

SPEAKS VOLUMES

THE MAGAZINE OF THE LEEDS LIBRARY

"In Leeds, where one would least expect it, there is a very good public library."

James Boswell, 1779

EXPLORING OUR WWII
EXHIBITION

A LOOK AT
THE LUTTRELL
PSALTER

DELVING INTO THE
FIREFWATCHER PAPERS



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GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Let's all club together

As a member of The Leeds Library, you have the opportunity to join one of our clubs. Meeting regularly at the library, we have not one but three book clubs; and with film, craft, and writing groups proving popular, there are plenty of ways to socialise with your fellow members. If you are interested in joining, send an email to enquiries@theleedslibrary.org.uk; or ask at the counter. Full details of club dates can be found on our website: theleedslibrary.org.uk/members-area/members-clubs-the-leeds-library/

Monday Evening Book Club

The first Monday of
every month
6pm - 7pm

Tuesday morning Book Club

The first Tuesday of
every month
10:30am - 12pm

Film Club

Twice a month
Wednesday (6pm)
Saturday (3pm)

Craft Club

The first Monday of
every month
5pm - 7pm

Book Chat

The first Friday of
every month
11am - 1pm (ish)

Exclusive member offer

Refer-a-friend

15 months for 12

Love the library? Share its magic.

Refer someone who signs up and you will both receive 3 months of free membership.

You don't need to wait until your membership is up for renewal.

All you need to do is email our Membership Officer Aidan with the details of the person you would like to refer.

His email address is
thackraya@theleedslibrary.org.uk

T&Cs apply

FROM THE CEO

Dear members,

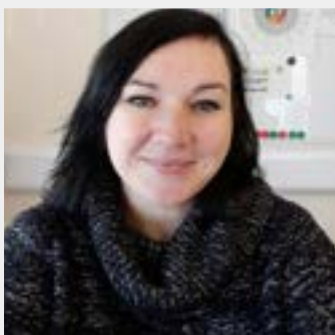
The last couple of months have flown by, last time I wrote my update we were just getting ready for the AGM. Now we're gearing up for Heritage Open Days in September so do encourage people you know to come in for the extra tours we have running throughout this festival, as well as displays from the Thoresby society. Details are on the What's On page of our website.

I'm looking forward to seeing you at the summer party in September. Please note the revised date - the uptake was quite low and feedback indicated that many of you were enjoying holidays away so hopefully this new date will be better for you.

Many of you have been asking us whether we are still buying books. We are! The level has dropped over the last few months but we are starting to increase the number we buy in so please do keep putting your requests in. We are proud to be one of the only few subscription libraries still adding contemporary titles to the collection and do not plan to change this.

We're hoping to welcome Anna back soon on a phased return. I am grateful to the staff for pulling together and covering in her absence, especially with annual leave thrown into the mix. What a great team we have; I have no doubt you'll agree.

Finally, we have launched our refer-a-friend scheme. You don't need to wait for your membership to expire, so do take advantage of this offer.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nina Corey'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

NINA COREY
CEO

Key points from the 2024 Members' Report

New report to keep you in the picture

At the library's Annual General Meeting in June, the CEO presented a Members' Report summarising key achievements for the calendar year, 2024.

Library services

12,964 items added or modified; over 50% of history catalogued; 41 books adopted & repaired; 523 items purchased at member request. 29 users accessing PressReader.

Events & engagement

Five foyer exhibitions; 22 public events with 665 attendees; 72 member clubs; 46 free tours with 476 visitors; 5 school and 6 university visits; 15 weddings (nearly £29k income).

Communications

Refreshed Speaks Volumes - 67% open rate; 1600 new followers on Instagram.

Performance

1,122 members (a drop of 59 against previous year) but an increase in income from membership of £4,528 to £134,762.



The Boardroom

£100 inc. VAT per hour

Wifi

43" smart TV

Lift access

Accessible doors

Accessible toilets on same floor

Capacity: 12

Event Space

£150 inc. VAT per hour

Wifi

Projector, screen & lectern

Lift access

Accessible doors

Accessible toilets on same floor

Capacity: 90 (audience-style)

Additional charges apply outside library opening hours

The Old Office

Prices on request

A heritage space

Private room

Wifi

Meeting table

Capacity: 10

Reading Room

£250 inc. VAT per hour

A heritage space

Private room

Wifi

Meeting tables

Capacity: 30

The New Room

£300 inc. VAT per hour

A heritage space

Private room

Wifi

Meeting tables

Capacity: 90 (audience style)

MEMBERS' SUMMER PARTY

Our annual summer party has been brought forward to September 16th.

Originally on August 16th, we hoped that holding the event on a Saturday would enable more members to attend, but the low take-up of tickets indicates that Saturdays are not ideal for most members.

So we have moved the date forward to Tuesday 16th. We do hope you can attend! You can book via the website on the link below, or pay at the counter. See you there!



<https://www.theleedslibrary.org.uk/events/members-1940s-summer-party/>

UPDATE FROM JANE AND THE LIBRARY SERVICES TEAM

We are delighted to welcome Assistant Librarian Anna back, all being well from Tuesday 19th August. Anna will be on a phased return after badly breaking her ankle. Once again, we'd like to thank members for the good wishes for Anna, and for your continued patience as the team gets back to a full contingent. It's wonderful to have Anna back with us!

As you may know, we have started to fill up the shelves in our new building. When stock is returned from our off site storage, the collection will be housed under one roof for the first time in many years!

We have to amend every catalogue record to show the new location of each book, so please do bear with us!

Some existing collections have already moved into No. 15, and these are:

Classic Fiction: the Classic Fiction collection has gone into the Robinson Room on the 2nd floor of No. 15. We are also expanding the collection, by adding stock from the basement and offsite.

Alchemy Book Collection (ABC): the ABC focuses on publications relating to South Asian, African and Caribbean historical and contemporary arts and culture, and is made up of gifts from Alchemy, Bonhams, the V&A Museum and the International Institute of Visual Arts, as well as various individuals. The holdings, both donated and pledged, number nearly 300 titles. This collection is housed in the Board Room also on the 2nd floor.

Leon & Nina Collins Collection (LNC): this collection totalling just over 900 items is also housed in the Board Room. Leon and Nina donated some of their vast collection of works by Jewish authors, or about Jewish culture and history, as well as a few fiction titles.

Comics, Juvenile, Quick reference, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, LOEB Classics, Pevsners and travel guides: all these are held in the new Events space.

Library of America (LOA): our nearly 300 strong collection is in the Robinson Room.

Book binding and conservation

Adopt a Book: our Adopt a Book scheme has seen almost 50 titles rebound since it started in mid 2024. We are very grateful to all our donors for their generosity. We are currently in the process of identifying new titles requiring conservation, and it is hoped to relaunch the scheme at our Members 1940s party on 16th September. Our old friend Brian Cole of The Castle Bindery in Scarborough will be carrying out the work (do see Finn's article about his Grandad's book in this newsletter), so do speak to Jane or one of the Library Services team if you are interested in supporting us.

Book Cleaning team: our regular book cleaning team meet on a Wednesday morning, and have been doing sterling work cleaning and carrying out minor repairs to our Natural History collection. If you are interested in joining the team, full training will be given by the team leader and bookbinder Linette Withers. Please ask for a volunteer application form at the counter.

Cataloguing

The Library Services team and volunteers are continuing to catalogue the historical collection including the basement fiction, juvenile fiction, history and journals. The fiction has been completed up to Watson, and the history is 80% complete.

Exhibitions

Exhibitions not only create interest within the library but also demonstrate the wide range of our collections to both members and visitors. The current exhibition on WW2 could not have been completed without the generous contributions of memories, memorabilia, photographs and other ephemera from our members! Our next exhibition will go out on display at the end of the month and will tie-in with the Heritage Open Days event which runs from 12 to 21 September with the theme of Architecture.

A MEDIEVAL TREASURE CHEST - THE LUTTRELL PSALTER FACSIMILE

Edited with an introduction of 60 pages by Professor Michelle P Brown. Published 2006.

Library reference DQ/745.6 LUT - it's on the shelves in the Event Space.

Every now and again I find a book in the Library that makes me feel like a 5-year-old on Christmas morning. The British Library's facsimile edition of the Luttrell Psalter is one of these books, exciting my inner 5-year-old with its phenomenal range of illustrations of everyday life and ideas in the 1330s. Usually we only see a handful of them in books and articles but, sitting in the calm of the Library, we can enjoy them all in this facsimile. Let me introduce you to the treasure chest that is the Luttrell Psalter.

First, however, a warning - the Psalter is huge and heavy, consisting of 309 folios measuring 14 inches by 10 inches. That's 618 pages in modern parlance. You need both hands to pick it up - but it's worth it.



Note - books on the Psalter and The British Library website refer to its folio numbers, not pages, and either v or r - v for verso and r for recto. The Verso is on the left, the Recto is on the right. Recto/Right is the easy way to remember this when looking up a particular image.

First, find the central image in the whole Psalter on folio 202v - it shows the fully-armoured Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, mounted on his warhorse. His wife, Agnes, is holding his helm and his daughter-in-law, Beatrice, holds his shield. Above are the words 'Dominus Galfridus Louterell me fieri fecit' - 'Lord Geoffrey Luttrell caused me to be made'. Like me, you probably wonder why this picture of Sir Geoffrey isn't at the beginning of the Psalter but a third of the way through. The reason is that it's opposite the first psalm recited at Vespers each Sunday evening. This made it very bit as visible and important as a modern frontispiece.



The Psalter's structure and illustrations

Folios 1 to 12 provide a calendar of saints' days and religious festivals before the psalms begin on folio 13. Then the folios up to 85 are dominated by the text of the psalms with illustrations filling the margins and at the ends of half-lines of text - illustrations including numerous saints, everyday scenes such as knife-grinders at work, a dog biting a pedlar, a patient being bled and a couple playing backgammon. The story of Jesus from the appearance of the Angel Gabriel to Mary to Mary's funeral then runs across folios 86-99.

There's far fewer illustrations between folios 109 and 144 but they begin again from folio 145 and a famous set of farming scenes appear across folios 170-173. Another set of illustrations on folios 206-208 show the preparation of a meal and the Luttrells at dinner. Soon after the main image of Sir Geoffrey on f202v, the illustrations end. Folios 215-298 contain only text. Finally, folios 298-309 contain staves of music used in services.

Who were the Luttrells?

Sir Geoffrey was born in 1276 in Irnham, Lincolnshire, where he was also married and buried. He took part in military campaigns against the Scots but seems to have spent his life managing his estates – he also held small estates in south Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. Given the splendour of the Psalter, it's intriguing that there's nothing special about the family – there were several thousand gentry families of this status and moderate wealth in England

In 1297, when he was 21, Geoffrey married Agnes Sutton, their marriage lasting over forty years until Agnes died In 1340, aged about 57. Geoffrey died in 1345, aged 69. They lived through a harsh, dangerous period, experiencing the Great Famine and deaths by starvation of 1315-1318 and the political dramas which led to Edward II's deposition in 1327.

Geoffrey and Agnes had six children, of whom Andrew, born in 1313, was their heir. Andrew married Beatrice le Scrope, an advantageous marriage as Beatrice's father was a wealthy lawyer and became Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench. Andrew died in 1390 aged 77 - the brass to his memory remains in Irnham church.



When, how and why was the Psalter created?

As you'd expect, there is much debate amongst historians but in summary: the Psalter was begun c1330 but was unfinished at Geoffrey's death and the final section was completed cheaply without illustrations. Perhaps Andrew, like many landowners, had a lower income after the Black Death?

The Psalter was planned by Geoffrey and perhaps his chaplain or confessor, the illustrations chosen to link to the text and bring out its meaning. The words were written by a single scribe but six artists contributed illustrations, one of whom knew the family well, given the individuality of the images of the Luttrells and their servants. The artists may have come from local monastic houses at Stamford and Bourne or from Lincoln, Norwich or York.

Why was it created? The commissioning may have been prompted by receiving, in 1331, papal dispensation for the marriage of Geoffrey and Agnes, though long after they'd married, or by the coming of age of Andrew in 1334. However, deeper motives may lie in Geoffrey's religious belief and anxiety about a world in chaos.



The centrality of religion in the Psalter suggests Geoffrey may have been unusually concerned for his soul and his place in Heaven. The many images of creatures, part-men, part-animals, are a warning of the horrors awaiting in Hell but also, as Michelle P Brown writes in *The World of the Luttrell Psalter* (2006): [their] 'primary function may have been to symbolize the world turned upside down - the bizarre and the unexpected - and the forces of anarchy held at bay only by prayer and adherence to the law of God and ... the king, or the local lord - Sir Geoffrey. They reflect the neuroses of a society in flux, one rightly concerned in the face of political corruption, international warfare, civil war, famine and demographic decline.



The Psalter as evidence

The scale of the project is deeply impressive - the planning, care and discipline that went into the creation of the Psalter was immense - and its scale suggests the Psalter was both an ambitious concept and a lengthy and complex project to carry out. All that effort gives us a window into the lives and thoughts of the people of the 1300s and a reminder to respect the people of the Middle Ages. So often we adopt a 'deficit model' when thinking about this period, comparing it with other ages, but the people of the Middle Ages were as sophisticated in their skills, intelligence and complexity of thought as the people of any other time. The Psalter is testimony to this.

See also:

Michelle P Brown, *The World of the Luttrell Psalter*, 2006 Library Ref - D/745.6BR - the best introduction, 96pp and beautifully illustrated.

Michael Camille, *Mirror in parchment: the Luttrell Psalter and the making of medieval England*, 1998, Library ref - D/745.6 CAM

Feedback on Ian Dawson's article in Speaks Volumes 44...

Ian Dawson poses a number of pertinent questions in his article "Why on Earth did the Library buy that?". In relation to the government and parliamentary records that he mentions, I have a theory, backed only by my hunch.

Given that the Leeds Library had been in existence for almost a century before the public libraries in the city opened in 1870, and that there were key parliamentary reports affecting Leeds published, particularly after the Reform Act of 1832, I like to think that our library believed that it had a civic duty to buy these and to make them available to members. I have from time to time used such reports which are neither available in the public library nor in the Brotherton Library at the university. After 1870 such public reference documents could be expected to be held by the Central Reference Library.

Michael Meadowcroft

You can read Ian Dawson's article, and back-issues of Speaks Volumes dating back to June 2022, on our website:

<https://www.theleedslibrary.org.uk/members-area/speaks-volumes/>

Ian's personal website is: <https://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk>

DELVING INTO THE FIREWATCHER PAPERS

A cache of World War II papers from the library's archives sees the light of day for the first time

From 1941, firewatchers were stationed on the roof of the library to guard against incendiary bombs. The librarian, Frank Beckwith, kept a meticulous archive of material relating to these four years of danger, including a fascinating glimpse into the lives and motivations of the dozens of people who applied for this dangerous task. In partnership with Leeds Beckett University, material from the 'Firewatcher papers' is presented for the first time in a digital exhibition marking 80 years since the end of hostilities. It complements an exhibition at the Leeds Library, which is in place until the end of August.

Click on the image or visit the exhibitions page on our website.



<https://www.theleedslibrary.org.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/>

WHAT DID THE LEEDS LIBRARY DO IN THE WAR?

An illustrated talk will explore how the Leeds Library was mobilised during the Second World War. Dr Henry Irving from Leeds Beckett University will explain how the library became a nerve centre for fire watching during the Leeds Blitz. He will be joined by two students who have researched the library's wartime archive and contributed to its exhibition on the Second World War.

Henry is a Senior Lecturer in Public History at Leeds Beckett University and a British Academy Innovation Fellow. His research interests centre on the Second World War, especially the public's response to wartime conditions, legislation and propaganda. Alongside his teaching and research, Henry is committed to making public history.

Library Stories
from the
Second World War

*Wednesday
3rd September
1pm. PAYF.*

with Dr Henry Irving



THE MYSTERY OF THE LEEDS LIBRARY 'TEA THIEF'

Member Joanne Le Grove, also a creative writing student at Leeds Beckett, worked on the Firewatcher Papers project, and was inspired by additional tea rations initially given to firewatchers.

Summer '44, Leeds.

Under cover of darkness, amidst lofty tomes, fire-watching women gather to guard. They dress not as ladies, donning boots, breeches and braces, bosoms front – centre of attention. By the light of a solitary candle, a steaming pot of tea, Mrs. Wright, Agnes, and Doris settle in for their nightly duty.

Book group is in session, shock, a death has occurred on the Nile. Miss Christie their constant companion, Monsieur Poirot their detective of choice. Mrs. Wright gets quite miffed at Agnes when she tries to do his voice. But no death has occurred, no, a more heinous crime indeed – the most precious leaves of tea, depleted by a great degree. What would Monsieur Poirot charge, a tea leaf thief is at large!

Agnes and Doris immediately sleuth, suspicious of all but their number one is Mrs. Wright, (what a coup) you see, Aggy was usurped. She started book group, but Mrs. Wright sashayed in, popped her biccies in the tin and sat at the head of the table. They watch her like hawks, her every move, does she empty the teapot, have an extra brew?

The women gather as a storm rages outside. Miss Christie unleashes a Hound of Death and book group begins in earnest. A clue appears, forsooth, a cup and saucer left empty in the new room. Doris gazes at the soggy leaves, moans psychically then pronounces, 'this tea was drunk by a man who likes dogs, I get nothing more' then collapses

Book group is in session; Gloria is here. She blathers, she swoons, she's marrying soon, hitching to Joseph the pacifist. Mrs. Wright brings order, ladies, to the issue at hand. The tea leaf thief is still at large, so what my dears is planned? Miss Christie gives them a Dumb Witness and Doris has in her hand a Ouija board for communing with the dead. Is she in LaLa Land?

The board is out and the women trepidatiously acquiesce to spirits' request. Four index fingers, gingerly placed atop the waiting pointer. The question on everyone's lips - who is the tea leaf thief? Mrs. Wright asks and spirit responds. The pointer begins to move. The women are aghast and ask once again. The tea leaf thief has been unmasked.

The women gather before nightfall; this tea leaf thief must be stopped. Gloria's Joseph is the muscle, though his pacifist heart wants no part of unnecessary force. Their plan is hatched, Mrs. Wright leads the way, this tea leaf thievery ends today. The group arrives at the wooden door; the tea leaf thief here resides. She knocks, it opens and there he stands, steaming cup and saucer in hand.

So sorry to bother you Mr. Beckwith Sir, but it's come to our attention, our tea leaves deplete each day at a rate that belies our actual consumption. It pleases me not, but it's our belief that you sir are the Tea Leaf Thief!

WWII EXHIBITION SPARKS MEMORIES

The library's World War II exhibition has been met with an enthusiastic response, including a large number of loaned items. Library Assistant Finnian Davies remembers his grandfather, Michael Bowles.



Sadly, my grandfather passed away on the 25th of July after a brief illness. He was a kind, down-to-earth man of great age and wisdom, and will be very sorely missed. I'm writing this because he left behind some personal effects that have come into my possession; the most notable of which is his cherished 1938 Royal Navy seamanship manual, a book he kept on a cabinet next to his armchair for almost his whole life. As a child, I remember him regaling me with exciting (and certainly not exaggerated!) stories of his time in the navy as a submariner, and his seamanship manual would often accompany these orations as a visual guide to the uniforms, kit, regulations, salutes, and knots - especially the knots - that sailors were expected to learn and memorise.

As a tribute to him, I have decided to have this manual restored by Brian Cole, a professional bookbinder that works with the library. Brian is a solid choice for this kind of work – he has previously worked on Adopt-a-Book restorations sponsored by library members and has done a tremendous job. Attached to this article is a photograph of the book as it currently exists; in a future volume I hope to include a second photograph that exhibits the restored manual in all its glory. To close this off, I'd like to share a few anecdotes from his time in the Navy... such as the time his sub sailed through the Bermuda Triangle (and made it through – no monsters or aliens), his education in maths by David Attenborough at the Firth of Forth in the late 1940s, and the shadowy excursions into the Arctic Circle his sub made during the early days of the Cold War, which are long buried under NDAs...



Michael Bowles 1931-2025

10 QUESTIONS

Library volunteer Matthew Peyton takes the hotseat, and talks film, food, and Anthony Bourdain...

Which 3 books would you take to a desert island?

Kitchen Confidential by Anthony Bourdain to keep me positive. *The Hobbit* by JRR Tolkien to keep me entertained. And the Dictionary so I can burn the pages and create a smoke signal for any passing ships.

Who is your literary hero?

Anthony Bourdain. A chef, a punk, and a writer; all things I want to be.

What is the biggest misconception about librarians?

That they're quiet.

What is your favourite film?

Zorba the Greek, thanks to Anthony Quinn's performance as Zorba.

What was your favourite subject at school?

Either film studies and drama. Probably film studies since that's what I ended up studying for 4 years at university.

Do you have any hobbies or interests?

I enjoy cooking, gardening, reading, knitting, musical theatre, and discussing films. And yes, I am fully aware all these things make me sound quite old.

Where were you born and do you have any siblings?

I was born in Leeds, specifically Garforth, and I don't have any siblings.

Do you have a Kindle or other eReader?

I occasionally use a Kindle if I can't get hold of a book I want, but I don't think anything beats having a physical book in your hands.

What's your favourite food?

I'd say my favourite food has to be the slow braised belly pork I make for myself once a month. It takes 2 hours and is gone in 5 minutes, like all good food should be.

What would the title of your autobiography be?

"Have you seen this film?": My Life as Told by the Film I Watch

BOOKED OUT FOR THE WEEK

Member Dan O'Brien came to the library to complete his Sixth Form work experience placement, and crammed a lot in, in only five days. Here, Dan reflects on his week...

I am a Year 12 student of Guiseley School Sixth Form, currently studying English Literature, History and Government + Politics at A-Level. I am aspiring to study a joint honours of Modern History and Politics BA at the University of Manchester. My (non-exhaustive) literary interests comprise the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Amadeo Bordiga, Orwell, Kafka and Cervantes. My other interests include bass guitar, funk metal, video games, TTRPGs, chess, anime and cinema. I have been a member of Leeds Library since 2021.

When the question of work experience arose, I was initially attracted to Leeds Library by virtue of my pre-existing exposure to the grounds and familiarity with members, volunteers, and permanent-contract staff. Preponderantly, the abundant capacity for consistently diverse responsibilities and pragmatic interrelation with my studies in English Literature thereby impelled this verdict; I can think of no other location with greater aptitude for my circumstances, or those of any other student with an affinity for history, local culture, or simply literature on principle. The prospect of interacting within this tightly-knit community, alloyed with the multifarious means of hypostatizing literature, history and politics in the abstract (imbibing the historical/cultural essence of the library) and concrete (engaging with works of classic fiction, historical interpretation and social sciences alike) – a magnetism compounded via Leeds's unique provisions – engendered my auspicious placement here at the library.

Whereby, I have attained a portfolio of hitherto uncharted skills and abilities no doubt immutable insofar as their tailored pertinence to future prospects manifesting suitably into academia and the workplace. My responsibilities have constituted shelving (predominantly the classic fiction collection in the Robinson Room), cataloguing pre-eminent books and freshly delivered magazines, managing reservation records digitally and physically, administrative collation in relation to membership records, mapping out various facets of the Main Room and New Room (and stratifying the text classifications accordingly), book-wrapping, expediting the chrysalis of the ground floor exhibition and designing booklets (amongst others).

Thereupon, I have had a wealth of exposure to the attuned pedagogy of staff and volunteers; developing understanding on the complexities and intricacies of a library's operation whether it be behind the counter, in the office or around the building. In the abstract, the physical act of carrying out such tasks, be they stringent or liberal, will undoubtedly transpose into my personal capacity for performing regimented responsibilities whilst additionally enabling a proactive mentality e.g. honing my perspicacity for the space's needs whenever such demand may be made apparent. Holistically, the explicit exposure to administrative programs (evolving my familiarity with the Heritage system) and more commonplace office maintenance ought to be rendered emblematic for tenures in the workplace later in life.

Most valuable and conducive of all has been the human experiences I have garnered by virtue of this intimacy with the library's day-to-day ordinance. By means of edifying my communicative technique and ameliorating the breadth of personal interactions with those party to the Leeds Library community I have gained numerous mementos of raw life experience to succour my future and foster greater character within me - for this I owe a great deal of gratitude I intend to elucidate on, unfettered, at the time of my closing remarks.

I believe some find their work experience to be a somewhat superfluous expedition, that is, a time sink. It can be true that people subscribe to placements with little to no zeal, their rhetoric concerning their time lacking vehemency, and their affinity for their position infinitesimal. And while this may suffice for some parties, I am truly honoured to profess that my placement has offered an antithetical experience. I should hope this gusto is rendered self-evident by nature of this prose.

My enjoyment of the myriad facets of work experience at Leeds Library has been truly ineffable. As any reading will already know, the simple pleasure of taking quarter within the premises is privilege enough; to look up from a book or laptop and metabolise the towering majesty of the leviathan bookshelves, or to partake in the sheer beauty of rooms new and old, with the odd scratch embellishing the truly monolithic character of the grounds rather than tarnishing the ornate grandeur - certainly a far cry from the ubiquitous office space of monochromatic, characterless banality.

Immensurable other charms – getting acquainted with a heterogeneity of individuals, delving into the depths of previously unbeknownst aspects of office work and library operation alike, – have accounted for a legitimately unforgettable epoch I’m not soon to forget.

In closing, I’d like to express the profound debt I feel to all staff, volunteers and members whom I’ve shared this momentous experience with – for their generosity of heart, patience, understanding, affableness, finesse and all around good virtue. In earnest, I had a sense of trepidation in embarking upon a totally alien means of existence for a week, and yet such sentiments were immediately expunged upon entering the library’s warming glow and getting to know those who render a building of material foundation a place of such abstract wonder.

I eagerly await my next visit, as I’m sure such emotion will certainly be evoked once again even when merely passing down Commercial Street.

YORKSHIRE DAY CELEBRATED IN STYLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA



The first of August was, of course, Yorkshire Day, and the library built on the roaring success of its ‘Gen Z’ video (featuring Kevin Grady and Steven Burt) by contributing to posts on Facebook and Instagram celebrating God’s Own Country.

We produced a video of Jane giving a spoof ‘speak Yorkshire’ lesson to Cornish colleagues Nina and Adrienne. It has currently been watched over 4,200 times.

Scan the QR code to watch!



Better the devil you know?

Member Ewan Povey review's 'Satan: A Biography', 2016, by Henry Ansgar Kelly. D/235 KEL.

"Satan, A Biography, is a book with an eye catching and compelling title. A title which repels the reading public as much as it attracts. There are perhaps two main groups of potential customers for this book: Christians who think of Satan as a real and deadly force bent on defeating Christ, and shall we say heavy metal fans and new age witches who think of him as a radical opponent of the hegemony of The Church. This book sets out to correct both of these views. We might suspect that the publisher of this book anticipated a lot of racing heartbeats in bookshops followed by purchases of a theology book, which are rarely bestsellers. I will here attempt as plain and ordinary a review as possible.

Henry Ansgar Kelly builds a formidable case arguing that any view of Satan (or any other pseudonym correctly or incorrectly associated with him) that does not take account of the Christian belief in an all powerful and loving God is a contradiction and bad news for any coherent Christian belief. Over 360 pages (including index) he argues this case through close, clear and detailed analysis of the manner in which Satan and other such figures appear in scripture and the manner in which these scriptures have been interpreted over time.

In a linguistic approach we learn for example that while we are aware of what I could call here Mr Satan Himself, actually in scripture we are often more likely to encounter a satan, this satan, that satan; in the sense that a satan is a bearer of bad news or accusations. Similarly we learn that readers of scripture over time tended to associate disparate bad guys in the Bible, such as Beelzebub as being the same figure as Mr Satan Himself, when in fact they are quite different. One of the most surprising things we learn about how little the Bible is commonly understood is that it refers to Angels who have had children with Humans. So the text is full of personages and actors in the divine drama. However we are to read this in the light of an all powerful and loving God.

So did Satan appear as a Serpent to subvert God's will in Eden? First of all there is absolutely no literary connection between "a serpent" and "The Satan". Reading the text itself we can only conclude that we are told that it is a snake. But wait you cry, isn't it obvious who that snake really is? Not if you read the Bible as carefully 27 as Henry Ansgar Kelly.

There is all this scripture and theology that is completely academic yet very readable, a bit like a detective story or a true crime book, however there is a very serious point. We can understand as we read the continuing political and historical importance of Christianity in the world, particularly the USA, and the belief in The Enemy (as Evangelicals are wont to refer to The Satan) is a prime motivator to the claims this religious movement has on State Power. A generalised belief that The Devil is at war with God and His Children is the rallying cry for a great swathe of quite extreme right wing political efforts.

The author here makes a complete and highly professional, controlled demolition of this view backed up by scripture and history. How in fact is it possible to be a rival to an All Powerful God, and what would it mean for Christianity if it was? It would spell very bad news for anything we value in Christianity, so we read here.

Speaking as someone who reads a lot about Buddhism but only a very little about Christian Theology, I can highly recommend reading this book. It's very interesting, very readable and hugely relevant to our times."

Notes of Your Music

James Nash. Valley Press, 2025. D/821 NAS

It is not unlikely that a very large percentage of people asked to name a poet associated with the sonnet form would opt for Shakespeare, Petrarch or Elizabeth Barrett Browning. If that person was from Leeds, however, it may well be the name James Nash that comes to mind. This collection is Nash's fourth collection of sonnets and, unsurprisingly, it is a form that he is totally at ease with and which allows him to range smoothly over a diverse feast of subjects - 'I need no box to keep such memories / Just fourteen lines with words as keys.' ('You gave me a box'). As a rule of thumb, you know how good a sonnet is when you forget that it is actually a sonnet you are reading. That is the case with this beguiling collection of fifty-seven sonnets bookended by two "normal" poems.

Seamus Heaney wrote that a sonnet is all about movement in a prescribed form and Nash's collection would support that. The poems here are fluent and flowing within the constraints of the sonnet form. They are promiscuous in their subject-matter - bottle banks, car boot sales, dog walking, cycling, Nash's delight at his own seat plaque at a cinema. In sifting through what he feels and what he knows, he may well 'rattle like buttons in a toffee tin' but he has followed his injunction to 'sort them' to perfection ('The promise'). There is a strong flavour of retrospection to this collection; Nash is, indeed, "Haunting my own life" ('Here I am').



In Hemingway's 'The Sun Also Rises', Jake Barnes notes that "it is awfully easy to be hard-boiled about everything in the daytime, but at night is another thing". Nash would seem to agree with this; 'My life is now made from many frights, / small fears that swell and magnify / in the sharky shallows of the night' ('So many fears'). Many of these frights and fears seem linked to the inevitability of ageing. Nash is 75 and, while he may see himself as a 'Large old man on bike, sweeping past / in a fleece' ('So the park') or lament that he '...was once a tall oak tree who stood / In a copse with the owl as my friend' ('Oak Tree'), any hint that ageing has diminished his abilities as a poet can be discounted.

The delight of this collection lies partly in Nash's honest recognition of where he is in his journey – the problems with teeth, illness and general waning of vitality – but much more so in the humour and goodwill with which he comes to terms with the trip. He is well aware of the pitfalls of exploring 'the tightly woven stuff / of a lived life' but is determined '...to keep this promise that I give / And explore the life I've had, and now live' ('This Resolution').

Striking is his ability to extract joy and hope from the ordinary, the mundane aspects of a life lived. Mundane but not unimportant, as he rightly puts it: 'Sometimes we should record the true, // The small, real signs of our humanity' ('Witness'). Nash is a Leeds resident since the early 1970s and this collection might be read as a paean to the city and its places that are dear to him: "The rooting of my soul in this beloved town' (So the park'). Nash celebrates his special places: The Leeds Library – where this collection was recently launched – 'Everything changes that we know / This place not so much somehow' ('This place is ballast to my soul'), St Michael's churchyard, The Hyde Park Picture House. This "Nijinsky on a bike' may well be 'dead old' and sometimes feeling it but, and Nash reminds us that there is always a 'but' in sonnetry, " I breathe, and hear and see. I touch, smell and taste / I live in fact, take part...' ('Train').

In 19thC culture the character of the 'sonneteer' was shaped as a rather naïve young man whose expectations for the world were consistently violated by his experiences in that world. This is certainly not a descriptor of Nash as sonneteer; his love of life and his life of love shine through in this collection whose poems are gentle oases of calm in a turbulent world. His reflection 'At least I tried' ('There's an arrow falling through the air') considerably understates his achievement.

Dr Patrick Lodge

In the Castle of My Skin

George Lamming. Penguin Books. In Demand.

The Tuesday morning book group discussed this book on the 6th of May. It was published in 1953 and was George Lamming's first novel. It is set in Barbados during the 1930s and 40s and deals with the some of social and political changes that were taking place in the Caribbean at that time. It is framed by the ninth birthday of G, the young boy who is a focus for the novel and by his departure about nine years later from the island and from the village in which he grows up, the village which is the novel's main focus.

Change and the response to change is the most important theme in the novel. The colonial context and its hierarchical nature is clearly established early on through the account of Empire Day at the school, as well as in the representation of Barbados as Little England bearing resemblance to and a close relationship with the mother country, Big England. The village is owned by the Creightons, the English family to whom the villagers pay rent. Their living conditions are not good; the rooves of their houses leak, the roads are appalling and while the landlord can be kind to individual tenants, he is extremely reluctant to spend money repairing the damage done by the flood that occurs at the beginning of the novel.

Change is initiated by Mr. Slime, a former teacher at the village school, who makes impressive speeches criticising the landlord and about improving the lot of the villagers. He sets up a Penny Bank and Friendly Society and leads a strike of dock workers. Later, there are riots on the island and a tense scene in which an ambush is prepared for the landlord and a violent attack on him narrowly avoided. Mr. Slime discourages this attack.

Many of the villagers support the changes proposed by Slime but not all. The old woman called Ma wants the rooves repaired but sees only trouble ahead if the existing hierarchy is challenged. Though there is much wrong with the situation of the villagers, it has, at least, a kind of stability. One of the strengths of this book is the way it brings to life the social activity in the village - the women buying from the mobile shop, gossiping and the fight that breaks out between two of the women, the conversation of the men in the shoemaker's shop and the shoemaker himself with his interest in the views of J.B. Priestley. One senses a certain affection in the way the author depicts these scenes. Although G has ambitions which take him away from the island, we read that 'he couldn't bear the idea of seeing things for the last time'. Lamming shows a fondness for the world of his childhood at the same time as he exposes some of the faults of the colonial system.

Another strength of the novel is the powerful sense of betrayal by Slime and other supposed leaders of the people when the landlord sells the village to them and it results in the eviction and destruction of the homes and the way of life of several villagers.

The group discussion revealed a variety of responses to the book. Several people expressed positive views and appreciated the strong female characters portrayed. The apparent lack of knowledge the villagers had about their own history was also commented on but some found the novel difficult to read and didn't finish it or were bored by it.



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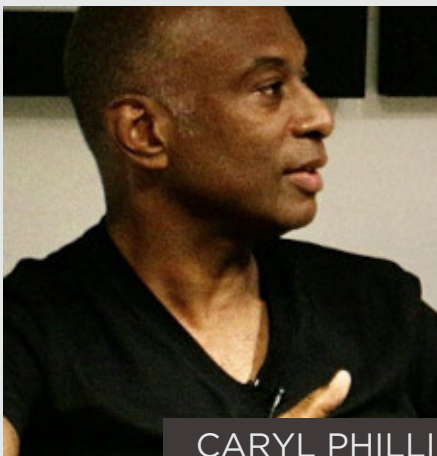
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SIMON ARMITAGE

Simon Armitage was born and lives in West Yorkshire. He is a poet, playwright and novelist and writes for radio, television, film and stage. He published his first collection *Zoom!* in 1989 with several full-length collections in the years since. In 2007 he published his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. His latest collection *Sandette Light Vessel Automatic* (2019) is a collection of some of the hundreds of poems that he has written for various projects, commissions, collaborations and events. In 2015, he was elected Oxford Professor of Poetry and in 2017 he was appointed Professor of Poetry at the University of Leeds. In 2018 he was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry and in 2019 he was named UK Poet Laureate.



CARYL PHILLIPS

Caryl Phillips was born in St.Kitts and came to Britain at the age of four months. He grew up in Leeds, and studied English Literature at Oxford University. He is an award winning novelist, playwright and essayist and has written for film, theatre, radio and television. His novel *Crossing the River* was shortlisted for the 1993 Booker Prize. *A Distant Shore* was longlisted for the 2003 Booker Prize, and won the 2004 Commonwealth Writers Prize. He has worked as an academic at numerous institutions including Amherst College, Barnard College, and Yale University, where he has held the position of Professor of English since 2005.

Nima Poovaya-Smith is a curator, speaker and writer. She was the founder Director of *Alchemy Anew*. Previous posts have included Head of Special Projects, National Media Museum, Director of Arts, Arts Council Yorkshire and Senior Curator, Bradford Museums and Galleries. She has contributed to numerous international and national publications including books and journals on subjects ranging from contemporary art, Indian jewellery, textiles, and curatorial and audience engagement practice. She is Senior Visiting Fellow at the Department of Fine Arts, Art History and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds, and a Trustee of Harewood House Trust.



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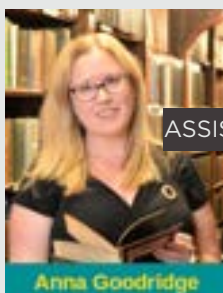
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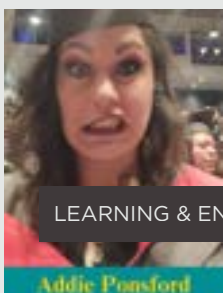
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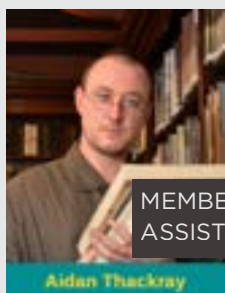
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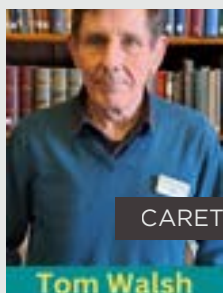
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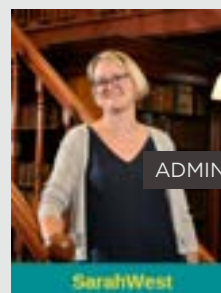
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