

SPEAKS VOLUMES

35

June 2023

Sandringham

FOUNDED 1788
The Leeds Library
NEXT CHAPTER PROJECT

the magazine of
THE LEEDS LIBRARY

In this issue of Speaks Volumes:

PAGE NUMBER

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General Enquiries: enquiries@theleedslibrary.org.uk

Counter: counter@theleedslibrary.org.uk

OPENING HOURS

Monday—Wednesday: 10AM-6PM

Thursday: 10AM-7pm

Friday: 10AM-5PM

Saturday: 10AM-4PM

Sunday: CLOSED

Update from our CEO

Dear Member

It has been a busy time in the library over the last few weeks.

With the level of member visits now back to pre-pandemic levels, it has been pleasing to see an increasing number of member-focused clubs flourishing. These now include a Writers' Club and Chat Café, alongside the books clubs, craft club and film club that the library already hosts. You can find details of these clubs in this issue of *Speaks Volumes*, and on the library website.



We would love to see more clubs and library groups set up, so please don't hesitate to have a chat with a member of staff if you would like to see more interest groups or member clubs set up and have an idea for one which you would like to lead on.

With the first phase of the building work in 15 Commercial Street having started over the last couple of weeks, there has been an increase in enquiries as to the identity of the retailer who will be moving into the retail unit in the new building. We hope to be able to let members know the details of the retailer in the next few days. In the meantime, members visiting the library in the last few days will have noticed that following the departure of Paperchase, the new tenant of the retail unit underneath the library will be Ann Summers.

The Annual General Meeting is scheduled for Saturday 24th June at 2pm in the Library. Details of the meeting will be circulated over the next few days, and we hope to see as many members as possible attend the event. After the AGM, there will be a talk by Dr Thom Keep, who is CEO and Librarian of the Portico Library in Manchester, which is a fellow member of the Independent Libraries Association.

Over the coming weeks we will be announcing various events planned for the Autumn, as well as details of our contributions to the Libraries in Leeds Festival and Heritage Open Day Festival in September, and Leeds Light Night and National Libraries Week in October.

Finally, the fundraising work for the library continues so that Phase 2 of the Next Chapter Project can take place. Over the coming weeks we will be giving members more details on planned fundraising efforts and would like to invite members to suggest additional fundraising ideas that can help the library complete the Next Chapter capital project as quickly as possible.

best wishes

Carl Hutton

CEO

Update from Jane and the Library Services team

Book Sale

Our April Book Sale was very successful, and we made over £1200! Many thanks to those who donated books to sell, and also to our volunteers who helped on the day.

We are holding another Book Sale on Saturday 22 July from 10am to 3pm.

With prices from 50p, and with a wide selection of topics, there will be something for everyone! All are welcome, so please let your family and friends know.

If you can't get to the sale, we still have a selection of books to buy in Coffee Corner (on the shelves behind the water machine), so do have a browse.

If you have any items for the sale, please can you bring them to the Counter before Friday 14 July.

Collection Development Policy

We have amended our Collection Development Policy and the revised policy has now been agreed by the Trustees and can be viewed on the website: <https://www.theleedslibrary.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Collection-Development-Policy-March-2023.pdf>. Please can you note the changes to our disposals policy on page 10, particularly Methods of Withdrawal.

Craft Club

Craft Club is now a regular feature in the Library and we welcome any new crafters among you! We meet twice a month, and as well as giving you the opportunity to work on your own projects, you will be able to meet other members and staff, in a relaxed and creative atmosphere and share advice and swap ideas. We provide free tea and coffee, and all we ask is that your craft is portable as we can't store things for you. We will next meet on: **Friday 24 June from 12pm to 2pm**

Members' Film Club

Our latest programme of films is available at the Counter, and tickets should be booked on Eventbrite. Our current season is the Film Club Members' Choice, and we are showing the iconic movie Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid on Wednesday 14 June, followed by the start of a new season on Saturday 1 July with Get Out starring Daniel Kaluuya. All Members welcome!

Coffee Club

Our Coffee Club is proving to be very popular with our Members. Sweet treats were provided by the staff, including Fat Rascals, Nigella Lawson's gluten-free clementine cake, and Lemon Drizzle cake. We meet again on Thursday 15 June between 10.30 and 12.00, so book your place on Eventbrite, and join us for a chat. Tickets are £3.50.

...Library Services update continued...

Exhibitions

Our latest exhibition is Yorkshire art and artists, and features famous names such as David Hockney, Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, but also includes some lesser known artists such as Katharine Holmes, Joash Woodrow and Alice Kirkby Goyder.



Alice Kirkby Goyder



Katherine Holmes



Joash Woodrow

...Library Services update continued...

Look4—Introducing the new look online catalogue!

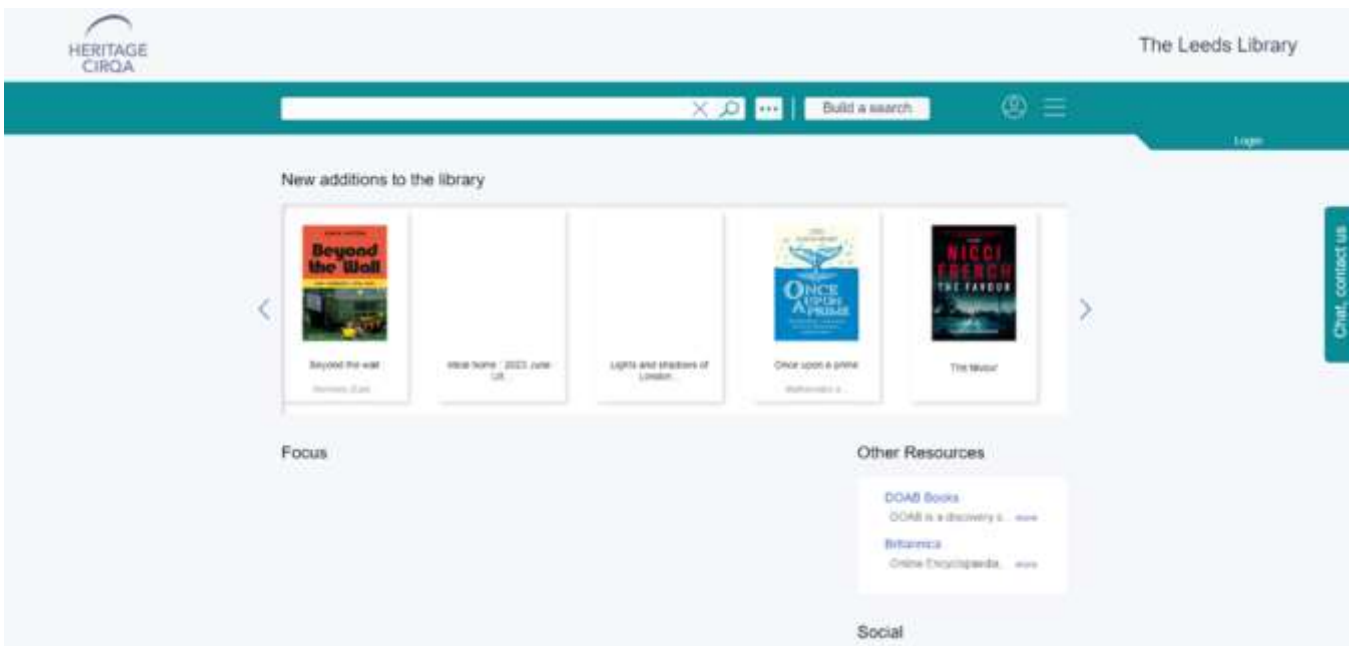
A recent upgrade to our library management system has meant a full upgrade to the online catalogue. Over the next few weeks, we will be fully transitioning over to the new updated version, but until we have adjusted it to our liking, we will be running both the current version and the new version alongside, for members to try out. Staff have already spotted some areas that will need amending by the library services team. The new version is not currently notifying the library when reservations have been made, so please bear with us if you use this function on the new system.

There will be some noticeable changes to the look of the catalogue and we will bring you more updates, including any new features in the next edition of Speaks Volumes.

So what are the new features?

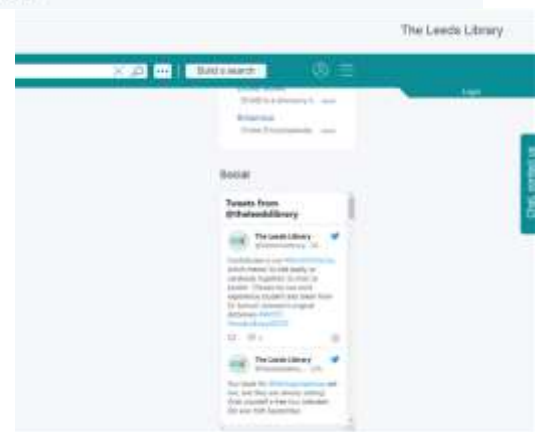
New look home page

New additions to the library will feature at the top of the screen below the search button. You can contact the library directly by clicking on the bar at the side of the screen and the login button is just above that.



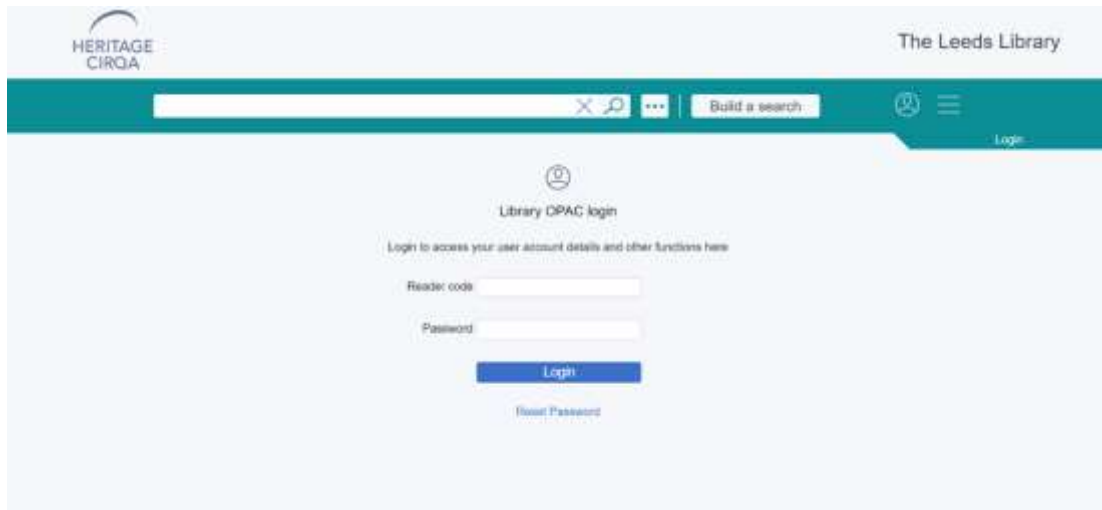
Social Media

You will now also be able to see the library's Twitter feed on the home page, which means for those members who don't use social media, you will still be able to access any important updates, notices of events and of course our all important *Word of the Day* without needing a twitter account.

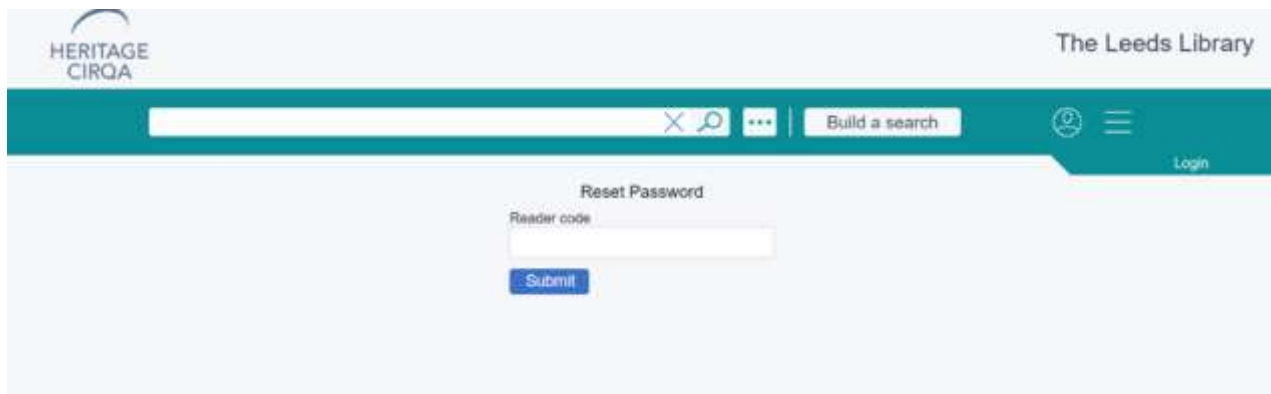


...Library Services update continued...

PASSWORDS instead of a PIN to log on



Library Members will now be able to reset their own passwords, or PIN number as it was referred to on the old system. To do this, go to the login button and on the screen you will see an option to reset password, you will be asked to enter your reader code and click submit (see image below). You will then receive an email asking you to choose a new password. This is much more secure and it will now mean members can choose a longer and more secure password, rather than the 4 digit pin. We would recommend all members upgrade their passwords as soon as possible. The Library Services Team will no longer be able to reset them on your behalf, as that feature has been taken away with the new update.



Please note that your existing pin will continue to work with the old version of the catalogue even after you have set up a password on the new version.

If you would like to check out the new look catalogue for yourselves, you can do so at the link below.

<https://theleedslibrary.cirqaHosting.com/cirqa-web-app>

If you have any questions or want to raise any issues that you notice, please email gooda@theleedslibrary.org.uk

Anna Goodridge, Assistant Librarian

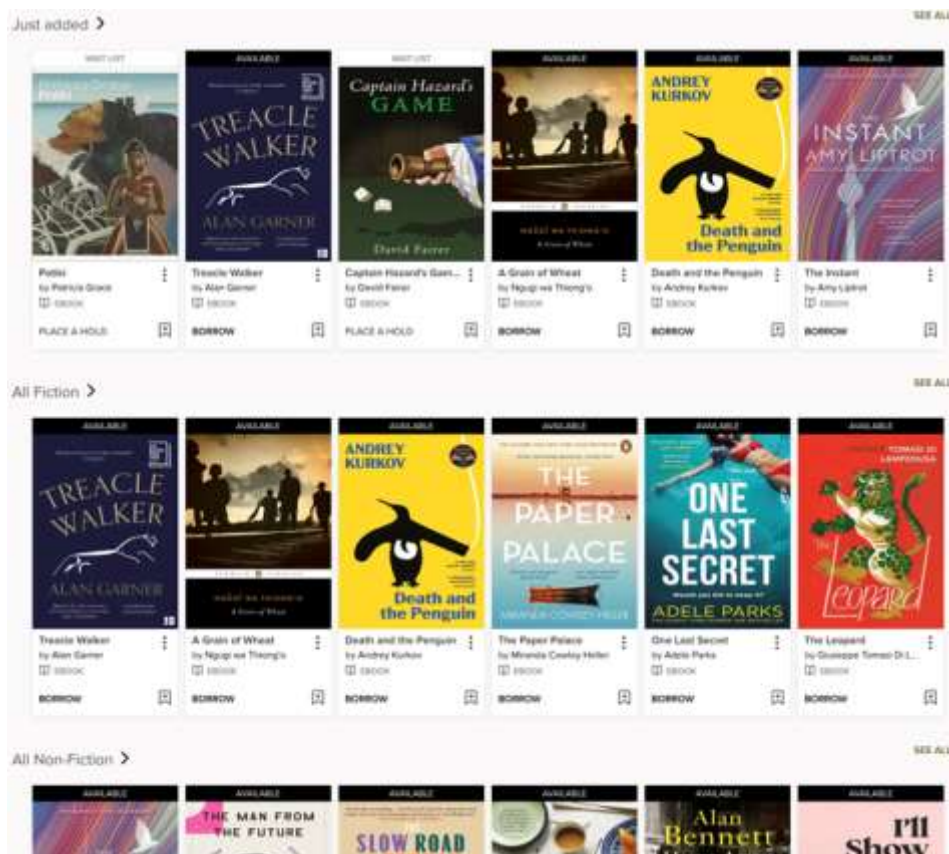
Member benefits: eBook library

Membership Benefits: eBooks

Here at The Leeds Library, we are constantly striving to bring value to your membership. Many of you have already signed up for our eBooks service but did you also know that our eBooks can now be accessed via your Kindle Fire*? Handy for those upcoming summer holidays!

- Download the OverDrive app from the Amazon Appstore
- Open the app and login using your email and 4-digit membership number
- Go to Manage Libraries to search and add The Leeds Library
- Go to your Bookshelf and click on 'Add a Title' to browse the collection.

The collection is regularly refreshed with a selection of Fiction, Non-Fiction, Classics and Audiobooks for you to enjoy. Happy Browsing!



Further details on accessing the eBooks Library can be found on the website here <https://www.theleedslibrary.org.uk/members-area/ebook-library/> If you need technical assistance with eBooks please let us know and we'll be happy to help you.

*requires Fire OS5 or above

Stamp of Approval from Nigella Lawson!

Our Members' Chat Café is proving very popular, not least because all the cakes and other goodies are home-made by keen bakers among the library staff. Returning by popular demand at the Chat Café in May was Communications & Marketing Officer Ian Harker's clementine cake, made to a Nigella Lawson recipe. While not vegan (because it contains eggs) it's gluten free as it calls for powdered almonds rather than flour; and the use of boiled clementines (or any other fruit that takes your fancy, really) makes the cake nice and moist.

We tweeted a photo of said cake—before it was tucked-into—and mentioned Nigella in the Tweet. She replied signalling her approval, and Ian—a Nigella stan—had an attack of the vapours. Where are those smelling salts?

The next Chat Café takes place on Thursday 15th June from 10:30am—12pm. Why not come along and find out what treats the staff have laid on this month?



Member news

Cloakroom security

A keypad security system has been installed on the door to the members' cloakroom in the foyer. This means that you will now need a four-digit PIN number to get into the pod where the lockers and coat hangers are located.

The PIN number has been circulated to members via email. If you need the PIN number again, please speak to someone on the counter.

The PIN number will be changed on a regular basis. Please keep an eye on your personal possessions while visiting the library, and use the lockers provided in the foyer for the duration of your visit.

Writing Club

Need a helping hand with your novel, poetry, or memoir? Share your work-in-progress and gather feedback from fellow writers in a supportive atmosphere.

Our newest members' club is Writing Club, which will be meeting on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month at 12pm in the New Room. The next two meetings are **8th June & 22nd June**. All genres and levels of experience are welcome, and no booking is required.

Children's Book Project

The Children's Book Project seeks to tackle book poverty and to give every child the opportunity to own their own book. The National Literacy Trust's 'Book Ownership in 2022' report found that one in three disadvantaged children across the UK has fewer than ten books of their own at home, and one in ten has none at all.

The Children's Book Project seeks to change that. After success in London—with more than one million books donated and distributed—the Children's Book Project is expanding, and the Leeds Library has enlisted to show them support.

The idea is simple. As a Children's Book Project hub, you can donate children's books at the library, and we'll do the rest. They will be taken to the collection point—Seagulls on Kirstall Road—and distributed to children via women's groups, children's centres, foodbanks and schools.

So bring your children's books with you on your next visit, and pass them to someone on the counter. They are sure to find a very good home. The Project is aiming to distribute 350,000 books this year—and every last one counts.



Collections highlights

Pride Month Collections Highlights

Niimi Day Gough, Archive Assistant

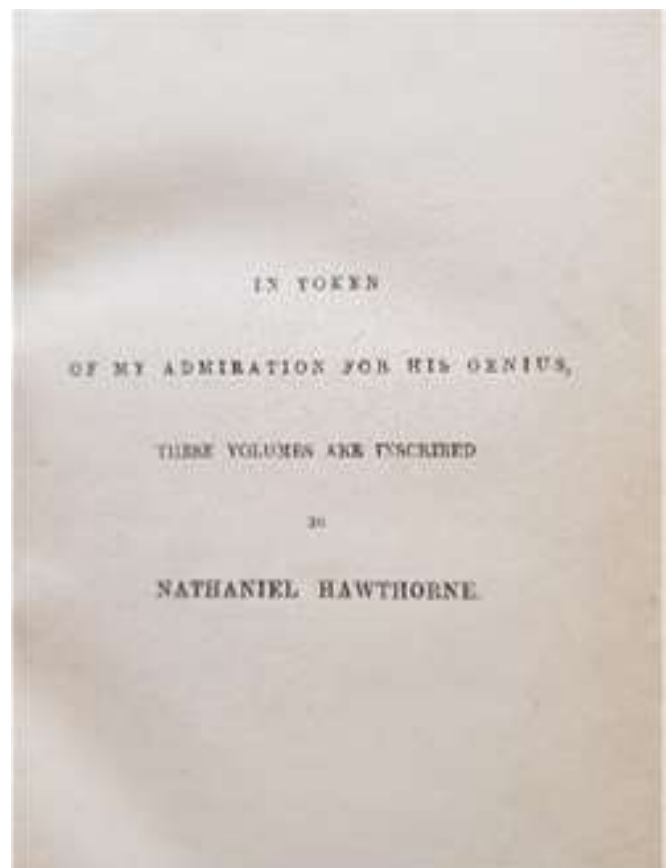
As any member (new or old) will know, the Library has collected a lot of books in its 255 years of existence. To celebrate the start of Pride Month, I'm turning the spotlight onto some of the queerer books on the Library's shelves—from both the places you'd expect and ones you wouldn't!

***The Whale [Moby-Dick]* by Herman Melville (1851)**

More famous under its American name, *Moby-Dick*, Melville's 1851 novel is his most famous and today the most praised. What those who haven't read it might not know, however, is that it features a marriage between main character Ishmael and Pacific Islander Queequeg—while they are in bed together! This element of the text, as well as several other instances of explicit references to sex and Christ in the book, were censored out of the first Victorian British editions of the book.

Thankfully, they are restored now.

Scholars have speculated that the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg might have been inspired by Melville's great affection and admiration for fellow author Nathaniel Hawthorne, to whom *Moby-Dick* is dedicated. Melville sent several impassioned letters to Hawthorne, writing in one that "your heart beat in my ribs and mine in yours, and both in God's." Whether this was romantic or not, they are love letters—and this homosocial love is palpable in *Moby-Dick*.

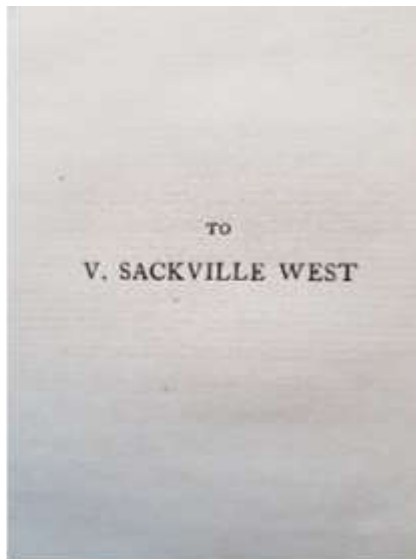


...Collections Highlights continued...

***Orlando* by Virginia Woolf (1928)**

One of Woolf's most famous novels, *Orlando* has many layers of queerness to its name. The book itself recounts the life of the eponymous Orlando, who changes gender from male to female throughout the book and lives for 300 years from the Tudor period until the stroke of midnight before the novel's publication. Woolf's inspiration for the book was Vita Sackville-West, her lover and friend, and it was dedicated to her from its first edition—as you can see here! Sackville-West's son, Nigel Nicholson, described *Orlando* as “the longest and most charming love letter in literature”.

There is no better evidence of this than the images of 'Orlando' that Woolf included in the book. All are from Sackville-West's family collection, with portraits like the one featured next to the front page here depicting her ancestors. The photographs of Orlando as a woman are all in fact Sackville-West, who posed for the novel specifically. To Woolf, Vita was Orlando.



...Collections Highlights continued...

***Conundrum* by Jan Morris (1974):**

Jan Morris was a Welsh travel writer and historian, famous for her writings on cities, the history of the British Empire, and for being the only journalist to accompany the 1953 Everest expedition (which was credited as the first ever full scaling at the time). She was also transgender, beginning her transition publicly in 1964. In 1972, she travelled to Morocco to undergo gender affirming surgery after being driven away from the UK by British doctors who demanded she divorce her wife before they would treat her. The couple eventually were forced to divorce, but stayed together—and, in 2008, were legally reunited in a Civil Partnership.



Morris details her transition in *Conundrum*, her first book under her new name and one of the first autobiographies to discuss transitioning ever published in the UK.

***The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker (1983)**

Walker's most famous novel, *The Colour Purple* was listed at number 17 on the American Library Association's list of the 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 2000–2010. It follows Celie, a young Black woman, as she navigates marriage, love, and abuse in the homophobic, racist patriarchy of the early 1900s Deep South. She falls in love with Shug Avery, the charismatic jazz singer, and (as its blurb says) “discovers not the pain of rivalry but the love and support of women”.



The Library's copy is sadly not a first edition, instead being published in 1987.

The publishing company, however, is notable in and of itself! This copy was produced by The Women's Press Fiction, which you can see in the iron symbol shown here. Founded in 1977, The Women's Press was based out of London and became a force in publishing feminist queer novels throughout the 1980s.

Archive Highlights

Library member Michael Meadowcroft wrote in with these two wonderful images showing Commercial Street around the turn of the Twentieth Century. They are from Michael's collection of ephemera acquired over many years to provide images to accompany lectures.

Their origin is unknown—unless any keen historians among our members can identify them!



Mary Ness: a tribute



Mary Ness, a stalwart of the Leeds Library, has died aged 87. She joined the Library in 1992, having bought share number 382 in the days when it was still a proprietary library and before it became an open charity in 2008. Mary was a committee member from 1997 and continued as a Trustee of the charity until 2017. She was also one of the 'Bridging the Gap' donors who made loans to it to assist the purchase of the new building. She was a forthright member of the Library's book group and was never reticent at expressing her views on books being read, or, indeed, on her fellow members.

By profession she was a nurse and it was at a Leeds hospital that she met her husband, anaesthetist Alan Ness, from whom she was eventually divorced. Their two sons are both medics. I very much enjoyed her company and she was a very convivial lunch companion until her advancing arthritis inhibited her movements and latterly forced her to be housebound. Mary was a voracious reader until, latterly, as her eyesight deteriorated, she was unable to cope with print. This and her immobility hugely frustrated and depressed her, even to the point of considering making use of Dignitas. Her peaceful death at home is a fitting end to a full, practical life, committed to causes she enjoyed and supported.

Michael Meadowcroft

A very special bequest

Last year, library member Michael Elsmore entrusted a very special book into the Library's care. It's one of our newest bequests, and it's now (physically) the smallest in our collection. Subsequent research into the book's history will be incorporated into the Leeds Library archive.

George Venables (Michael Elsmore's uncle) was the book's first owner. He was born in 1886 in Stafford. Here he is, with his family—back row on the right.



In 1910, he married Lizzie, and they had two children: George Henry (born 1912) and Reginald William (born 1915). Not long after Reginald was born, though, George enlisted to fight in the First World War, and he became a private soldier in the 11th battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. On 27th August 1916, he embarked on the ship *Arcadian* for the Salonica campaign in Northern Greece, where George would serve for two years and four months.

George's War Office information—digitised by the National Archives—states that he was employed with "trench mortars". Further research into his battalion's history may well shed more light on when George experienced. On demobilisation in 1919, though, he gave details of the effects his time in the army had had, and they make for grim reading.

"I am now suffering from Malaria such was caused through phlegmatic conditions whilst in the Army from which Disease I suffered from when on Active Service in Salonica. I have had four relapses since June 29 to July 7."

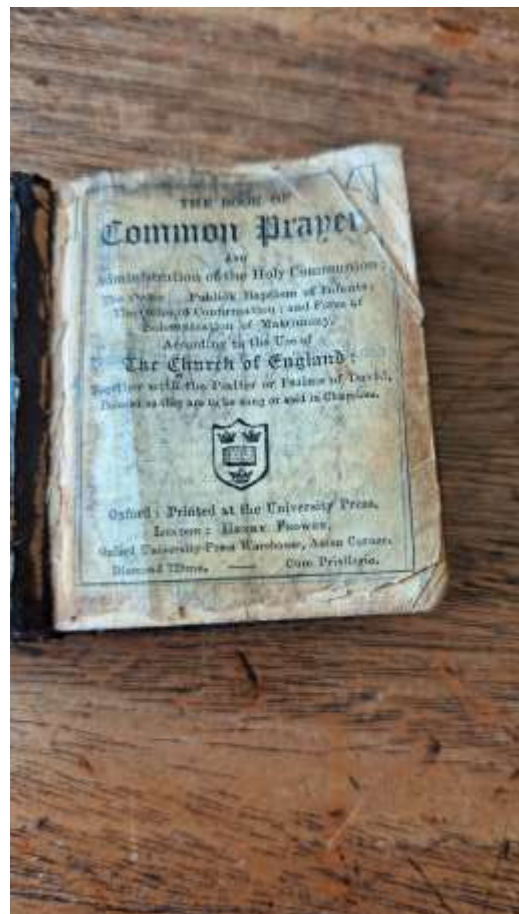
Indeed, his regimental medical record confirms that George had been hospitalised with malaria twice while on active service, as well as once with laryngitis and once with dysentery.

...a very special bequest continued...

But George returned home to his wife and children, to Lizzie and George junior and Reginald, his discharge papers noting that he was “a useful man”. So many of his comrades, of course, did not return. And when George came home, he brought with him a Book of Common Prayer, measuring 4.5cm by 5.5cm—the book that is now the smallest in the Leeds Library’s collection.

Taking its place among our treasures, we are fortunate to be able to piece together its story and that of its first owner. And while we can only guess at what George Venables experienced in Salonica, it is moving to think of the comfort that this little book brought in the darkest of times.

We are grateful to Michael Elsmore for his generous and touching donation.



Book reviews

The Madness: A memoir of war, fear and PTSD

Fergal Keane

William Collins, 2022

This is not a book to be “enjoyed” but it is a compelling narrative. I have always warmed to Fergal Keane’s reporting on BBC Radio 4 not least as he has the knack of linking a country and the often horrendous episodes therein with personal experiences on the front line, often including pictures of the individuals caught up in war. I have also been puzzled by his long absences from the airwaves in recent years. Now I know why. If any readers have, like I and probably many other non-sufferers, been tempted to make light of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Fergal Keane’s memoir is a must read.

This memoir is both painfully honest and beautifully written. He describes the immediacy of war reporting, not from a distant command post but from the front line. He describes his addiction to war reporting and his immediate insistence of leaving for a war zone as soon as hostilities commenced at the expense of his family responsibilities and his promises to his advisors and his family. Bit by bit his reporting from a succession of war zones brought on cumulative symptoms of PTSD which he rode or ignored, even though he had journalist colleagues and local civilians killed and maimed around him. Perhaps inevitably he resorted to the abuse of alcohol to mask the effects.

It was being deeply involved in the Rwanda genocide in the Summer of 1994 that catalysed his eventual breakdown, even though it took many years to provoke the full crisis in his mental health. The acute effects of PTSD—vivid images in his mind, sleeplessness, nightmares and sudden and recurring instances of a complete inability to cope—led him to a succession of therapists until he found one who was capable of reaching the deep recesses where the terrors resided and enabled him to cope without the completely debilitating dependence on alcohol.

Finally, he realised that although he needed to continue to report from war zones it would have to be contained in the consequences and the aftermath of hostilities rather than the frontline. This realisation has, fortunately for his audiences, brought him back to the BBC airwaves in recent years.

Michael Meadowcroft

The History of Mr Polly

HG Wells

This was the book chosen for discussion in the Tuesday Book Club for February.

Written in 1910, it tells the story of Alfred Polly, an emotionally insecure and badly educated young man, who nevertheless reads voraciously, loves words (and mis-uses them in his own idiosyncratic way) and searches for beauty and meaning in life.

...book reviews continued...

The novel opens “in medias res”, with Polly, aged 35 deciding he hates his life. He owns a small gentleman’s outfitters shop, which is going bankrupt, in a sleepy South Coast town, he doesn’t get on with his neighbouring shopkeepers, he is unhappily married and he has indigestion.

From there, the novel takes us back to his earlier years – his friendship with fellow apprentices in the department store where he first works, the death of his father and the funeral which introduces him to the Larkins family and a modest inheritance which allows him the leisure to cycle round the countryside before being trapped into marriage with Miriam Larkins and commitment to a shop.

Having reached the point where the novel opens, he decides to take drastic action. It which doesn’t quite work out as he planned, but it enables him to realize that “Fishbourne wasn’t the world”. He “clears out” and eventually finds happiness and contentment at the Potwell Inn with a kindred spirit, the plump woman Aunty Flo (“My sort” he says on first laying eyes on her.)

First he has to “see off” the ferocious Uncle Jim in a series of very funny mock-heroic encounters and to return incognito to check that Miriam has survived his defection – she has. He returns to the Potwell Inn presumably to live happily ever after.

This is a comic novel, with a happy ending and an economy of writing and ironic lightness of touch throughout. There are lengthy comic set-pieces to savour, such as the funeral tea, the wedding and the fire sequence at Fishbourne. However, the comedy is often laced with distress or unease. Our hero Alfred Polly cuts a rather ridiculous figure, such as when he falls for the red-headed schoolgirl who so cruelly plays him along. Yet he engages the reader’s sympathies throughout, and we can’t belittle his small tragedies or triumphs.

The novel is set very firmly within its Edwardian heyday, with its portrayal of the stultifying effects of lower middle class life in small towns and its idealization of the countryside and the open road. Its social commentary links it with other novels Wells wrote about the same period, such as Kipps or Ann Veronica. But compared to his sci-fi novels such as War of the Worlds, which still seem “modern”, prophetic even, novels such as Mr Polly seem of another age, and have largely fallen out of fashion.

Many of the group felt it was an inconsequential novel. It was surprising how many of us had read it in our teens and remembered scenes from it vividly. Like others, I certainly enjoyed re-reading it and can recommend it—it’s worth a second look.

Christine Stead

...book reviews continued...

Kiss Myself Goodbye

Ferdinand Mount

This was the Tuesday Morning Book Club's choice for December. I chose this because I had listened to a discussion on 'A Good Read' on BBC Radio 4 and was amazed by the mention of Leeds and Sheffield both of which I know well and yet I had never heard of any of what they were talking about.

Our group was joined by Richard Hainsworth (a long standing Leeds library member) who had contacted the Library prior to the meeting saying he had further information to add to the discussion including a scrap book of newspaper cuttings from his grandfather and other material. Ferdinand Mount is a well known journalist and was for ten years editor of the Times Literary supplement. He has also written a number of other books.

The book, though, reads rather like an episode of 'Who do you think you are' on BBC TV. The author investigates in the book his family and the amazing life of his Aunt to quote 'the many lives of Aunt Munca'. The book is a work of fact not fiction (although it reads as a work of fiction!) There are many twists and turns as FM peels away the layers of history about his family which were completely unknown to him previously.

What did we think? Most of us really liked the book and were greatly entertained by it. Two members really could not stand the book though. Everyone found the many name changes very confusing and thought a family tree included in the work would have been useful (although that would have taken some interpreting!).

We also rather hated some of the characters but these were real life people never the less. We were impressed by Mount's descriptions of grimy Sheffield and Brightside and were appalled at the treatment of the two girls in the story. I googled some of the facts in the book, out of pure interest, and was amazed to discover that the grotesque pink marble bathroom at Charters (Frank Parkinson's house) was still going strong, although the house was now apartments.

Richard Hainsworth then showed us his scrap book of newspaper cuttings of the major events in Leeds and, especially, the then Borough of Pudsey in 1938 to 1939. Both Richard Hainsworth's grandfather and Walter Forrest were Mayors of Pudsey (the former from 1938 to 1939; the latter from 1909 to 1912).

...book reviews continued...

The scrap book had amazing details of Pudsey in 1938/9. The newspaper cutting's book was of events of that year, including, Richard's parents wedding and lists of all their presents and also more importantly, from the point of view of the book, a long description of Walter Forrest's funeral and lists of mourners.

We did feel the story trailed away a bit at the end but otherwise despite the reservations was a very enjoyable read.

You will never look at the Parkinson Building again in the same light!

Ann Suter

If Not Now, When?

Primo Levi

The Tuesday morning Book Club discussed 'If Not Now, When' for their meeting on 4th October.

I chose this book as we had never read any work by Primo Levi .I felt that he is an author who has been neglected somewhat in the years since his death in 1987.

Primo Levi (1919-1987) lived all his life in Turin in Italy. He took a degree in Chemistry but suffered under the discriminatory laws against Jews with the rise of Fascism He joined the resistance movement in Italy not long before the end of the war but was soon arrested and eventually sent to Monowitz (a camp within the Auschwitz complex). He was saved, partly, by working as a chemist in IG Farben's labs. The camp was liberated 1945 and Levi then made his way by a long route through Poland, Belarus, Romania, Hungary, Austria and Germany back to Italy. Much of the detail in 'If Not Now When' was gained while Levi was on this journey.

Levi went back to Turin, lived in the same flat in Turin, and continued to work as a chemist as before until his death in 1987 when he fell (or jumped) from the stairwell in the apartment.

'If Not Now, When' is Levi's only work of fiction. It was written much later in life than the rest of his books and took nearly 2 years to write. The book traces the journey of a group of Jewish partisans behind the enemy lines during the 2nd World War, hoping to reach Italy and eventually Palestine. It is set in the area on the Russian, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland borders; changing as the partisans move around. Mendel (a Jewish clockmaker) is the unifying thread in the book and is the only one to survive until the end.

...book reviews continued...

Levi never forgot the Jews he saw in 1945 (who were Zionists) hitching their wagon to a train of home ward bound Italians. A ship to Palestine was waiting for them in Bari. Levi was fascinated by these Jews who had managed to survive, had carried out guerrilla warfare and sabotage against the Germans in the forests of Byelorussia. Levi on the other hand had been captured before he could even learn how to handle a weapon. He listened and noted down all their stories.

Also, despite being of Jewish origin, he knew very little Yiddish or Hebrew and spent a year learning it. All the characters in the book are fictional except for Polina (the pilot of the airplane which brought them supplies). The narrative teems with biblical allusions and Hebrew expressions. The Hebrew letters VNTNV written up in the extermination camp is a palindrome of 5 Hebrew consonants and can be read both ways "And they will give back" i.e. we can do the same to you!

The title of the book is taken from a Rabbinical saying (Pirkei Avot) but was extended in the book to Gedaleh's song:

*If I am not for myself who will be for me?
And being myself, what am I?
And if not now, when?*

The physical hardship, the hunger and the grimness of winter is wonderfully described and he does give us a feel for the broad open spaces and the forests, the scattered skirmishes of a spread out war and the uneasy relationships between partisans and civilians and discrimination against the Jews.

The Book Club really liked the book. It was an engrossing work, with authentic descriptions and as one member said impossible to read in historical context without comparisons to the situation now. The real criticism was that the ending was weak and a bit saccharine but that did not really detract from the main body of the work. People liked the momentum and tension all the way through (will they survive and will they all get to the end of the journey?) and you become included as one of the group. There were strong women characters included, Line for example. Levi writes with a simple understated style, in a way similar to Hemingway, but not dwelling on the gruesome parts but mentioning them anyway so your imagination can do the rest.

The title of the book was also discussed and liked. There were lots of genuine details about animals and how when they found a starling (having lost their compass) they released it and one partisan told them starlings always fly west so they followed it and got their directions again.

...book reviews continued...

The book deals with a journey, and a quest, and what it is like to be Jewish among many other things. Levi was profoundly affected by his experiences (not surprisingly) and never really recovered.

I felt this must be very apposite with the events in Ukraine taking place at present in the same area. Surely all soldiers, and civilians, alike, involved in war must feel the same. Today we have modern equipment and mobile phones but much of the conditions must be the same: landscapes and towns laid to waste, harsh weather conditions, lack of food and desperate living conditions. It is all described in detail here and I think Oh dear! How little have things changed in 80 or so years.

A book to be recommended especially if you have not read any Primo Levi.

Ann Suter

Portable Magic: A History of Books and Their Readers

Emma Smith

Allen Lane, 2022

Have you ever tried to burn a book? It's not easy! Book-burning such as that done by the Nazis on 10 May 1933 features here, but overall, the number of books burnt is probably exaggerated, evil though the attempt may be.

Did you know that when you read a book you leave traces of yourself? Not just crumbs of toast or bus tickets, but sweat and skin fragments in microscopic quantities. These can be analysed. Thus 'Swabbing the gutter of a 1627 Bible, the Folger Shakespeare Library found the DNA of a Northern European individual who suffered from acne.' (p.231)

Do you recall all those zoom interviews on television with officials during the Covid lockdown, taken against the backdrop of bookshelves? Maybe you were more interested in what books the celebrity had than what they said! Well, renting out bookish backdrops was big business. 'What you say is not as important as the bookcase behind you!' according to a Twitter account called *Bookcase Credibility*. One struggling cabinet minister had the book *What Works* placed upside down in his shelves!

Remember the iconic publicity photo of the curvaceous Marilyn Munroe clutching James Joyce's book *Ulysses*? 'A publicity stunt' was the cynical media chorus: Dumb blond pretending to be erudite; likewise her marriage to leading playwright Arthur Miller ('Egghead marries hourglass').

...book reviews continued...

But research shows Miss Monroe to have been well-read with a well-stocked library, including Camus, G B Shaw, Steinbeck and *Ulysses*. Perhaps the marriage was a marriage of like-minded literati!

And do you know what *anthropodermic bindings* are? They are books bound in human skin.

But surely you knew 'the oldest surviving example [of a subscription library] in the UK is Leeds Subscription Library.' (p.164)*

This book is about, well, books! Not the making of them – manufacture or authorship, not their content, nor libraries, nor readers - well, not specifically. It is about the culture of books and their place in our lives. *This* particular book is a product of the COVID-enforced leisure of a Leeds-born Professor of Shakespeare Studies at Oxford University, tied to an electronic window on the world. It is erudite, entertaining, lucid and highly interesting: a 'must-have' read for bibliophiles.

After beginning with a look at book history, East and West, we go to the trenches in World-War Two where we learn, surprisingly perhaps, that the most-read book was Lytton Strachey's biography of Queen Victoria; the reason being because of the small, and hence portable, format of the Armed Service Editions publisher. Then on to 'Shelfies' where, in addition to Miss Monroe's personal library, we learn about the well-stocked libraries of Lady Anne Clifford and Madame de Pompadour. Later we learn of the furious attempts in the USA to silence Rachel Carson's ground-breaking eco-classic, *Silent Spring*. 'The *Titanic* and book traffic' - accounts of wealthy US book collectors buying up UK book treasures - and the religious dimensions to book history, follow.

I found the author's chapter on 'Library books, camp, and malicious damage' challenging, particularly as she seems to applaud the cultural contribution of the vandalism of Joe Orten and Kenneth Holland. And I thought the author rather harsh on public libraries and their need to be relevant to passing fashions.

*Issues of primacy are not straightforward but the trustees of the subscription libraries in Wanlochhead in Dumfriesshire, founded 1741, and Leadhills in Lanarkshire, founded in 1756, and both still functioning—just—would doubtless contest the author's assertion! BD

...book reviews continued...

This leads on to the thorny issue of censored books, with a chapter heading: '237 goddams, 58 bastards, 31 Chrissakes, and 1 fart'. *Mein Kampf* and the freedom to publish follows in a chapter of their own. What books should a library NOT stock is a difficult issue. Or should libraries stock controversial and subversive books? The chapter on talismanic books looks at books as physical objects such as Bibles that stop bullets, or even fire them! The aforementioned anthropodermic bindings and their use in African-American poetry follows. Other chapters feature modern innovative books such as those where you can choose your storylines and endings, books as propaganda, and electronic formats.

Inevitably we come to the question: 'What is a book?' According to the UNESCO in 1964, it is a printed arrangement of no fewer than 50 pages and made available to the public. A later criterion is if it has an ISBN. How so yesterday! 'Books and their transformation' is the title of *this* book's epilogue.

Fully indexed and referenced, this excellently-produced and fascinating book is, itself, testimony to the value of books as 'portable magic'.

Bob Duckett

Famous last words

Speaks Volumes is delighted to introduce Famous Last Words.

In each issue, the last lines of a well-known book will feature on the last page—guess the book; but you'll have to wait until the next issue to find out the answer. No googling!

Of course, there have been quite a few books published, so each Famous Last Words will feature a quote with a connection to the edition of *Speaks Volumes* in which it appears. Happy guessing!

The inaugural Famous Last Words conundrum is:

“Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.”

<p>Wednesday 14 June</p> <p>6pm—9pm</p>	<p>Members' Film Club</p> <p>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 "Heroes and Heroines" season.</p>
<p>Thursday 15 June</p> <p>10:30am—12pm</p>	<p>Members' Coffee Club</p> <p>Join your fellow members in the Thoresby Room for a slice of homemade cake, a hot drink, and a chat. All members are welcome. Places are limited and booking is essential, tickets include a slice of cake and unlimited tea/coffee/juice.</p> <p>Please let us know at the time of booking if you have any dietary requirements we should be aware of.</p>
<p>Friday 16 June</p> <p>12pm—2pm</p>	<p>Craft Club welcomes knitters, sketchers, calligraphers, felters, beaders, 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 (wests@theleedslibrary.org.uk) or Jane (rileyj@theleedslibrary.org.uk)</p>
<p>Saturday 24 June</p> <p>2pm</p>	<p>Annual General Meeting</p>
<p>Saturday 1 July</p> <p>3pm—6pm</p>	<p>Members' Film Club</p>
<p>Monday 3 July</p> <p>6pm—7pm</p>	<p>Monday Evening Book Club</p>
<p>Tuesday 4 July</p>	<p>Tuesday Morning Book Club</p>
<p>Thursday 6 July</p>	<p>Overdue Comedy Club</p>



To book events, scan the QR code above, or visit <https://www.theleedslibrary.org.uk/events/?eventPage=1>