

A group of students in school uniforms are gathered around a large, open book on a wooden table in a library. The library has high ceilings with a skylight and bookshelves filled with books. The students are looking at the book with interest.

SPEAKS VOLUMES

36

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the magazine of

**THE LEEDS LIBRARY**

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#### **OPENING HOURS**

Monday—Wednesday: 10AM-6PM

Thursday: 10AM-7pm

Friday: 10AM-5PM

Saturday: 10AM-4PM

Sunday: CLOSED

## Update from our CEO

Dear Member

We hope you have enjoyed the summer. If you have visited the Library in the last few weeks, you will have noticed that the Main Room of the Library looks very different at the moment, with two hoardings covering parts of the bookcases on the East side of the room. These hoardings mark the location where doorways will be located to enable members of the Library to move between the two buildings in the future. The doorways are being created as part of Phase 1 of the work, with temporary doors to be fitted. These will ultimately be replaced with permanent doors once Phase 2 has been completed.



We realise that the building work has been disruptive in the last few weeks. Thank you for bearing with us whilst the work has taken place. It is anticipated that Phase 1 of the project will be completed by mid-September.

In terms of Phase 2 of the project, we recently received positive news that the Library had secured a grant of £249k from the National Lottery Heritage Fund towards the cost of the project. Whilst the fundraising work for Phase 2 continues, the grant makes a significant contribution to enable the project to move forward.

At the end of June the Library had its AGM. Thank you to all those members who attended. The meeting marked a number of significant changes to the Board of Trustees due to several Trustees having served their full term of office.

Both the Chair, Martin Staniforth, and Vice Chair Simone Ivatts stood down, as did fellow Trustees David Butcher and Liz Minkin. Joining the Trustees was Paul Ellis, who is also the new Chair of Trustees; along with Susie Rumsby, Edward Danon and Laurra Davis, who bring a wealth of experience to the Library that will be of significant importance over the coming months. In addition, after 6 years, Dr Kevin Grady stood down from the role of Library President. It was agreed at the meeting that Liz Minkin would take over the role and duties of this position.

### **...update from our CEO continued...**

Over the last few weeks, whilst the building work has been going on the Library has reduced the number of events that it has been hosting. From September, the events programme will begin again with a number of activities. The Library will be involved in the Libraries in Leeds Festival that is scheduled to take place from the 2nd to 9th September. We are also running a craft market and tours of the Library for the Heritage Open Day Festival from the 8th to 16th September, and we will be contributing to Green Libraries Week in early October with two projects funded by Leeds Inspired. These are the presentation of an immersive performance by Seth Kriebel entitled 'The Unbuilt Room' (with members getting the chance to buy tickets before they go on general sale) and a series of ghost story walks through Leeds to be performed by storyteller Matthew Bellwood. Other live performance events are in the pipeline, and will be announced over the coming weeks.

*best wishes*

Carl Hutton

CEO

## Updates from the trustees

*At the AGM on 24th June, several trustees of the Library stood down, and we welcomed new trustees to the Board. Martin Staniforth retired as Chair of Trustees, and Paul Ellis joined as the new Chair.*

*Here, Martin and Paul as outgoing and incoming chairs reflect on the Library's recent past, and on the challenges and opportunities we face in the future.*

### The Changing Library

*Martin Staniforth*

It has been a great privilege to chair the Library Board of Trustees over the last eight years, and to lead the Library through a period of significant change. We are now seeing the real benefits of the move to charitable status, not least in our ability to access funding for new and exciting projects.

Foremost among these has, of course, been the purchase of 15 Commercial Street, the first expansion of the Library since the New Room was built nearly 150 years ago. This will provide much-needed space to store and display our collections and to hold events without disrupting members' enjoyment of the Library as well as giving better access for members and visitors with disabilities. However we have also invested in the current Library, most obviously through refurbishing the foyer and reflooring the building. At the same time we have continued to increase the number of members, which now stands at over 1,200, and have been successful in attracting a more diverse membership. We have provided more services for members through reading groups and other clubs while continuing to grow our collections and providing access to electronic resources such as ebooks.



We have increasingly opened up the Library by encouraging visitors, by hosting events including talks, lectures, poetry evenings and comedy nights, and by participating in city-wide cultural activities such as Light Night and Heritage Open Days. All of this brings people into the Library and encourages them to become members. Most importantly we have established Leeds Lit Fest as a key part of the city's cultural offer and a lasting legacy of our hugely successful 250th anniversary year. We have not, of course, done this on our own but in partnership with many other cultural institutions in the city. In particular we were delighted when the Thoresby Society decided to move into the Library, bringing with them their wonderful collection of books, archives, maps and other material about Leeds. Their presence is a real asset to us.

## **Updates from the trustees continued...**

While these may be the most visible signs of change in the Library in recent years a lot has also gone on behind the scenes. We have committed resources to our archive and to conserving and restoring the books we care for. We have welcomed researchers wanting to use our collections in their work. We have modernised our constitution and rules and streamlined our governing body. And we have established a clear strategy to guide the future development of the Library.

While we have done much in recent years to improve the Library for members and to show it off to visitors there is of course more to do. We need to make the Library more environmentally sustainable, to make our collections more accessible through digitisation, and to increase our work with the wider community. However I am confident that with the support of our staff and members the Library will continue to go from strength to strength.

## **Updates from the trustees continued...**

### **Introducing Paul Ellis, new Chair of Trustees**

I've been the Chair of Trustees for about six weeks now and I'm slowly getting a feel for how things run. I'm pleased to have it re-affirmed that we have some great, knowledgeable colleagues who are passionate about what the Library represents. This is a vital strength given the backdrop to the last few years with the disruption of Covid, the impact of the cost of living crisis, changes regarding our retail tenants affecting our income and of course the exciting but challenging Next Chapter Project to expand our footprint into 15 Commercial Street.



While I was not previously a trustee, I have been a member for many years, enjoying the access to the specialist collections and the incredible wealth of knowledge and human life that they open on to, from Belgian resistance newspapers from the First World War to the butter-consuming preferences of Galician peasants in the 1890s, matters of national and international importance and the seemingly mundane. One of the delights of the Library which never fails is to open a volume and see where that takes you, remembering to go home at some point in the journey. I thought I would have more time for that having recently retired, but Library affairs will take precedence for the foreseeable future!

While I have eclectic tastes, my literary interests are largely focussed on the 20th Century, including authors such as William Golding, JP Donleavy and Graham Greene; and from the States Ernest Hemingway, Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow and Philip Roth. Probably my most favoured writer is Gunther Grass with his insights into German culture and history. I also read hesitantly in Dutch and French including in translation from the above when I have the time.

So as with most of us, I start as a reader and a member delighting in our heritage but with a keen interest in ensuring that Leeds Library remains a vibrant institution contributing to the intellectual life of our city. There is a tension between providing for the expectations of our members and ensuring that we are outward-looking in an age of change, not least in the cultural sphere in Leeds. I believe these two imperatives are fully reconcilable and hope that is where my contribution will lie.

## **Updates from the trustees continued...**

You will have seen the results of the recent member survey—thank you if you were able to find the time to share your thoughts. Good communication is an ongoing process, so if at any time you have observations and comment that you feel will help the Library develop its mission and provide insight into your own needs as a member do not hesitate to get in contact. As a former CEO of a member organisation, I can say that one of the most rewarding elements of the role was the regular interaction with individual members. It took time, but the feedback and conversation was invaluable, not least in encouraging us to constantly examine how we articulated the essence of our organisation. So if you see me in the Library, do not hesitate to collar me, and otherwise feel free to contact me. We may not be able to always take your thoughts on board, but we will be open about the reasons why not. I look forward to meeting as many of you as I can over the coming year.



## **...updates from the trustees continued...**

### **Membership Survey 2023—You Said**

*Philip Walker (chair of the Membership Committee) looks at the results of the recent member survey*

In June members of the Library were asked to participate in our annual membership survey and 140 of you took the time to respond to the questions we asked. First of all, I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who responded – your feedback is really important to us and we appreciate the time you have taken to participate in this research. Your contribution will help us to identify how we can continue to improve the Library and the services you have access to as a member.

As in previous years the survey showed that many respondents had been a member of the Library for five years or more and that having access to a wide range of books and other collections was the primary reason for joining. There were many useful suggestions from you how the collections we have can be developed and Jane and the Counter team will be going through these to ensure the collections reflect members interests. Many of you highlighted a desire to support the Library as a reason for retaining your membership. We are grateful for this support and do not take it for granted.

It was heartening to know that majority of members are aware of the fundraising efforts we are undertaking for the Next Chapter Project and we thank you for the support you have already shown and hope that you will continue to support the initiatives we will launch shortly.

The majority of respondents were aware of the digital services we offer as part of your membership. If you are not familiar with these, I encourage you to visit the Remote Services section of the website where you will find details of the PressReader service, eBooks library and how to access Drama Online and Digital Academy Courses with The Idler. These services are a particular enhancement to your membership if you are unable to visit the Library as often as you may wish.

The survey also highlighted that there are some issues around non-member access and security that are causing members anxiety and I can assure you that the staff and Trustees will be looking again at these issues. Similarly the Library's opening days and hours will be considered to make sure they reflect member needs.

Comments were also raised about refreshments, lack of plug sockets, noise from buskers, lack of and reliability of public transport, signage around the Library and the comfort of the furniture. Some of these we can deal with some, such as public transport we can't, so again watch out for updates.

## Updates from the trustees continued...

Finally, staff and Trustees do appreciate that there is a certain level of disruption to normal Library operations at the moment due to the building works currently taking place in 15 Commercial Street. Please bear with us during this short period of disruption that will have many long-term benefits for the Library and members.

We will be undertaking another membership survey in 2024 but we are always interested in hearing your comments on the things we are getting right and, more importantly, the things we do not get right. If you have any feedback or comments on any aspect of the Library's operations please speak to any member of staff.

Once again, many thanks for sharing your thoughts, views, and opinions with us.

### An historic day

Friday 4th August saw an historic breakthrough at the library, as our contractor Dobsons Construction created the new entrances into the adjoining building, and the Leeds Library expanded from its original footprint for the first time since 1881.



## Update from Jane and the Library Services team

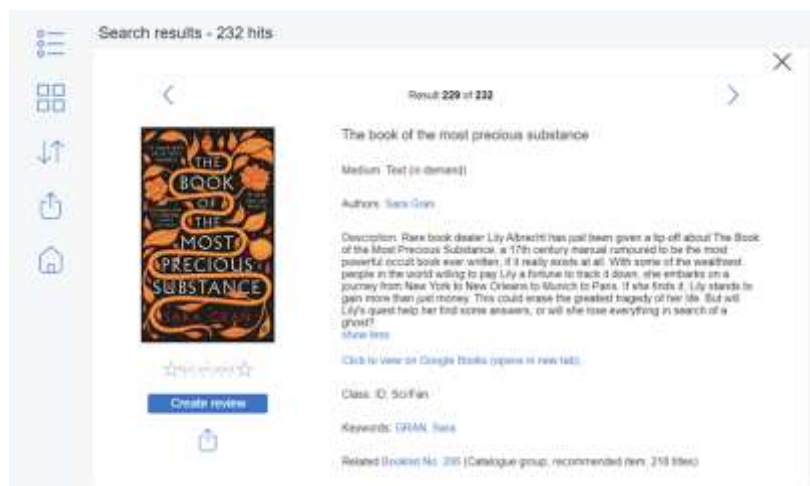
### Book Sale

Despite the horrendous weather and the rail strikes, our Book Sale raised over £500 and we would like to thank you all for your contributions and your purchases! If you missed it, don't worry, as we have a permanent selection of sale books on the shelves below the new fiction titles, so do have a browse.

### Upgrade to our online catalogue

We are still working on the new upgrade, there have been some issues which we would like to resolve before fully transferring over to the new version. Thank you to those who took the time to try it out for us, your feedback has been very useful and we are taking your comments on board.

One of the exciting new features that the upgraded catalogue will have, is that all new books will have their synopsis on the catalogue record, so you can easily see what a book is about and whether it is of interest.



This does mean that in future, once we have fully moved over to this system, we will be streamlining the quarterly Booklist that we currently produce, to a bi-monthly list of titles. That means we can get those circulated to you all quicker and you will be able to search for the Booklist number on the catalogue (see image below) so that you can view all those titles together and browse them at home.



If you would like to try out the new catalogue while it is still in the trial stages, you can do so here <https://theleedslibrary.cirqaHosting.com/cirqa-web-app>

Please pass any comments or feedback to Anna at [gooda@theleedslibrary.org.uk](mailto:gooda@theleedslibrary.org.uk)

## Booklists

The next Booklist, No.206, Summer 2023 should be ready by the end of this week; you will be able to access it online via the website here (add in the link) once it has been uploaded and there will be hard copies at the counter to pick up too.

## New titles coming soon

Don't forget to reserve your favourites by adding your membership number to either the fiction and DVD list at the Counter, or the non fiction ledger. These are just some of the books coming soon and their publication dates:

Kate Atkinson	Normal rules don't apply	24/08/2023
Lee and Andrew Child	The secret (Jack Reacher)	24/10/2023
Ann Cleeves	The raging storm (Two Rivers)	31/08/2023
Kate Ellis	The killing place (DI Wesley Peters)	On order
Robert Galbraith	The running grave (Cormoran Strike)	26/09/2023
Elly Griffiths	The great deceiver (Brighton mysteries)	12/09/2023
Lisa Jewell	None of this is true	In stock
Val McDermid	Past lying (Karen Pirie)	12/10/2023
Chris Nickson	Rusted souls (Tom Harper)	05/09/2023
Richard Osman	The last devil to die (Thursday Murder Club)	14/09/2023
Kathy Reichs	The bone hacker (Temperance Brennan)	On order
Timothy Garton Ash	Homelands : a personal history of Europe	In stock
Nancy Birtwhistle	Clean and green : 101 hints and tips for a more eco-friendly home	In stock
Sally Coulthard	Fowl play : a history of the chicken	In stock
Henry Dimbleby	Ravenous	In stock
Jess McDonald	No comment : what I wish I'd known about becoming a detective	In stock
Polly Morland	A fortunate woman : a country doctor's story	In stock
Simon Schama	Foreign bodies : pandemics, vaccines and the health of nations	In stock
Wes Streeting	One boy, two Bills and a fry up : a memoir	In stock

## **...Library Services update continued...**

### **Craft Club**

If you're a crafter, why not join us at our regular Club? 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.

These are the next dates:

Friday 25 August: 12.00 to 14.00

Monday 4 September : 17.00 to 19.00

Friday 22 September: 12.00 to 14.00

### **Members' Film Club**

The Film Club is continuing to grow in popularity, and our new season of films - The Brits at home and abroad - starts on Saturday 2 September with director John Borman's evocative, funny and semi-autobiographical film set in London during the Blitz. All members are welcome, and the listings are available at the Counter.

### **Libraries in Leeds**

The library is taking part in the Libraries in Leeds Festival which runs from 4-9 September. This inaugural festival showcases a number of the city's libraries and celebrates their varied contributions to the health, heritage, cultural, arts and education sectors as well as being accessible places for communities to enjoy using together.

The programme includes a number of interesting talks, including these 2 to be held here:

<https://www.leedsinspired.co.uk/events/role-public-libraries-past-present-and-future>

<https://www.leedsinspired.co.uk/events/books-portable-magic>

There will also be an online exhibition of Leeds people or books from the individual libraries. We are highlighting our library member and Leeds abolitionist Wilson Armistead.

We are also running a Backstage Tour of the library! Members of the public will have the opportunity of seeing behind the scenes of our beautiful library.

For more information about the festival, please follow this link: <https://librariesinleeds.org/events/>

# 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.

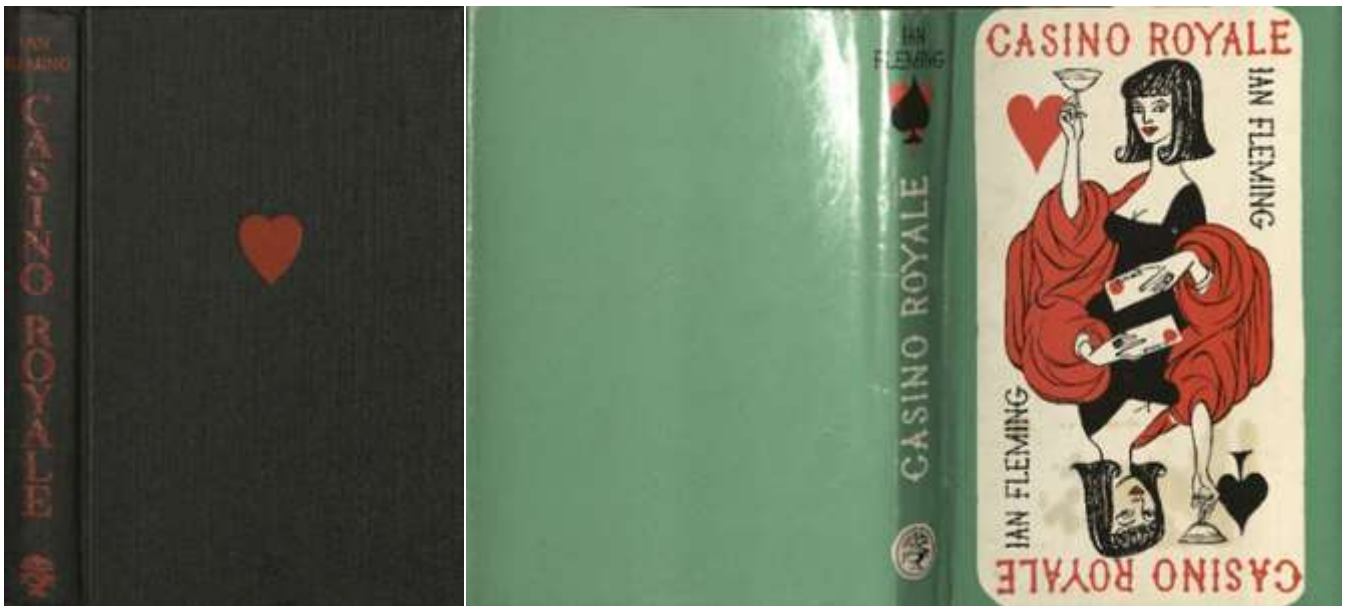


## Archive Highlights

*Niimi Day Gough, Archive Assistant*

Hello everyone! Since our last meeting here, I've completed my cataloguing of all 90 of the numbered boxes that greeted me upon my arrival last year. I found a huge variety of beautiful specimens—everything from Georgian mortgages, Victorian police complaints, and 1950s library stamps. Of course, this doesn't mean we have spotlighted our last Archive Highlight; I celebrated the milestone by diving straight into the uncharted waters of the unnumbered boxes! So, we have a bumper Highlights issue this month, featuring a Bond-ish book cover, orphaned botanical illustrations, and mysterious Victorian drawings...

### A Return of 007



Our older or more espionage-inclined readers might recognise my first find! By now, many of you will know our James Bond-related tale of woe—the Library did have a completely intact (and incredibly valuable!) first edition of Fleming's *Casino Royale*, the first book in his Bond series. Sadly, however, that's no longer true after a nefarious book binder stole the boards and cover, leaving only the text block intact. Thankfully, book binder Brian Cole came to the rescue to produce the lovely and completely unique cover and box we have today. The book boards and jacket you see here (contrary to my first assumption) don't belong to our text block. In fact, the plain green back of the dust jacket dates them to a 1963 reprint—not quite as valuable as the original, but still worth more today than they were when these were first stored in our archive!

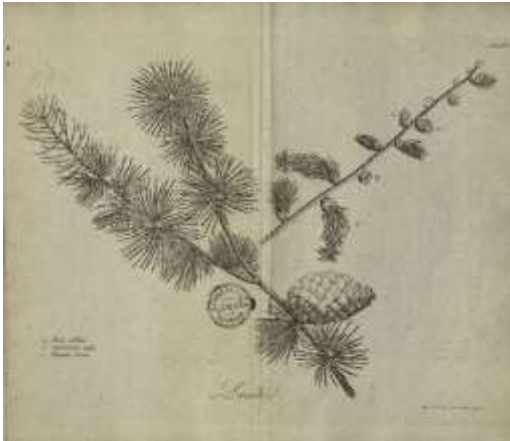
## Archive Highlights continued...

### Lost Books, Found Pages



My next highlights are these beautiful printed botanical illustrations of trees and their seeds.

They're all from the same book, but the title and author of the text is a mystery – I found them barely held together with a scrap of spine in an un-labelled plastic folder. The box they're housed in is full of similar orphaned pages and covers, all stamped with the Library's name.



The box itself was labeled only 'Book Odds and Ends—Please Do Not Destroy!'. Despite their mysterious origin, the style of illustration and design of the Library's stamp visible on all of these pages implies they were a late-1700s addition to our collections.



Either way, I'm glad the box's pleas were heeded—these illustrations might be orphaned, but they're certainly worth keeping!



## Archive Highlights continued...



Hello, Humphrey Davy!

(1825)



This portrait of inventor and scientist Humphrey Davy was found in another un-labelled box in the archive room, under a folder of bills from 1997. Humphrey Davy (1778-1829) is most famous for his chemistry experiments and for inventing the Davy Lamp—and coining the name ‘laughing gas’ for nitrous oxide after it made him laugh during experiments! This portrait is signed ‘Your Humble Servant H. Davy’ and dated in the same hand to July 1825, when Davy was President of the Royal Society.

Why the Library has this portrait is another mystery entirely. I found it stored in the brown envelope pictured here, originally addressed to F. Martin Jorysz (Librarian 1980-1987) but now labelled ‘Humphrey Davy (Portrait—Signed)’. Perhaps it was sent to us by a member, for safe keeping? However it arrived, as with the illustrations above, I’m glad it found a home on the shelves of the Library archives.

## Archive Highlights continued...



### Mystery Painter

I could have dedicated an entire issue of Archive Highlights to our next and final collection. These lovely drawings were in the same un-labelled box as Mr. Davy (above), in amongst dozens of clippings of paintings and drawings in a similar style. I have been unable to find a date or artist recorded on any of them—apart from the initials 'H.B.', written on the rose painting below. The illustration style has some hallmarks of Victorian art—round faces, pastoral landscapes—a theory which seems to be bolstered by an invitation to a dinner dated to 1881 found in amongst them.



## Archive Highlights continued...



I think this piece is one of the most interesting of this artist's work. The landscape is competently rendered, but what catches my attention are the added little doodles on the lake and on the back of the drawing.

The little swans and boats on the back seem like the handiwork of a child—perhaps H.B. was a parent? Either way, they were generous with their art supplies and materials!



The variety of materials here is just a small sample of what lies hidden in the depths of the Library's institutional archive. If you have any questions about our highlights today—or any other archive enquiries—please don't hesitate to contact me at [day-goughn@theleedslibrary.org.uk](mailto:day-goughn@theleedslibrary.org.uk)!

## **Book reviews**

### *Among Others - Friendships and Encounters*

Michael Frayn

Faber 2023

Review by Michael Meadowcroft (412)

I first came across Michael Frayn and his Miscellany column on 19 October 1960. I can date it so precisely because our family were News Chronicle readers, on my part because of Roy Webber's cricket scorebooks published in full! Alas the paper suddenly ceased publication on 17 October 1960 and our newsagent delivered the Daily Mail the following morning. Its manifest right wing content was anathema to our Liberal family and we immediately switched to The Guardian. Much later on Michael Frayn became recognised as a writer with a far broader range of skills, including novels, plays and film scripts.

With this sixty-plus years background I immediately reserved his latest book and read it in a couple of days whilst on holiday in France. It is an affectionate collection of memories of personal friends, most of whom are deceased but some of whom are very much alive. It is unusual in that, unlike the standard biographies, they are all based on Frayn's personal recollections. He describes the portraits as not "intended as biographies of them, comprehensive accounts of their lives for the historical record, nor as they see themselves - just a few impressions of my own passing contacts with them, as fleeting snapshots." As one might expect from such an experienced and respected author, it is beautifully written.

His subjects are a mix of individuals fairly well-known, such as the drama director, Michael

Blakemore, but others are simply Frayn's personal friends and even family. Curiously, I have had tangential contact with three of the individuals pictured therein. One of these was Bamber Gascoigne well-known as the eternal presenter of University Challenge. I knew him in a very different context – as a lifelong supporter and financial backer of the Liberal Party. Reading Frayn's chapter on him it is easy to appreciate how his life and personality was consonant with his politics.

## **...book reviews continued...**

The second was Eric Korn whom I was pleasantly surprised to see included. I knew Korn as a seller of antiquarian books. For many years he was an ever-present at major book fairs. A well-loved eccentric and louche member of that fraternity, his stock was as eclectic and as curious as the man himself. I bought many unusual items from him over the years. Frayn portrays him as a friend whose aim from his student days was to know every piece of knowledge in the world! He eventually accepted that this was an impossible task but his phenomenal reading capacity equipped him for an extended role on the BBC's somewhat esoteric "Round Britain Quiz".

My third link with the book is the presence of Neal Ascherson who is depicted as another hugely intellectual friend and one with an apparently inexhaustible collection of influential contacts which Frayn uses successfully. My slight link with Neal Ascherson is once again political in that he stood unsuccessfully as a Liberal Democrat candidate in the first election for the Scottish Parliament. The party was delighted to have him as a candidate and was sorry that he did not persevere at future elections.

All the chapters are compelling, particularly as Frayn produces frank comments and perceptive insights into the character and life of each of his subjects and certainly does not spare himself - often including embarrassing incidents from his own life in connection with his friendships with his friends.

## **Reviews from the Tuesday Morning Book Club**

*Anna of the Five Towns*

Arnold Bennett

1902

Occasionally the Book Club revisits writers who were once popular and whose novels we all probably read in the past.

Arnold Bennett certainly fits the bill: the most financially successful novelist of his contemporaries, his novels were widely enjoyed though now largely forgotten. The most famous are set in the Potteries where he grew up until he escaped to London, becoming an editor of a woman's magazine and a writer, not only of innumerable novels but of self-help books and guides to writing fiction.

## ...book reviews continued...

John gave the introduction to the Book Club, outlining this background, Bennett's passionate belief that literature was for everyone, and his unpretentious approach that he was there to make money as a writer, and not necessarily to produce great literature. Unsurprisingly he was attacked by modernists, particularly the Bloomsbury set. Virginia Woolf considered he had the mind of a shopkeeper and that his characters had no interior life. "Anna of the Five Towns" was his second novel: the central themes of the middle level manufacturers, religion, and money all drawn from his own childhood. John described the manufacturers as the shock absorbers of the ups and downs of trade: Bennett's father ended up as a pawn broker. Like Anna's father he was a tyrant to his children.

Perhaps unexpectedly the novel then kicked off a fierce debate. Most had enjoyed it, finding there was a powerful depiction of Anna and her struggles to be herself against the brutal control of her father in a very male dominated society. Others were not quite as engaged but appreciated the social observations, the detailed description of the Potteries, and found it well written with touches of witty humour. Some, however, reacted as strongly against it, dismissing it as a story with unnecessary padding, a thin book with thin characters and no real feel for people or Anna's life.

There was much discussion of Virginia Woolf's essay on Bennett, as well as on the conflict of intellectual literature and popular fiction written for profit, and the British psyche that if we enjoy something popular there must be something wrong. We also explored the connections of Methodism and capitalism. One member pointed out that Bennett was not a polemicist but an acute observer, someone reflecting the world in which he lived. Bennett was very much a European writer, idealising Zola, and his descriptions of industrial settings are remarkable, appealing greatly to the people of his time who worked in manufacture across the country.

Focusing more on the novel itself it appeared that those who engaged with Anna found her struggles all too believable, and her moments of independent action heroic. Her sense of beauty, her enhanced sense of worth after the holiday on the Isle of Man, as well as her guilty inability to be "born again" at the revival, are all evidence of the development Bennett gave to her character. No one was quite sure of her suitor Mynors, and whether her marriage represented any real improvement on her trapped life with her father. The fate of her younger sister, left to care for the dreadful father, also stayed with the reader. On the whole men come out pretty badly in the novel.

## ...book reviews continued...

Most of the Book Club were unsure of the ending and what really happened with Anna and the tragic Willie Price. It was all rather unconvincing and abrupt. It was noted, however, that Bennett further explored the themes “Anna of the Five Towns” in three more novels, all his favourites. “The Old Wives’ Tale” is generally acknowledged as his finest work with the exploration of the woman who, unlike Anna, escapes life in the Potteries.

These works were mentioned during the discussion:

John Carey, “The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice amongst the literary intelligentsia”, Faber, 1992

Patrick Donovan, “Arnold Bennett, Lost Icon”, Unicorn, 2022

Margaret Drabble, “Arnold Bennett: a biography”, Faber, 1974

Virginia Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”, Hogarth Press, 1924

### The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born by Ayi Kwei Armah

The Tuesday Morning Book Club read ‘The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born’ for their April choice.

The author was born in Ghana in 1939 and was educated abroad at Groton School, and Harvard University and the book was published in 1968 just after the fall of President Nkrumah and is set against a backdrop of urban Ghana in the last years of Nkrumah’s reign. The book expresses the disillusionment and cynicism in Ghana at that time and is in essence about the story of an upright man resisting the temptation to take easy bribes and the approbation from his family and colleagues this causes, until he is vindicated in the end.

The book is very different from other books from African authors of the time in being set in an urban environment with little attempt to relate to African culture for example magic or belief systems. The whole feel of the book is of despair, and no hope for an improvement in the situation. There is an excessive mention of filth, with some really awful descriptions of this. We did think could be a metaphor of corruption though. Also most the events take place in Passion Week leading up to Easter which we did wonder if this was significant and the person called only Teacher was a Jesus figure. The main character incidentally is only referred to as ‘the man’.

We were pleased in general that we had read the book although it was not really a cheerful read but it carried a very powerful message applicable to the entire world. We could easily think of many examples of corruption in the government in England and Scotland to day. Alas little changes!

## ...book reviews continued...

Review of *The Migration of Ghosts* by Pauline Melville (Discussed 4th. July 2023)

This is the second book of short stories published by Melville, an Anglo-Guyanese writer whose literary output is fairly small not least because her primary career was as an actor. The title of the book (which is also the title of one of the stories) makes explicit two of the important themes i.e. migration and migrant communities together with an interest in the supernatural or the non-rational aspect of human experience.

Humour is a feature of several of the stories, none more so than 'Mrs. de Silva's Carnival' centred on London's Caribbean community and Mrs. de Silva herself with her 'enormous behind, swinging rhythmically from side to side like a huge demolition ball'. Wit is present too in 'The Parrot and Descartes' which develops a serious point about a period in the seventeenth century when 'mind and matter started to divide, body and soul to separate and science and magic to march in opposite directions' with a light touch and satiric tone. Culture clashes of a more contemporary nature are explored in the title story, where an English husband and his Amerindian wife experience mutual incomprehension of each other's contrasting responses to architecture and society in London and Prague.

The part played by the supernatural in indigenous Amerindian culture is an aspect of such clashes and in 'English Table Wuk' the ignorance of a Western educated Guyanese girl about the beliefs and practices of ordinary Guyanese people is exposed when she witnesses a bizarre ritual intended to appease the spirits of dead English colonisers; a kind of equivalence is perhaps suggested between that ritual and the response of English people to royalty when, at the beginning of the story, the girl and her friends are watching the funeral of Princess Diana on television. In 'The President's Exile', the spirit of a corrupt and brutal postcolonial dictator revisits scenes of early humiliation and later crimes.

The writer's interest in other experiences that cannot be wholly explained rationally, in 'epiphanies', moments of self-realisation that seem to acquire a transcendental quality is shown in 'The Duende' where a slow musical build-up culminating in an old lady's dramatic flamenco gesture brings an entire taberna to a collective ecstasy. The Winti Dance in 'Erzulie' is a similar event, though observed with more detachment. In 'Erzulie' and 'The Sparkling Bitch' Melville also exposes the economic exploitation and environmental degradation visited on the third world by Western capitalism.



## **...book reviews continued...**

The group generally responded positively to most of the stories, which they enjoyed though one member who also enjoyed them felt that in the end they didn't have much to say that was original.. Several readers were moved by 'Lucifer's Shank', a story structured around a series of time separated meetings between a narrator and a woman being treated for cancer which culminates in her premature death. Readers were also repelled by the callousness towards suffering and death shown by characters in 'Don't Give Me All Your Sad Stories'.

Bryn Moore

## **Accolade for member of the Leeds Library team**

Communications and Marketing Officer Ian Harker recently received an Honorary Fellowship from Leeds Trinity University (his alma mater) for services to poetry.

When not working to promote all things Leeds Library, Ian is a poet and editor, and has been involved in the written and spoken word in Leeds for many years. The Fellowship was bestowed in a ceremony at the university by Leeds Library member Rt Hon. Sir John Battle. Ian regrets that he wasn't allowed to keep the big floppy hat.



<p>Saturday 2 September</p> <p>3pm</p>	<p><b>Members' Film Club</b></p> <p>Join fellow Members of the Library for an afternoon in front of the silver screen</p>
<p>Wednesday 6 September</p> <p>2pm</p>	<p><b>Backstage tour at The Leeds Library</b></p> <p>Part of the Libraries in Leeds, festival, experience a taste of working life behind the scenes at the library with the Librarian, Jane Riley.</p> <p>Find out more about the Libraries in Leeds festival on their website: <b>librariesinleeds.org</b>.</p>
<p>Wednesday 13 September</p> <p>6pm</p>	<p><b>Members' Film Club</b></p> <p>Join fellow Members of the Library for an afternoon in front of the silver screen.</p>
<p>Friday 29 September</p> <p>7pm</p>	<p><b>Members' Big Quiz</b></p> <p>Join fellow members of the Leeds Library for our Big Quiz! The evening will be fun and sociable, but not without some hard questions thrown in to get the grey cells working...</p>
<p>Saturday 7 October</p> <p>3pm</p>	<p><b>Members' Film Club</b></p> <p>Join fellow Members of the Library for an afternoon in front of the silver screen.</p>

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



## Famous last words

In each issue, we feature the last lines of a well-known book—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!

Last issue's conundrum was:

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

This is the last line of *To The Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf, who featured in our last Archive Highlights.

The Famous Last Words conundrum for this issue is:

"The gun, Bill Roach had finally convinced himself, was, after all, a dream."