanimously agreed that the 'most eligible mode' of garnering enough room for our books was by 'building [...] one'. Our Commercial Street home was then duly designed by Thomas Johnson, built, and moved into in 1808 – for the cost of roughly £498,600 in modern currency. As you can see from this sketch (right), the Library's frontage has changed little throughout the ensuing 214 years – though our surroundings have changed a lot! This sketch also shows the left edge of 15 Commercial Street; a constant companion.





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# The Leeds Library

## ...Old Chapters continued...

There is a surprising lack of images of the Library's frontage during the 1800s in our archive (in great contrast to the hundreds of letters and records from that period). Indeed, these two are both colourised post cards of Commercial Street from the Edwardian period (circa. 1905). Despite this, the century was a busy and largely successful one for the Library. In 1854 and 1856, the Library even held a ball – a 'grand conversazione' – complete with Quadrille band and elaborate decorations. Then, after complaints of poor ventilation and lack of bookshelf space (the beast returns!), the New Room was constructed in 1881.



Originally the Leeds Intelligencer Newspaper's offices, the Room was added to the Library through the passageways we still walk through today. Throughout all of this, however, our face remained much the same – bar the moving of the entrance to the middle bay and the addition of the ornate iron gates that can be seen in the right of the postcard image below opposite. These weren't removed until 1960 – a cool 79 years of being imposing to all not welcome here!





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# The Leeds Library

## ...Old Chapters continued...



It wasn't until 1930 that we made the next changes to our building. This time, we were taking over basement space previously belonging to our tenants – two guesses as to why! After 49 years, we had again fallen prey to our lack of space for new books. Indeed, the monster seemed to be growing; we had held out for 73 before expanding into the New Room! The subterranean nature of the construction made minimal changes to our outside appearance, as you can see in this architect's sketch from the period. To me, this constancy reflects the odd role of the Library building in the era as a whole. Whilst the people inside and around experienced the First World War and the Great Depression, the face of the Library looked upon it all unchanged like the unblinking eyes of Gatsby's T.J. Eckleburg (though, I'd like to think, with a kinder countenance).

This photograph was taken in 1950, for then-librarian Frank Beckwith's pamphlet about the Library's history. If you squint, you can see W.H. Smiths in the place of what now is Paperchase – and, of course, 15 Commercial Street before it was re-done with the windows it has today. The Library survived the Leeds Blitz of World War Two by the skin of its teeth, thanks to the hard work of a team of Fire Watchers managed by Beckwith – and a healthy dose of sheer luck. In 1941, an incendiary bomb was dropped on 15 Commercial Street. Thankfully, it never went off and was discovered shortly after by Fire Watchers. Ironically, we only know of this because of letters to W.H. Smith in which the Library refutes ownership of 15 Commercial Street!





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# The Leeds Library

## ...Old Chapters continued...

This postcard is from the 1970s, helpfully labelled for future archivists writing articles. This was taken some time after the City Council pedestrianised Commercial Street in 1970 – hence the change in flooring and distinct lack of cars comparative to our last photograph. As you can see, the ornate iron gates on the Library entrance are also gone, though W.H. Smiths remains in our ground floor. In 1971 the Library's fourth ever female librarian, Mrs. Sheila Ritchie, was in situ – though to my deep regret, I must report that the woman in the fantastic poncho is probably not her.



This photograph was likely taken by our last librarian, Geoffrey Forster. Our own Anna Goodridge dated it to 2000 by the appearance of the Disney store replacing the W.H. Smiths (and its ensuing successors) – thanks Anna! 15 Commercial Street has also changed, now taking on the long blue windows we recognise. I'm sure this is a sight familiar to some of our readers – hopefully a pleasant memory!





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# The Leeds Library

**...Old Chapters continued...**



Throughout our history, our building has changed – just like the books housed within it and the ideas they engage with. What hasn't changed, however, is our community's love of reading and desire to share stories with each other. With the addition of 15 Commercial Street to the Library's face, we hope that we will draw in even more of these people – from all backgrounds and experiences – to share in The Leeds Library's story.

Thank you for accompanying me on this trek through our building's history! It was greatly assisted by the Library archive and by Kevin Grady's encyclopedic knowledge of Leeds history and fantastic photographs. Thank you, Kevin! If you, reader, have any questions about the Library's history or our archive, please feel free to email me at [day-goughn@theleedslibrary.org.uk](mailto:day-goughn@theleedslibrary.org.uk).



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# The Leeds Library

## Museums and Heritage Conference Retrospective

*At the beginning of May, the Library sent out an expedition to the annual Museums + Heritage Conference manned by Michael, Molly, and Niimi. After two days of talks and meet-ups, they report back their findings below!*

### MICHAEL

The M+H conference this year was wonderful. It was invigorating to be involved in seminars and talks filled with likeminded people and industry experts. Some of my favourite talks included a delve into how to best construct visitor experience surveys based on work done at an exhibition on the future of meat; a talk about the approach taken on displaying the now defaced Edward Colston statue to encourage conversation about change in history; and a talk explaining partnership approaches to lending and borrowing between museums and libraries. I felt inspired and encouraged by the information I was able to access on the visit and we all came back with a lot of ideas on how to best implement what we had learned in the Library. The only downside of the visit was the North London Derby result!

### NIIMI

I've been an avid museum-goer and library-enjoyer since childhood; and as my current role in The Leeds Library shows, I remain so to this day! Despite this, however, the M+H talks (with more lovely history geeks than I'd ever seen) made me realise I hadn't completely articulated why I find heritage so powerful. The core of my favourite seminars – whether they discussed decolonising a stately home funded by enslaved labour or producing small cartoon exhibitions – was the importance of storytelling. The key to creating impactful projects as a heritage organisation is to find the stories our collections tell and marry those with the stories our community is interested in hearing. As a library, this shouldn't be hard for us!



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# The Leeds Library

## Reviews from the Tuesday Morning Book Club

Seamus Heaney's translation of Beowulf, reviewed by Lucy Evans

This was a memorable Book Club. It was the first time we had met in person since March 2019. It was also the first time we had tried out the splendid new chairs and tables in the New Room. The choice of Seamus Heaney's translation of Beowulf led to a far-reaching discussion where we all learnt a great deal from fellow members – one of the joys of the Book Club. It is also rare for us all to feel the same about a book. So far only Proust, Seamus Heaney's translation of Book VI of the Aeneid and now his Beowulf have achieved that status.

The Book Club often debates the impact of different translations. In the light of this, and at Ann Suter's suggestion, The Leeds Library recently purchased Anna Aslanyan's *Dancing on Ropes : Translators and the Balance of History*. Seamus Heaney's translation of Beowulf has received both acclaim and criticism, and we wanted to look at that aspect as well as at the poem itself.

Only a few of us had studied Beowulf at university and one who had gave the introduction both to Beowulf and to the structures of Anglo Saxon verse, the alliterative patterns that disappeared by the fifteenth century. Seamus Heaney has been criticized for freeing himself from this constraint but in fact the modern approach is that the regular rhythm is equally critical as the verse was designed to be accompanied by music, probably of a harp. As part of the introduction, we listened to a little of Seamus Heaney's reciting Beowulf on YouTube. The fact that Beowulf, a tiny manuscript measuring no more that 5 by 7 inches, has survived at all, including fire damage, is miraculous. Its three thousand or so lines, written down some five centuries after the poem was created, represent ten percent of all the Anglo-Saxon verse that we have. The introduction provided an inspiring start for the discussion.

We agreed that Beowulf in other translations may be less accessible than in the Seamus Heaney translation. One member remarked they had looked at the Tolkien's translation but found his attempt to match the rhythm of the poem led to tedious prose. Seamus Heaney, as another member commented, deliberately "plays fast and loose" with the alliterative and stress patterns of the verse, changing it as he sees fit to the rhythm. But the structure of the translation remains largely alliterative and works very well.

Heaney has largely avoided the kennings of Anglo Saxon verse and some critics felt this thinning out meant his translation lacked richness. We did not find this for the power of his language, sometime adapting dialect words from North Ireland, and imagining the voices of his uncles declaiming Beowulf, is overwhelming. Some members found echoes of their own dialect words in his translation. Another member commented how the dropping of kennings in the case of the word gold, intensifies the symbolic impact at the end of the poem.



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# The Leeds Library

## **...reviews from the Tuesday Morning Book Club continued...**

Basically, Heaney's translation opens up Beowulf to a modern audience, and as one member pointed out, through it we can glimpse the thought processes of an ancient people. As well as Heaney's translation and his valuable introduction to Beowulf we had a long discussion on the nature of the poem itself.

There is a huge body of academic debate around Beowulf. We touched on some of the themes such as Beowulf's supposed childhood weakness, which may be an error of translation (Heaney follows the conventional approach here), the strange lack of colour words, and the tension between the Old Testament and pagan world. The New Testament does not feature in Beowulf. There was also a lively exchange on whether Tolkien, the great Anglo-Saxon scholar, had trivialized Beowulf with his own tales of elves and hobbits.

Beowulf on one level is a heroic epic, but we all felt there is a deep philosophy to the poem, a fatalism towards the bleakness and loneliness of life, especially for the masterless men. Gold is the treasure, but it is abandoned in the ground at the end of Beowulf. Only the name left behind, the reputation achieved for glory and honour, has value. The betrayal of Beowulf by his cowardly men, the forebodings of disaster and defeat, make a somber finish.

One critic summed up Beowulf as 'A thousand warriors have been killed in a mead hall'. Women hardly feature in the poem and their only value seems to be how well they act as hostess at the mead feast, graciously handing round the cups. Grendel's mother at least has huge force. Drinking and feasting is on a massive scale. We all felt Beowulf and the warriors might have been wise to at least set a watch whilst celebrating the end of Grendel.

Overall, we agreed that Seamus Heaney had taken a work that is pretty much untranslatable and captured its poetry.

We finished by comparing notes on our understanding of the Dark Ages, a rather lost period of history. Alfred and the cakes is still the main story although one member brought up in Morley, a central Wapentake, learnt of Danelaw at primary school. Judging by what is left of their verse, the Anglo Saxons appear to have had a bleak view of life. Viking sagas are perhaps more robust and humorous.

One member recommended Stepping Stones: interviews with Seamus Heaney by Dennis O'Driscoll, in which Heaney does not appear to have been particularly struck by Beowulf itself. This is a useful addition to the account Heaney gives in his introduction to the translation.



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# The Leeds Library

## **...reviews from the Tuesday Morning Book Club continued...**

A review of *The Warden* by Anthony Trollope, by Julie Trueman

Trollope was the son of Fanny Milton Trollope and Thomas Anthony Trollope. His mother published 40 novels and travel books to augment the family income because his father, a son of the landed gentry, was an unsuccessful barrister, scholar and failed gentleman farmer. Lucy Ellman in the *Guardian* of 2013 writes that Fanny was a feminist before the word existed, voicing principles and defending the underdog in her books. Trollope had an unhappy childhood during which the disparity between his parents privileged background and their comparatively low income challenged him. He had no money, no friends and was bullied at Eton and Harrow. It is said that at school he fantasized about suicide and constructed imaginary worlds in to which he retreated. After leaving education he worked for the Post Office and acquired a reputation for poor time keeping, insubordination and fell into debt. He disliked his work, but in 1841 he was transferred to Ireland and was able to improve his reputation and finances because his salary stretched further. He admitted to writing for money and made sure he completed a set number of words each day.

*The Warden* is the first of the six *Barssetshire Chronicles* published in 1865. It is a well loved satirical novel set in the Cathedral town of Barchester. The story is about a zealous young reformer, John Bold who challenges the financial affairs of the church which runs Hiram's Hospital, an almshouse funded by a medieval bequest made to the Diocese for the support of 10 retired bedesmen. The income of the charity has prospered over the years and provides a lucrative sinecure for the meek elderly warden Septimus Harding precentor of the Cathedral. A scandal breaks in the national press exposing the large disparity between the income of the warden and the inmates of the hospital. The warden finds himself pitted against John Bold, the suitor of his daughter Eleanor and his overbearing son in law Archdeacon Grantly son of the Bishop. The novel explores the impact of these events upon Harding and his immediate circle, the bedesmen and the negative consequences of this moral crusade, as well as the reluctance of institutions to accept change.

The writing is vivid, direct and contemporary, with much wit and humour and many clever throwaway lines which illuminate the story. Stylistically it is playful, versatile and waspish. The female characters are credible and the writer is sympathetic to women within the cultural norms of the time. The author makes no pretence that he is writing fiction by continually referring back to himself throughout the book. The characters are beautifully drawn. Archdeacon Grantly for example is shown to be a pompous overbearing man which is illustrated by the way he talks to the bedesmen and Bold. Grantley sees it as his duty to defend the church without question but is subjected to his wife's wishes behind closed doors.



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## **...reviews from the Tuesday Morning Book Club continued...**

The story is a social and political commentary. The novel satirises and exposes the workings of the Church of England, the media and the legal system. The author's contemporaries would have been more aware of the issues raised in the book than modern day readers. Trollope may have considered the warden to be an introductory novel which would account for the loose ends left at the end. It is a short interesting story which all members of the group enjoyed reading which has stood the test of time.

What Maisie Knew by Henry James, reviewed by Christine Stead

This was the novel chosen for discussion by the August Tuesday morning Book Club. It was first published in 1897, within two years of his better known "Turn Of The Screw", and both novels in their way explore the ways in which adults use children for their own corrupt ends.

"What Maisie Knew" is experimental in that it is narrated entirely from the point of view of the child, Maisie, who is at the centre of a web of sordid sexual intrigues spun by her parents, their new partners, lovers, and other linked adults.

At the age of five, Maisie is pushed into the centre of her parents bitter divorce battle. Neither parent wants her, but both have to agree to keep her for six months at a time before tossing her back. She is used, abused, manipulated, and neglected by her parents, Ida and Beale Farange, and subsequently used as a human shield by their new partners, Sir Claude and Mrs Beale, who in their turn become lovers. She receives no proper education and grows up in isolation from her peer group.

Maisie has to learn to survive in this maelstrom which she only has a child's understanding of what is happening, first by a pretence of ignorance and stupidity as her parents try to weaponise her experience of the other. As she grows she learns to use her hard-won knowledge to try to establish peace and harmony amongst the warring parties. She is still young when the novel ends, when she finds the freedom and independence to choose her own path with Mrs Wix, her strange and eccentric governess who becomes a kind of moral guardian.

In spite of his courtly prose, James is unsparing in revealing the selfishness, greed and sexual appetite of the adults. Maisie's parents are both portrayed as extraordinarily unpleasant – in the case of Ida, quite monstrously so. On the surface Maisie seems to survive the trauma of her dreadful treatment, though one scene with the Captain in Regents Park reveals shows her desperate longing for a mother's love. A modern readership may well wonder to what extent Maisie's early experience will damage her permanently as she finally leaves her childhood behind.



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## **...reviews from the Tuesday Morning Book Club continued...**

All the members of the book group agreed that this novel was a challenging read. The adult reader is, of course, able to bridge the gap between Maisie's "knowledge" and what is really going on, but disentangling Henry James' sometimes impenetrable and incomprehensible prose was felt to be a barrier and a serious weakness – one member of the group described it as "bad manners" towards the reader. This novel provided plenty of material for discussion, and a good choice for a book group to get their teeth into.

Our next meeting will on Tuesday 4th October at 10.30am in the Leeds Library, when we will discuss "If Not Now When?" by Primo Levi. We welcome new members, and anyone wishing to join the group should contact Ann Suter at [suter.pamelaann@gmail.com](mailto:suter.pamelaann@gmail.com).

The Library: a fragile history. By Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen. Profile Books, 2011. 518pp.

There is a striking phrase by the authors in the Postscript to this book: 'The future turns out to be very temporary.' (p.411) With 518 pages, 800 references and a forty page bibliography, the authors give us plenty of evidence for their assertion as it relates to libraries. The specific context here is the rapid obsolescence of new technologies 'witness the rise and discrete departures, of the CD-ROM, very much yesterday's future of books. The e-reader, Amazon Kindle, seems likely to follow.' To which we can add microfiche, Betamax videos, reel-to-reel audio tapes and a plethora of other formats. Since the history of libraries is inextricably tied up with books and manuscripts, the 'death of the book' must give us pause for thought. 'In 1979, the head of the RAND corporation announced that libraries would soon be obsolete and ... predicted 2019 as the year the last library would close its doors.' Well – No! The Leeds Library is still here and planning to open more doors! One has to admit though, that libraries generally are in decline, their roles in question, and that the bookless library has become a reality. Bibliotech, in San Antonio, Texas, is 'the first all-digital public library', while Google's plan to film 500 years of the world's printed heritage has reached some twenty million books (out of their estimate of 129,864,800 books published since Gutenberg!). The takeover of print by digital is further testified by Amazon's Alexa who is said to answer 500 million questions a day. (p.405)

Believable or not, the future of books and libraries is fragile.

From the 35,000 clay tablets of the Royal Library at Ninevah, destroyed by the Babylonian conquest of 614-612 BC, to the 'bookless library' in the 21st century, Pettegree (Professor of Modern History) and Weduwen (Deputy Director of the Universal Short Title Catalogue), both of St Andrews University, give us a full and depressing picture of the rise and amazingly rapid fall of libraries across the world.



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# The Leeds Library

## ...reviews continued...

Here we find a sorry saga of covetousness and aggrandisement (e.g. Cardinal Richelieu's appropriations of other people's libraries to strengthen his power-base); fires (Chicago 1871 - three million books destroyed, Norwich 1994, 350,000 books); destroying cultures (Russian destruction of libraries in Poland, book burning by the Nazis, emptying Jesuit libraries by the Swedish militia); war (carpet bombing of Dresden, Berlin and Coventry); promoting ideologies and national identities; theft, by librarians even (the Director of the Girolamini Library in Naples stole 4,000 rare and precious books in 2013); avarice (often of beneficiaries who cash in on a deceased's library); earthquakes (San Francisco in 1906 and 1989); 'hubris, misjudgement and maladministration' (p.400/6) - San Francisco again, when up to half a million books were destroyed because they would not fit into a new building!); and of course neglect, damp, mice and mould!

The main focus of the book is continental Europe, from whence our idea of libraries and librarians came, though the UK and the USA get good coverage as we come to the modern age. Here we find those good guys: the eighteenth century Reverends James Kirkwood in Scotland and Thomas Bray in England who promoted parish libraries; Andrew Carnegie who funded some 3,000 library buildings across the world; and Bill and Melinda Gates who funded the People's Network, putting public access computers in public libraries.

I'm sure I'm not the only person who thought libraries were, unquestionably, a 'good thing' and would last forever! But the over-riding theme here is a sad one: that books have been seen as objects to be acquired, owned, and fought over. They have been the victims of the ebb and flow of nations, of wars and competing ideologies: 'politicized'. In 1927 Chicago's Mayor, Big Bill Major Thompson insisted that the city library must be purged of pro-British literature; post-war; the American Library Association supported President Truman's 'loyalty pledge'; and earlier this year, in a UK professional library journal, an article pleads for libraries to 'de-colonise' their stock. What's happening here? Political point-scoring? Censorship? Depressing, but the authors do give us a reality check. Libraries are fragile! Thankfully, they also find some positives to end their work. The French Médiathèques are rated highly, and there are many wise words on the value of reading and libraries.

Now here's a thought: How many libraries can you name which have a history longer than the Leeds Library? Not many I wager. Let's keep it that way!

Bob Duckett