

SPEAKS VOLUMES

Inclusive growth
network
Working with places across
the UK to deliver inclusive
growth in practice

38

March 2024

the magazine of
THE LEEDS LIBRARY

In this issue of Speaks Volumes:

PAGE NUMBER

CONTENTS

3	Welcome from the new CEO
5	Updates from Jane and the Library Services team
6	Spring Clean update
8	Magazine sale
9	Children's Book Project
10	The Leeds Library committee structure
10	The Leeds Library ghost on BBC Radio Leeds
12	Niimi's archive highlights
16	New titles on PressReader
21	Famous last words

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

Welcome from the new CEO

Dear members,

I'm now four weeks into my new role and what a whirlwind it has been. I've been working my way through handover documents, learning how the counter services work, getting up to speed with operations and the Next Chapter project, and of course getting to know the staff, volunteers, trustees and members. I've enjoyed catching up with many of you, please do feel free to stop me and say hello if we haven't spoken yet.

I feel so lucky to be working in this beautiful and inspiring building, with such brilliant people. You as members clearly love it too so thank you for your all of the support you have given to the Library. I'm keen to ensure that the Library continues to fulfil its core purpose, and that the next phase of the Next Chapter project starts successfully. I will have a fuller update for you all on this one soon.



Many of you have spoken to me about the heating and lighting in the Library so I'd like to update you all on this one now. The lighting is being fixed in the next few weeks – we are having to wait for the parts to arrive but it is imminent. The heating is a bigger issue as the boiler is obsolete, so we have commissioned a report to give us all of our available options for replacement, which will also enable us to futureproof as much as we can. It's going to be a big project but please be assured that we are not ignoring the issue, and I'm grateful for your patience over the last winter. The joys of listed buildings! Luckily I have a lot of experience in this area and there is always a solution (normally an expensive and convoluted one).

I'm looking forward to learning more and tackling the next few weeks, months and years. There's so much to work with here, it really is a privilege.

...from the new CEO continued...

At the end of last year we sent out a fundraising survey, which had a great response. 105 people filled it out, of which 100 were active members. This survey was sent out as part of our overall fundraising planning for Phase 2 of the Next Chapter project, facilitated by our fundraising consultant Gifted Philanthropy. We were really pleased with the support that was reflected in the survey results, both financial and in-kind. Stats from the survey include:

58% of respondents are happy for donations to be spent wherever the need is greatest.

13% of respondents would like to learn more about donating to the Library.

10% of respondents were not aware that the Library can claim an additional 25p per £1 in Gift Aid on qualifying gifts.

33% of respondents have left a gift to charity in their will.

21% of respondents would be happy to fundraise for the Library through sponsored events, raffles or similar, and 31% would consider it.

It is always a challenge to find the monies for a project of this size but we are a good way there already, with 'positive noises' from some of the funding bodies that we have active applications with, and more opportunities being identified. All support is appreciated, including large and small scale bequests, volunteer hours, and sales in the shop (have you seen the new Easter chicks yet). Spreading the word means a lot to us as well. If you would like to find out more about our fundraising plans, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Nina.

best wishes

Nina

Update from Jane and the Library Services team

Book Chat—a new club for members

Thank you to all who attended the first three Book Chat meetings on Friday 12 January, Friday 9 February, and Friday 8th March. Among the books discussed were:

Sanctuary by William Faulkner (F031899)

The Rings of Saturn by W.G. Sebald (F000423)

This Other Eden by Paul Harding (F022791)

The Last Devil to Die by Richard Osman (F033151)

The Hidden Life of Trees by Peter Wohlleben (N040402)

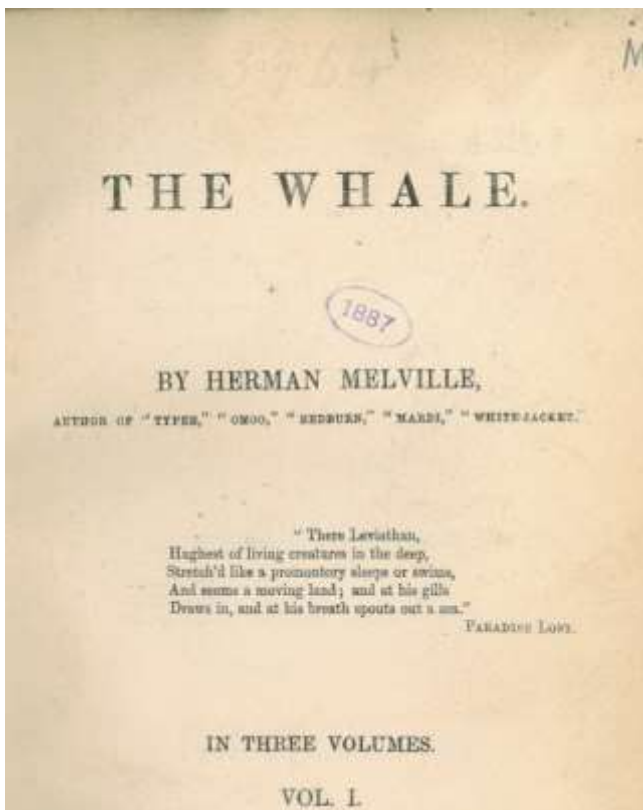
In Memoriam by Alice Winn - which some loved, and others didn't! (F033141)

In Search of Us: twelve adventures in anthropology by Lucy Moore

Outskirts: living life on the edge of the Green Belt by John Grindrod

The End by Samuel Beckett

And more generally, the Dr Quirke novels by Benjamin Black, Elizabeth Strout, Scandi-crime as a genre and the crime novels of Boris Akunin.



Jane showed the attendees our 2 volume set of *The Professor* by Charlotte Brontë. Written before *Jane Eyre*, but published posthumously in 1857, which is when our copy dates from.

Last month, she brought out the triple decker set of *Moby Dick* which is a 1st edition. Published in September 1851, Melville asked to change the title from *The Whale* to *Moby Dick*. Only 500 copies were printed as *The Whale*, and the library is fortunate enough to have one!

All members are welcome, and the next dates are 5 April, 10 May and 7 June (from 11am to 1pm).

No need to book!

...Update from Library Services continued...

10 Stats and Facts!

1653: current number of items on loan.

86: the number of times *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel was borrowed.

60: the number of times *Great Leeds Stories* by David Thornton was borrowed.

57: the number of times *A Dance to the Music of Time* DVD has been borrowed.

3627 items have been added to or modified on the catalogue since January 2024.

1483: the date our oldest book *Itinerarius in partes Ierosolimitanas* by John de Mandeville was published.

1085: the number of current memberships.

105: the number of members we had in 1768.

140,000: approximate number of books.

503: books in our first catalogue.

Spring Clean Update

As you will all be aware the library closed to members over the weekend of 23rd to 26th February for a spruce up, sort out and spring clean. We have not had the opportunity to do this for a while, so it was an excellent chance to do some of the projects we are unable to do during normal opening hours (mainly because we think you wouldn't appreciate the mess and dust)

But what did we get up to? The library team were joined by some of the trustees and volunteers for the weekend, so we could tackle as much as possible in the time we had.

Our librarian Jane, ably assisted by some of our Friday volunteers tackled the Old Librarian's Office. Every book is now back in its rightful place, excess furniture has been removed and the room given a good clean.

before:

after:



...Update from Library Services continued...

Myself and Helen along with Vice Chair of Trustees Philip and his wife Lesley took on the challenge of organising the Thoresby Room. This was one of the more obvious changes, as we moved the standard sized Dewey collection to a more accessible position (before there was a significant amount of items that required a member of staff to scale a ladder to retrieve them) and to make space for its new position, a large proportion of the Yorkshire topography books had to be relocated too. We also moved the larger Dewey books so they are all together in one area, again to make them more accessible (they were previously hidden behind the arm chairs).



The Thoresby Society's collection of pamphlet boxes were moved into this vacated space, because the box numbers are much easier to see from behind the chairs. On the shelves directly above the seating area, we reordered and shelved some of the journals, including the Yorkshire Archaeological Society's Parish Registers, which are a brilliant resource for researching family history. And if anyone is looking for the old trade directories of Leeds have gone, they are now just by the door to the passage. We really hope you will find it easier to search for books, or just more enjoyable when browsing the shelves!

There were lots of other works going on behind the scenes: we had shelf tidiers, shelf cleaners, the counter even got a good clear out and clean. We had books that needed integrating into the collection and these are now back in their rightful place, we prepped most of the magazines ahead of the sale, we had a good sort through our events equipment, the merchandise stand was re-jigged and some new signage was put up around the library.

We packed a lot of work into those four days, and we all hope you notice the difference as you wander around the building!

Anna Goodridge
Assistant Librarian



...Update from Library Services continued...

THE LEEDS LIBRARY MAGAZINES SALE 2024

The Leeds Library annually sells all the previous year's magazines that are not to be retained by the library.

The following titles are available for purchase but be aware they are on a first come first served basis.

Please email Finn on finnian.davies@theleedslibrary.org.uk by 24th March to register your interest, or alternatively hand in this form at the counter on or after that date.

Weekly titles are £12, quarterly, bimonthly and monthly titles are £6.

Please note – all titles are sold as seen and any issues on loan will be supplied as they become available.

NAME.....No.....

ANTIQUÉ COLLECTING (M)		HOMES AND GARDENS (M)	
ASTRONOMY NOW (M)		IDEAL HOME (M)	
BBC GOOD FOOD (M)		LITERARY REVIEW (M)	
BBC HISTORY (M)		LONDON REVIEW OF BOOKS (B)	
BBC WILDLIFE (M)		MOJO (M)	
BEST OF BRITISH (M)		NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC (M)	
THE BOOKSELLER (M)		NEW SCIENTIST (W)	
BRITAIN (Q)		THE NEW YORKER (W)	
COUNTRY LIVING (M)		THE OLDIE (M)	
THE COUNTRYMAN (M)		PRIVATE EYE (W)	
CRAFTS (Q)		PROSPECT (M)	
CUMBRIA (M)		SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN (M)	
CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGY (M)		SIGHT & SOUND (M)	
CURRENT WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY (M)		THE SPECTATOR (W)	
CYCLING PLUS (M)		TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT (W)	
DALESMAN (M)		THIS ENGLAND (Q)	
THE ECONOMIST (W)		VANITY FAIR (M)	
FAMILY TREE (M)		THE WEEK (W)	
GOOD HOUSEKEEPING (M)		WHAT CAR? (M)	
GRAMOPHONE (M)		WHAT HI-FI? (M)	
HARPER'S BAZAAR (M)		WORLD OF INTERIORS (M)	
THE HISTORIAN (Q)		YORKSHIRE LIFE (M)	
HISTORY TODAY (M)			

...Update from Library Services continued...

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.



From the trustees

Leeds Library Committee Structure

Philip Walker (Vice-chair of the Board of Trustees) explains the role and purpose of the sub-committees of the Board of Trustees.

One of the lesser known parts of how the Library is managed is the role played by the sub-committees of the Board of Trustees. These committees and their members play a vital role in day-to-day running of the Library and are an important part of the charity governance of the Library.

There are currently six committees covering different aspects of the Library's operations. All are chaired by a Trustee and comprise of fellow Trustees, staff and members of the Library.

Firstly, there is the **Buildings Committee**. The Buildings Committee is responsible for all Library buildings and has oversight of Health and Safety issues, improvement and development of the facilities in the Library, décor and service charges to third party tenants. This committee is also responsible for the planned preventative maintenance programme that helps to keep the Library in the best possible condition.

The **Books Committee** is chaired by Chris Stead. The Books Committee's role is to support a strategy for the development of Library collections, to develop and support a strategy for conservation of the collections and to support and encourage participation in book-focussed activities for members, for example book clubs. This committee also reviews book-buying policies and the provision of journals and periodicals to reflect the needs of members.

Library trustee Professor Ruth Robbins delights listeners with our spine-chilling tale

Ahead of her creative writing workshop on 13th April using Victorian ghost stories for inspiration, Professor Ruth Robbins appeared on BBC Radio Leeds to regale listeners with the story of spooky goings-on in the library in

Unfortunately, places on the workshop have sold out; but you can listen to Ruth's rendition of the Leeds Library ghost story on BBC Sounds [HERE](#).



...from the trustees continued...

The **Outreach Committee** is chaired by Annie Faulder. The Outreach Committee's role is to establish and sustain long term relationships with external partners and stakeholders and to improve access to the Library and its collections by welcoming an increasingly diverse visitor base. The Outreach Committee also has oversight of the Library's website and social media presence.

The **Resource Committee** is chaired by Paul Ellis. The Resource Committee's role is to maintain oversight of the Library's finances, staffing and governance and particularly to review the Library's annual budget and financial position throughout the year. This committee is also responsible for the Library's investment strategy, ensure the implementation of any recommendations from the annual audit of the Library's accounts and to keep the Library's governance arrangements under review.

The **Learning and Discovery Committee** is chaired by Ruth Robbins. The Learning and Discovery Committee is concerned with education at all levels, and with research (both academic research and research for pleasure). Its role is to develop and implement a strategy, in conjunction with the work of both the Books and Outreach committees, to broaden the library's audiences and to demonstrate its importance as a educational and discovery resource.

Finally, the **Membership Committee** is chaired by myself and its purpose is to act as a communication channel between members of the Library and the management and Board of Trustees. The committee focuses on the needs of members to ensure the Library continues to offer a range of benefits and activities that remain attractive to existing members and will appeal to prospective members. The Membership Committee also ensures that the Library continues to be responsive to the changing needs of the members whilst always been aware of the needs of the overall membership.

Each of these committees is focused on ensuring that the Library is the best place it can be. If you want to know more about a particular committee, or if you feel you have skills or knowledge that a committee may benefit from, do let a member of the Library team know and they will pass on your details to the relevant committee chair.

The Board of Trustees will be undertaking a review of the sub-committees in the first quarter of 2024 and an article will appear in Speaks Volumes updating members of any changes that take place.

Niimi's Archive Highlights

Hello all! It's Niimi again, bringing you a different kind of archive highlight for the first Speaks Volumes of 2024. I found a clipping of the article below in an unmarked box in the Archive Room, written by one Adrien Berry for a March 1982 edition of the Daily Telegraph. It anticipates the invention of e-readers with surprising foresight, though it assumes that e-books will be individual cartridges ('capsules') instead of downloadable text. Berry's far from positive about this technology, however! Instead, he gravely warns against the destruction it will wrought on history and the publishing industry – conjuring ominous spectres of a future that we know has not come to pass. Delve into this window into the worries of the past below!



A postcard of Commercial St. (and the Library!) from the late 1970s.

Read any good capsules lately?

Benevolent old godfather: My dear, I shall give you a book for your birthday.

Silly young girl: Oops, don't do that! I've already got one-old joke.

This will soon cease to be a joke. The time is not far off when someone who enjoys reading, no matter how exhaustive his literary tastes, should eventually be able to do all of it from a single volume.

The idea is simple, but it could have the most damaging effect on our culture, as I explain in a moment. First, consider how it would work. A lover of literature would own a small computer, about the size and shape (but not thickness) of a hardback book. He would open the cover and find a television screen with the same dimensions as the page of a book.

...Niimi's Archive Highlights continued...

He then decides, let us say, that he wishes to read "War and Peace", all 500,000 words of it. He inserts into the "book" a capsule, about half the size of a matchbox, that is labelled "War and Peace". It takes about 30 seconds to "load" - upon which Page 1 appears on the screen, with a message at the foot of it saying: press button X to turn the page.

But after a few pages, he decides to read something else. He "clears" the book, removes the capsule and inserts another.

The book publishing industry, as we know it, will have vanished. No longer will millions of tons of paper be needed to print books. Gone will be the need for huge warehouses to store unsold books, and for lorries, trains and ships to carry them to bookshops round the world.

Bookshops, except the antiquarian kind, will no longer sell books, but capsules or little take cassettes instead. And even these outlets may ultimately become unnecessary if the customer can connect one of his capsules to a telephone line and feed in the text of the book.

Publishing firms themselves may no longer exist, since an author will be able to publish his writings without their assistance. He will need only a home computer on which to type his manuscript, and a telephone connection so that he can transmit the work to those who pay to read it, capital equipment that could cost as little as £100. Obviously this will mean a great increase in the amount of rubbish on the market. But that will not matter. The only loss incurred by an incompetent author will be the waste of his own time.

Few will lament the disappearance of publishing firms with their appalling inefficiency, taking, as they do, up to a year to publish a book from the receipt of the manuscript. And with their passing, there will be a great increase in the freedom of the would-be author, who will no longer have to worry whether a publisher will take his work. The market will be open to anyone who can write.

No, do not smile. This technology is already in use, albeit in a primitive way. A microcomputer, a device slightly larger than an office typewriter, is today's equivalent of the electronic "book". A text can be fed into it and read on the screen, and a button is pressed to turn the "page". They call it "word-processing."

But there are still serious drawbacks. Most microcomputers will not accept a text longer than about 7,000 words at any one time, a mere seventieth of "War and Peace." And the computer is both heavy and delicate, and must be connected to the mains – which tends to stop people using it in public places.

...Niimi's Archive Highlights continued...

And the cost of a machine that will store those 7,000 words in its memory? If you are content to wait seven minutes to "load" them, with a tape cassette drive, the equipment still costs about £700. And to do so in seconds with a floppy disk drive, the total cost is around £1,500.

But these things will change swiftly. A rechargeable battery pack will replace the mains connection. Computers will become smaller, cheaper and more rugged. Their memories will be vastly expanded, until that magic moment is reached when a machine costing less than £100 can accept within seconds a document of 80,000 words, the length of the average book.

These developments seem inevitable. Publishers, delighted to cut out printers, lorry-drivers and warehousemen, will leap at the electronic book, not realizing that it will hasten their own destruction.

Almost everyone will be happy. Amid all the new trash, there will also be a flowering of new literature.

Where, then, will be the damage to our culture? It will lie in the computer itself, which will be able to "erase" the contents of a capsule. The capsule can only be bought at a shop, just as blank video tapes are today. The customer will often be too lazy or too mean to go out and buy new blank capsules. Instead, he will erase "War and Peace" and record a few thrillers over the top of it. In other words, today's editions of innumerable classics may not only be the last to be published in printed form, but may also be the last that future historians will ever be able to find.

This will be the tragedy of the disappearance of printed works. As a grim editorial in the March issue of Practical Computing points out, printed books tend to survive while electronic documents do not. Publish a book now with a print of 100 copies and the odds are that one of them will survive into the next century. But the circulation of 10,000 copies of an electronic book may be needed for even one of them to last so long.

Historical knowledge will give way to ignorance. If the memoirs of the next Prime Minister but one are written and circulated electronically, what historian of the 22nd century will be able to lay hands on a copy? Hearsay and selective quotations will replace original records. Witness how the use of the telephone has already destroyed so much historical evidence. Because people now communicate so much less on paper, historians of the future will know far more of Mr Gladstone than they will of Mrs Thatcher.

...Niimi's Archive Highlights continued...

Electronic publishing will be immeasurably cheaper, and more efficient than today's. But in the long term we shall pay a tragic price for abandoning the legacy of Caxton and Gutenberg.

If you have any questions or queries about the Library's archive, please don't hesitate to contact Niimi via email at **Day-GoughN@TheLeedsLibrary.org.uk**.



Leeds Library members (excluding Access Membership) get PressReader as part of their member benefits—you can download newspapers and magazines to your phone or tablet. And some new titles have been added: you can now access the Irish Independent, Sunday Independent, Belfast Telegraph, Sunday World, and The Herald.

I'm new to PressReader. How do I get started?

Ask us to send you your unique registration link (by email counter@theleedslibrary.org.uk or by telephone 0113 2453071)

Follow the link to register an account

Use the PressReader website or download the PressReader app to your chosen device

Start browsing!

I think I may have registered for an account but I'm not sure. How do I find out?

Go to the PressReader website/app

Login or choose 'Forgotten Password'

If you have an account, you will be able to login or request a password reset.

If you are not registered, contact us for a link.

My PressReader access has expired. What do I do?

Make sure you renew your account token every 12 months to continue your access. Renewal links are available from the Library on request.

Remember, if you have any questions about PressReader or any of our online services please get in touch and we will be happy to assist.

Book reviews from the Tuesday Morning book club

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923). The master of the Short Story. Do we agree?

I thought we would read some of Katherine Mansfield's short stories as it is the centenary of her untimely death in 1923 at the age of 34.

KM was born in Wellington NZ to a wealthy family, the Beauchamps. Her father was a banker and director of the Wellington Harbour board and The New Zealand Bank. She had an idyllic childhood with her sisters and brother in NZ and many of her stories are based on those early years. For example *The Bay*, *The Garden Party*, *The Stranger*, and *The Voyage*.

During her short life she was a prolific writer with 60 short stories, poetry and articles to her name.

When Mansfield was 14 she was sent to Queens College London to school until she was 17 when she returned to NZ and the family.

Mansfield felt to achieve her ambition to become a writer she needed to escape from her family and country and she had had a lot independence and freedom in London that she never would have experienced at home in NZ. So, when she was 19 in 1909, she set sail to England and lived most of the rest of her life in London and Europe. She changed her name using her middle name as a surname and lived an erratic and bohemian lifestyle including many lovers and two marriages. She was involved with the Bloomsbury set of the time i.e. Virginia Woolf, Rupert Brook, Lady Ottoline Morrel, Bertrand Russell, Aldous Huxley and the Lawrences.

Her life was a lonely one though being too far outside the norm for her family (although her father still sent her a small allowance for all her life) and not really belonging to any group or making a family of her own.

There is a very good biography of KM by Claire Tomalin and BBC Radio has adapted some of her stories for the radio.

Mansfield went on to develop a close relationship with Virginia Woolf and the Lawrences. D H Lawrence used KM as a basis for some of his characterisation in his books (*Women in Love* and *The Rainbow*).

Mansfield struggled to find a publisher for her stories at first but *The New Age* magazine and *The Rhythm* included her stories. The latter was edited by her second husband John Murry.

Mansfield suffered from ill health all her adult life and died of TB in France in 1923 aged only 34.

...book reviews continued...

KM's style is modernist (for the day) without a conventional plot, concentrating on a turning point or crisis (like a death). The plot is secondary to the mood and characters, featuring the use of simple situations such as the struggling charlady in contrast to some the strictly organised novels of the day.

There are themes of isolation –each character develops in its own isolation. A major theme is the failure to understand - between adults and children, husbands and wives. Hatred was one of her favourite emotions to explore.

She was greatly influenced by Chekov and accused of plagiarism of his stories.

What do we think? I have read all her stories in the past and enjoyed reading them again although perhaps not so much as the first time.

Generally, we thought some of stories in this small selection were excellent, enjoyable and well chosen. Some of them were definitely the favourites –The Garden Party, At the Bay, and The Daughters of the Late Colonel. The Voyage and the Bank Holiday were also discussed.

The wonderful descriptions of the bay and the sand and flowers, the use of epiphany moments, transient experiences (At the Bay) and the brilliant use of just narrative (The Daughters of the Late Colonel) to convey an entire story were praised. A comment was made that all the endings were left hanging for the reader to make up their own mind as to what was intended. In the fine detail there were themes of nastiness and sadness. The many mentions of death in all the stories are perhaps not surprisingly as KM was so ill and the thought of death must have been ever present.

On the whole to be recommended, and do listen to the BBC radio adaptations.

The Whale Rider by Witi Ihimaera (1987)

The book chosen for our October read was *The Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera. I suggested this book as it continues with our theme of New Zealand literature and is a book written by a Maori author about Maori people. This is in stark contrast to last month's book of short stories by Katherine Mansfield, which were enjoyed by the group, but there was practically no mention of the indigenous people of New Zealand.

...book reviews continued...

The author was born in 1944 in New Zealand of Maori descent and was brought up in a similar small community to the one described in the book. He decided to write as he thought that the Maori culture was being ignored in literature.

The Whale rider is Ihimaera's best known book being adapted for film and there is also a version as a children's book.

The novel is deceptively simple. It is set up to lead the reader to expect a children's story and Ihimaera does say that he wrote the book with a feminist slant with his young daughters in mind. The language is carefully crafted. Ihimaera uses 'tags' to drive the plot and trigger memory (for example many things are described as 'spearing' in order to remind us of a spear thrown by the ancient Paikea). The story is based on a real Maori myth and the author adapts the original myth to show the relevance of old stories in a modern world. The language is also suggestive of the re-telling of a myth.

In the novel there are parallels between the elderly bull whale and the grandfather Koro Apirana who is just as stubborn as the whale when he beaches himself on the shore.

Paikea (The notable Maori ancestor) becomes a symbol for all that is possible as the Maori culture revives, evolves and grows.

What did we think? It is a deceptively simple story cleverly written. In general most members of the group liked the book.

There are a lot of themes: of exclusion, sexism, nationalism and of myth versus realism and concern for the environment.

Two members of the group had New Zealand connections and thus had a greater/extensive knowledge of the Maori culture which they could share with us. It is interesting that this book was the one that was accepted by the Maori community as the best work by the author.

One group member was very unconvinced by the anthropomorphism of the whales and thought that the Maori characters were very one-dimensional. Although the two people who had NZ connections thought that this is how the myth would be represented in their culture.

The book really emphasises the relationship between man and nature and how man is destroying the delicate balance of nature not just in New Zealand but world wide.

...book reviews continued...

Afternoon Raag by Amit Chaudhury

For our November book the Tuesday morning Book Club read *Afternoon Raag* by Amit Chaudhury.

Chaudhury was born in 1962, in India, of Indian parents but came to study as an undergraduate at University College London and then wrote his doctoral dissertation on D H Lawrence at Balliol College Oxford. He went on to develop a multi-faceted career, producing many works of fiction and nonfiction besides being a poet, musician and social commentator.

The book is set in Oxford where the narrator is a graduate student in the 1980s. The book nods to the conventional novel in having a skeletal plot and a few lightly sketched characters. At the same time it is thinly disguised memoir interlinking descriptions of Oxford with memories and descriptions of India. Indian music (the Raag is melodic framework for a piece of improvisation in classical Indian music) threads its way through the book and the book is dedicated to Chaudhury's music teacher who died unexpectedly in 1988.

Chaudhury is commended for his stylistic brilliance—did we share that view? In general we did. We liked his choice of words and style. The chapters on India were fluent and evocative with wonderful descriptions. The book was hard to 'get into' and perhaps was easier to read in small sections. It was very good on atmosphere with a dreamlike quality. One comment was that there were a lot of comings and goings—for example the word door was mentioned over a hundred times. It was considered to be a contemplative piece of writing with much that was uncertain including the ending. Much was left for the reader to assume or extrapolate themselves.

Afternoon Raag promoted us to discuss what we expect from a novel and whether this actually counts as a novel or is some sort of prose poem. There is an unusual lack of a linear narrative, and the characters don't really seem to exist. Another point we debated was the unconvincing portrayal of the working class in Oxford. Indeed, some wondered if this was intended as satire, a parallel with how Indian society is sometimes described by western authors. Oxford is a grim, cold and alien place in contrast to the loving snapshots of India and family.

I think we would agree that the book and other works are worth a read.

...book reviews continued...

A certain Idea of France: The Life of Charles de Gaulle

Julian Jackson

Allen Lane 2018

With a certain sense of achievement - and of relief—I have finally finished this huge and definitive biography of de Gaulle, having initially borrowed it five months ago! Fortunately no other member was in a queue for it. True I have had to set it aside for brief periods from time to time to deal with more urgent reading. It is a huge tome of 887 pages and, weighing in at over 1.5 kilos, it is a strain to read in bed. Nevertheless it is so fascinating and well written that I have never been tempted to give up on it.

I imagine that many of us have a hazy view of de Gaulle as a difficult personality who punched above his weight when it came to promoting France. Churchill's comment after the war gave an inkling of the problem when he said, "Of all the crosses I had to bear during the war the heaviest was the cross of Lorraine." However, as the book sets out in vivid detail, he was throughout his life an awkward so-and-so. Though his reaction to a particular situation or event was always difficult to predict, the one consistent thread was that he invariably espoused the line that best promoted France, of which he regarded himself as the personal embodiment. In his promotion of France he had no shame nor embarrassment, one consequence of which was that France's position on the postwar international stage, such as having a French administrative sector in the postwar administration of Germany and a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, which were objectively hardly justified by France's wartime role.

In postwar France de Gaulle pretended to be above politics and, in French fashion, he formed a "rassemblement" which he pretended was a non-party movement but which contested elections against other parties, and when his party did badly he couldn't understand how the French electors could conceivably vote against him. He was remarkably well read, not only on international politics but also on French literature generally. He tended to be very shrewd on predicting international events but less astute on domestic affairs.

Michael Meadowcroft

Arguably he saved France twice, first in 1940 by maintaining a French presence in the war against Hitler, not least by persuading French colonies to abandon the Vichy regime. Secondly, at considerable cost to his personal popularity he ended the bloody strife over Algeria. Also, not least with a view to entrenching his personal authority as elected President, and cognisant of the weaknesses of the prewar Fourth Republic, he pushed through a new Fifth Republic constitution with an enhanced role for the central authority as opposed to the Prime Minister and the Assembly. Finally, it was the insurgent events of May 1968 on the streets of Paris and other cities that finally brought his resignation and retirement.

This is a superb biography, notwithstanding its interminable detail and it is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand this complex, difficult but charismatic politician.

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: "We are just now looking forward to the advent of you and Rose, for the time of your annual visit draws nigh, when you must leave your dusty, smoky, noisy, toiling, striving city for a season of invigorating relaxation and social retirement with us."

This is the last line of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë, which was reviewed by Christine Stead in *Speaks Volumes* 37. The Famous Last Words conundrum for this issue is:

"Especially in London in the springtime, when, as has been pointed out, he was always at his best."