Isla Clough Charlotte Daniels Louise Denyer

John Ellison Keith Jones Jacquie Knott Jimmy Knott Anne Parry Meg Reid

Stephanie Ryland **Jeff Taylor**

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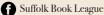
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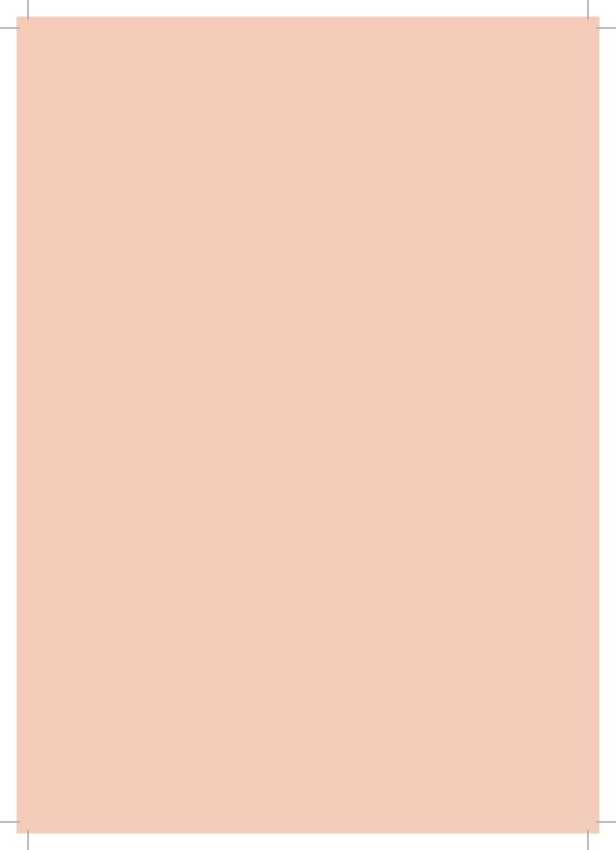
suffolkbooktalk



BookTalk

SUMMER 2017

Created by Andrea Clark, Charlotte Daniels, Louise Denyer and Jeff Taylor



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from the chair

You are holding in your hands the first of our new style BookTalk magazine. It still has reviews of our meetings, book reviews and of course the quiz but we hope it looks a bit special. After the success of the lovely cards that Charlotte produces to promote each meeting we thought we would be more adventurous with printing. We hope you like it.

Our 35th year is nearly half way through. So far we have had: poetry, art, history and biography, as well as a trip around London with a flaneur, all from the comfort of the Ipswich Institute.

The six books shortlisted for the New Angle Prize for books set in East Anglia also bring variety: short stories, biography and art, as well as novels. This year the shortlisted writers are all women. The winner will be announced at the New Angle Prize dinner at Hintlesham Golf club on the 6th of September. This is consistently a lovely evening and it would be great to have lots of our members there. Tickets

are available from the Institute. As well as the judges choice, the winner of the readers' vote will be revealed on that evening. Do make sure you vote for your favourite online or by completing a form you can collect from the Institute.

My final plea is for more entries for the prize quiz. We need to give Jean, our reigning champion, some competition. Or have you thought about contributing a review to BookTalk? Be inspired by Jim Knott's review of Alan Badiou's *The True Life* on page 14 and send us your writing for publication in the next issue by October 1st 2017.

Jacquie

highlights EVENTS YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED

alex bellos

BY KEITH JONES

Alex Bellos is perhaps the sort of maths teacher some of us wish we'd had. His lively and accessible personality was only part of the pleasure he provided for us. It was his coming at the whole mystery of numbers that was refreshing. Early in his talk he remarked that one of the tricks of detective story writers is to guide your assumptions in one direction while making the ultimate solution lie quite elsewhere. In the course of an hour, Alex showed how quirky, unexpected and mysterious numbers can be.

He's clearly intrigued many failed mathematicians like me. We have bought his books, too: Alex's Adventures in Numberland and Alex Through the Looking Glass have been very popular already, while Can You Solve My Problems and Football School seem to be exactly what I missed out on in my own wordfilled and (somewhat) number-blind childhood. There was a telling moment

when he recounted his bewilderment at finding how often he was asked what his favourite number was. Like many maths teachers he had found this a primitive and inexplicable question, and was amazed that so many people asked it. But unlike most such teachers. who cannot conceive how anyone can fail to think mathematically, he has tried to respond creatively to our recalcitrance. The idea that numbers should suggest colours, sounds and patterns is not outlandish to him. Numbers may be the key to a universe of abstract thought but number is also a part of the world we inhabit, and a link between our minds and our environment. For example: seven, he told us, is the number we like most. It's odd, it's prime, it's idiosyncratic. There's something mysterious about it too, as there is when a whole range of prime numbers is mapped on a screen creating a strangely satisfying abstract form.

Alex is immensely prolific, though books are only part of his output. We had plenty of questions, as usual. Some of which led even Alex to speak like the maths masters who failed to arouse my interest at school. But mostly he succeeded where they failed and showed us why his books, blogs and *Guardian* columns attract countless readers.

hollie mcnish

BY JACQUIE KNOTT

We started 2017 in great style on the 22nd February with the poet Hollie McNish. We now have one event each year in which a writer comes to us in the evening and to the English department of University of Suffolk in the afternoon; Hollie did this for us this year and brought many of her afternoon class to the evening reading, which was lovely.

As a popular performance poet, Hollie is more accustomed to 'gigs' than to reading in a library and I gave her a brief introduction to match. I thought I could make up for that now.

Hollie McNish studied
French and German at King's College
Cambridge before earning a masters
degree in Developmental Economics.
She has always used verse to keep her
diaries and even used verse to keep
her notes when she studied.

As well as performing her poetry in festivals and spoken word events she produces YouTube videos,

a number of which have gone viral. Her fist album *Versus* was released in 2014 and she was the first poet to record at Abbey Road studio.

She won the UK Slam Poetry Competition in 2009 and went on to finish third in the Slam Du Monde contest. *Nobody Told Me*, her book about motherhood which she read to us from, won the 2017 Ted Hughes award.

I was incredibly excited to have her visit us, having heard her read several times. Looking around the audience I was delighted to see people familiar with her work and those new to it responding with laughter and tears. She is now touring with her new book *Plum*. If you want to hear more there is lots of her on YouTube.

iain sinclair

BY JEFF TAYLOR

In March we were lucky to have the opportunity to hear Cardiff born writer lain Sinclair extemporising about his career as a book dealer, poet, novelist, memoirist and film maker. His work is mostly rooted in the past and present of London. We were treated to a variety of anecdotes relating to his life and work. He began by speaking of his involvement in the British avantgarde poetry scene of the sixties and seventies and his memories of the arrival of Alan Ginsberg in the Summer of Love. This was followed in the seventies by novels such as Lud Heat and Suicide Bridge, which mixed fiction, poetry and essay and in the eighties by more poetry and the novel White Chappell, Scarlett Tracings which combines book-dealership with Sherlock Holmes and Jack the Ripper.

Sinclair came into his element when describing his move into an area that is generally thought of as psychogeography. He spoke of his adventures walking the M25 on foot which led to the writing of London Orbital published in 2002. He also recalled the experience of reconstructing the 90 mile journey the poet John Clare made in 1841 to his home at Helpston near Peterborough, having absconded from an asylum in Epping Forest. This was recorded in Edge of the Orison published in 2005. We were also treated to a preview of The Last London, possibly his last book about London, which is due to be published later this year.

Hearing Iain Sinclair speak has inspired me to explore his many books and films further. Most recently I heard him on the Radio 4 programme *Only Artists* in fascinating conversations with the film director and screenwriter Sally El Hosaini and the artist Keggie Carew.

In an email after he returned to London lain wrote that "I enjoyed my brief excursion to Ipswich – especially after the talk (and the fish and chips in the pub around the corner, beforehand)". Maybe we could encourage him to swap London for Ipswich!

claudia myatt

BY STEPHANIE RYLAND

Claudia Myatt is a writer, painter and illustrator who calls herself a "maritime scribbler". She was a fascinating speaker and, to those of us who have struggled through art school, it was amazing to learn what she has achieved out there on her own.

She was never taught. She was married with two children, but the marriage broke down when she was well into her fifties and she moved away with very little money and was homeless. She lived on a houseboat that someone lent her – she knew nothing about sailing but taught herself.

In 2012 she borrowed money from a friend and bought an ancient tugboat near Woodbridge. It still leaks. She has a shed for a studio in a converted barn near Martlesham Creek, which she loves. She found work as an illustrator after teaching herself watercolour and drawing. She now teaches others and contributes a

regular cartoon to *Practical Boat Owner* magazine.

She also earns money by acting as crew on boats. She described sharing a tiny yacht space with two men, having to share a bunk (protected by sleeping bag for privacy) and going to the loo nearby behind a curtain and the embarrassing business of trying not to make a noise! She also earns money on cruise ships – she teaches for two hours a day and in return gets accommodation and food in lieu of a salary. She seemed to rather enjoy this aspect of her working life; going on adventures for free. What a feisty lady.

At question time I suggested she write and illustrate her autobiography. She said her life wasn't that exciting – I disagreed! She keeps a 'sketchbook diary', which has since been published. This was on offer for sale after the talk and was fascinating.

She also discussed doing "what you want" – feeling your way with drawing and watercolour – don't do it the way other people do: find your own way. This is very wise advice.

She was quoted in the EADT: "You can take the safe road or the new, exciting road. You'll have to be braver taking the new road, but it will be worth it. I knew this was my chance to find out where I should be." She certainly is a brave and determined lady.

hamish macgibbon

BY ANNE PARRY

In April, prior to the publication of his book *Stalin's Renegade Spy*, Hamish MacGibbon came to speak about his father, James MacGibbon, former Chairman of Suffolk Book League.

A chance meeting with Victor Gollancz led young James into the world of publishing and, with his literary acumen and charm, over the years he discovered and promoted many distinguished writers; Solzenitsyn, Doris Lessing, Stevie Smith and Catherine Cookson (to name a few). Often he persuaded them to change publishing houses to his own! Later he became an agent with Curtis Brown and then after the war set up his own firm with Robert Kee.

James invited many of his literary friends to speak at SBL over the years, but his audience had rarely come to hear about his "other life" as a spy. As a committed Communist, he was welcomed into the Intelligence Corps after an innocuous interview in which

he was asked if he was "for them, or for us?" He answered truthfully at the time "for us". But in 1941 when Russia joined the Allies he was concerned that very little intelligence was given to them. Even Churchill gueried this, as the viciousness of the war on the Eastern Front grew worse with huge casualties. So he offered his services secretly to the Russian Embassy. In London, and later in Washington when he was transferred to the States, he photocopied all the troop movements of the Germans and the Allies and gave them to his Russian handler. He spoke of secret 'drop boxes' and Russian code names.

After the war he ceased spying and would never have come to the attention of MI5 if the (bugged) Communist Party Headquarters had not been discussing an offer of £2,000 from the Russian Embassy to help MacGibbon and Kee. James was interviewed intensively, but never cracked. He and his family came under surveillance for some years. Having seen all the files and heard the tapes of telephone conversations, Hamish was interested in the extent and cost of this.

The story only really came into the public domain after both James, and his wife Jean, died. "One man in his time plays many parts..." Indeed.

juliet barker

BY CHARLOTTE DANIELS

On Wednesday 7th June, Juliet Barker graced us with her subtley enchanting stories of well-known historical figures, but from a clearly unknown perspective. She spoke of the stories behind the public images of, among others, the Bronte family and William Wordsworth. She told us of her research, which often spans years and consists of visiting libraries and museums she had worked at and spotted the manuscripts and resources that were largely untouched by the masses of historians and biographers researching their own books.

Juliet described a simple life in Yorkshire surrounded by her family, her research and her books. She told a story of when her daughter was young, tactically writing her summer report at the beginning of the holiday. Her mother was less impressed with her daughter's proactive attitude towards her work when she discovered what she had written: an account of the

extremely 'boring' trip around all of the historical museums she had been dragged to! Juliet, and our audience, found the anecdote quite amusing, to say the least!

Juliet spoke eloquently and passionately, especially when questions were asked about other historians' approach to biography and the substitution of gaps in research with fiction. She told us she laughed at questions like 'have you thought about writing a novel?' explaining that asking a biographer to write a novel is akin to asking an airplane pilot to fly to space! Juliet and her husband supplied their own books to sell after the meeting, and they were very well received. She was thrilled to sell so many, and donated all the proceeds to charity; what a lovely lady indeed.

literature REVIEWS AND COMMENT

the making of war and peace

BY JOHN ELLISON

Early last year television's latest notion of Tolstoy's classic narrative, however good or bad, provided for one or two of us an alternative to serial thumb twiddling, and set the year's sales of the book soaring above 50,000 by September. It set me to wondering about its original birth process; so I turned to Henri Troyat's superb 1960s biography of the author.

This tells us much. Tolstoy began work on *War and Peace* in the autumn of 1863, when he was 35, a year after his marriage to 18 year-old Sonya Behrs. The sixth and last volume was published – in Russian, of course - in early December 1869, by which time, arithmetic insists, he was 41. When the planning began he and Sonya already had one child. Before publication they were parents of four.

The novel changed names as it progressed. It began as *The Year 1805*, continued as *All's Well that End's Well*, finally gaining its everlasting title.

The 'great labour', as Troyat terms it, was immediately preceded by a winter of historical research facilitated by the acquisition of various published works on the Napoleonic wars, together with some original source material. Equally vital to progress was a settled life and Sonya's strenuous support. Tolstoy had a history of clashing emotions, a volatile relationship with Sonya, and of flitting from one short-lived obsession to another. Henri Troyat writes: 'The total understanding that the couple had been unable to achieve by themselves... was created for them by fictional characters. Absorbed in the fate of his heroes, Tolstoy became less concerned with himself. By distributing his contradictory emotions among a cast of imaginary characters, he forged his own unity and thereby his balance'.

Sonya, meanwhile, besides supervising the children's upbringing, assumed the management of the Tolstoy estate. 'She was the buffer state between him and the outside world,' declares Troyat. More than that,

she made endless clear copies, in a beautiful script, of the work as it came, repeatedly half-legible, repeatedly to be revised, from his pen. Their son Ilya recalled that she copied out most of the manuscript seven times.

The work faced interruptions from family illnesses and from breaks needed by the writer, who took refreshment in spring time from country pursuits. Disruptions could be brutal. In September 1864, Tolstoy, out hunting hares, was thrown from his horse, briefly losing consciousness and dislocating his right arm. A local doctor failed eight times successively to force it back into place without success; and another doctor, whose attempt to do the same thing (with Tolstoy this time chloroformed) with muscular help from two untrained helpers, misguidedly announced victory. Two months later a more 'expert', though again necessarily aggressive, surgical operation in Moscow, once again facilitated by chloroform, reversed the previous attempt and achieved success. In the summer of 1866 came another interference, when Tolstoy was unexpectedly invited to represent at a court martial a soldier charged with striking his captain. He took up the challenge but failed to prevent the man's firing squad execution, generating long-lasting feelings of guilt for his failure.

Research, as the writing proceeded, took new forms. Tolstoy ransacked the mind of his sister-in-law Tanya (of whom for a while Sonya was understandably jealous) for memories of romantic feelings and experiences that he could borrow for the fictional character of Natasha Rostov, and travelled the length and breadth of the site of the 1812 battle of Borodino to give him a more exact and powerful sense of the place, honing his imagination to create a fictional description of that battle consistent with historical fact.

Sister-in-law Tanya's impromptu country dance at a party given by the Tolstoys was to be immortalised as Natasha's, while Tolstoy split his own personality into two for the characters of Prince Andrey Bolkonsky and Pierre Bezukhov. 'Into one,' concludes Troyat, 'he put his appetite for life, his pragmatism, his brutality, and into the other his aspirations towards ideal peace and charity, his naivete, his awkwardness, his hesitation.'

During his 'great labour'
Tolstoy declared that he had left 'a
piece of his life in the inkwell'. He
wrote lightheartedly at one moment to
a friend: 'I am glad you love my wife,
although I love her less than my book.
Of course, as you know, that is my wife.
Someone is coming! Who? My wife!'

until 1904 – for a 'direct to English' translation of War and Peace to reach the booksellers. This was by Constance Garnett, formidable pioneer of translations from the nineteenth century Russian giants. Another century forward we can think ourselves fortunate to have Tolstoy's classic in a number of translations, which include that of Louise and Aylmer Maude (the latter Ipswich-born) whose names preface my own copy. As for this year's TV version, it must, to be fairly judged, be considered against the standard set by the 1967 film – surely a classic in the genre - directed by Sergei Bondarchuk.

john ellison's times change

BY ISLA CLOUGH

I read *Times Change* with some knowledge of child protection and the changes implemented by the Children Act in 1989, so I'm not an entirely objective reader of this novel, which tells the story of a solicitor, Robert Fordham, and his first job with Haringey Council Social Service Child Protection Department.

I trawled my memory for the last time I had read a book dealing with similar issues. It was *The Shorn Lamb*, a novel written in 1960 by a child care officer that is still in print.

Times Change is unsentimental, easy to read and well written. The story of young Robert Fordham's exchanges with the egos in Social Services and the courts will be familiar to many of us from our experiences of work, probably in any setting, except that when a child's welfare is at stake the egos encountered are surprisingly powerful and influential. Sadly, this does affect the outcomes.

John Ellison's book deals sensitively and realistically with these situations and does not lose the serious aspects, but that romance is running concurrently with solving difficult cases adds to the charm of the stories. I'm sure he could have written a book with harrowing accounts of children failed by the system from his experience of real life cases, but he has not written that book here, which does not discount the honest representation of the characters or of the pain of child protection in this novel's honest, gentle insight into the work of solicitors in children's services.

alain badiou's the true life

BY JIMMY KNOTT

Alain Badiou claims that the role of the philosopher is to corrupt youth. A task which he tackles wholeheartedly in *The True Life*. Analysing the problems faced by young people today and how they might be overcome to better the individual and society. Badiou argues for a shift in society and thought that would lead to, what he dubs, *The True Life*. Although being explicitly aimed at the young it carries messages that could apply to any who feel are not the person they could be.

Badiou is frank about the outrageousness of he - a 79 year old - discussing youth. He approaches it from an interesting direction, utilising the perspective of an elder looking back to create an open minded philosophical narrative. On each topic he seems preachy and out of touch before deftly turning his point into an original and progressive radicalism. Unlike some contemporary philosophy you do not need a degree

to understand it. He alleviates his sometimes complex points with indepth explanation and poetic calls to arms.

The book advocates radical change in young people. A drive to become the best you can be and the obstacles that one faces in doing so. The chief amongst which is a society in which capital is valued at the expense of the individual. However Badiou stays relatively clear of economics. He instead focuses on the individual and the effect that that society can have over them. The True Life is vague in political leaning. It is certainly left wing, and takes ideas and quotes from Marx, but just as readily calls on the work of Freud or Rimbaud.

Badiou seems to be arguing for a shift in thinking away from capitalism but what he wants to shift towards is unclear. The way he explains the world and the times we live in is enlightening and original but does not provide any real solutions. In some ways this works. It forces the reader to look internally and do a bit of self

evaluation but it makes the theories feel impractical. When focusing on women Badiou grapples with how women are portrayed and understood and where we are going wrong. More so than anywhere else in the book does it feel like a description of problems without any suggestions as to how to overcome them. For a text promoting the 'True Life' it seems unsure what that life would be. On the other hand this does put the direction of change in the hands of those enacting it giving the whole process much more validity.

The True Life is not a very easy book but does not require a great deal of previous reading and provides an original discourse on the nature of youth. This book is useful to any person young or old attempting to figure out their place in society. While it does not provide answers it is a great perspective on modern society which, although dense in places, rewards the time and energy spent on it.

quiz f10 waterstones gift card to be won

answers from last issue

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR WINNER JEAN HILL

1. What family name is shared by Hindley, Hareton and Catherine?

Earnshaw

2. Which Scottish author's 1824 book (nine-word title) deals with split personality?

James Hogg wrote The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner

3. Who published the first of her Gothic series of novels in 1980?

Joyce Carol Oates

4. John Huston directed and starred in the film version of which Southern Gothic novel?

Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood

5. Which Ipswich author wrote an early Gothic novel and is buried at St Stephens?

Clara Reeve was known for her novel

6. Who is the eponymous protagonist of a 1799 yellow-fever novel?

Arthur Mervyn

7. Which Norwich author wrote one of

the Northanger Abbey "horrid novels"?

Francis Lathom

8. To which Isle of Man author was Dracula dedicated?

Hall Caine

9. Which knight finds a gold palace within The Fall of the House of Usher?

Ethelred

10. On screen, Hurd Hatfield portrayed the title character of whose 1890 novel?

Dorian Gray

11. Which writer attended Ampleforth, qualified as a doctor and died at 25?

John William Polidori

12. A novel published in 1995 was written by which female US novelist in 1866?

Louisa May Alcott wrote A Long Fatal Love Chase

13. Which MP told ghost stories to **The Old English Baron** Shelley and wrote a novel in ten weeks?

Matthew Lewis

Anagram: Horace Walpole, the author of the first gothic novel

quiz: the great fire of london

The Great Fire of London destroyed much of the medieval city in the early part of September 1666. Let's mark the date with a fiery quiz.

Take the first letter of each answer and rearrange them to form the two-word title of an appropriately themed poem. Please send your anagram answers to the following address by the 1st September 2017, or email to **booktalk@sbl.org.uk**

Louise Denyer 25 Fox Lea Kesgrave, Ipswich Suffolk IP5 2YU

ANSWER	
NAME	
ADDRESS	
EMAIL	

I

In which London lane did Pepys live at the time of the Great Fire?

2

Who talks of conceits that "burn like the mines of sulphur"?

3

Whose 1908 short story describes a Canadian's many attempts to build a fire?

4

In which book of the Bible does the prophet say that you will not be burned?

5

Who wrote of being ashes where previously he had been fire?

6

The fireman in Fahrenheit 451 reads aloud part of a poem by which English poet?

7

Which character's left hand is a "mere stump" after an infamous fire?

8

What country wins the Quidditch World Cup in The Goblet of Fire?

9

Which lying girl called firemen to a non-existent fire and later burned to death?

IO

Carlisle's citizens learned of the Armada thanks to the fire on which mountain?

II

Who appears in The Iliad and had his house set alight when Troy was sacked?

I2

Which prison, holding a Dickens character plus father, is set alight by the mob?

13

Whose 1962 novel takes its two-word title from a line in Timon of Athens?

I4

Who had his plague-and-fire novel serialised in the Sunday Times in 1841?

this summer: felixstowe book festival

BY MEG REID, DIRECTOR OF FELIXSTOWE BOOK FESTIVAL

We celebrated Felixstowe Book Festival's 5th Birthday between Friday June 30th and Sunday July 2nd 2017. The opening event on the 30th was an evening of music & poetry from Martin Newell with The Hosepipe Band; fizz and canapés were aplenty!

Festival fiction highlights were Esther Freud; Louis De Bernières; A.L. Kennedy; Tracy Chevalier, and Louise Doughty, best selling author of Apple Tree Yard (an event sponsored by none other than SBL). Plus, former Director General of MI5 Stella Rimington will be discussing her latest novel *Breaking Cover*.

Two novels I couldn't put down since have been Richard T. Kelly's The Knives, exploring the secrets and complexities of modern government, and Jemma Wayne's groundbreaking novel, Chains of Sand set between

London and Israel amidst the turmoil of

An interesting non fiction session was hosted by Terry Waite CBE, who reflects on the highs and lows of his life in *Out of the Silence;* including the being held hostage for 5 years in Beirut and the humanitarian work that followed.

We always have a full programme for children too, including the Young People's Short Story Competition awards ceremony and a Teddy Bear's Picnic with Jane Hissey.

To view the programme in full and to read more about Felixstowe Book Festival, visit:

www.felixstowebookfestival.co.uk

upcoming events

BY CHARLOTTE DANIELS

We'll be kicking off the latter half of 2017 with a visit from Novelist **Andrew Cowan** on Thursday 13th July. He has published 5 novels, and passes on his creative gift daily as the director of the creative writing programme at UEA. He has also published a textbook, *The Art of Writing Fiction*, so thankfully those of us who aren't lucky enough to attend his university lectures can benefit from his wisdom at home instead!

On Wednesday 13th
September, we will be welcoming
Emma Healey to the Ipswich Institute.
Emma graduated first from a degree in Bookbinding, moving on to a MA in Creative Writing from UEA in 2011 and then went on to win the Costa Book Award for Best First Novel for her debut, Elizabeth is Missing.

Wednesday October 11th will see **Megan Bradbury** visiting SBL,

who was awarded the Charles Pick fellowship at UEA (do you sense a theme?) and a Grant for the Arts to help her finish her first novel, *Everyone* is Watching, which tells the story of NYC through the eyes of the geniuses that inhabit it.

November's guest, joining us on the 1st, needs no indtroduction: **Wendy Cope** OBE. Her latest anthology, *Family Values*, which is coincidentally her first in 10 years, is said to be rife with deadpan, dry humour.

The year will draw to a close hand in hand with **Robert Lloyd Parry**'s dramatic readings of M.R. James' ghost stories on Wednesday 6th December. We're expecting a spooky, candlelit end to our 35th Anniversary year. We hope you'll enjoy these events as much as we've enjoyed planning them!

Reserve your tickets for any of the above events by returning the form overleaf!

reserving tickets

PLEASE RETURN
THIS FORM TO OUR
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:

Janet Bayliss 20 Lingfield Road Ipswich IP1 6QS

i would like...

tickets for the	event on//2017.
Number of member tickets required (£4 general admission (£8 each) student (free!)	each)
Would you like your tickets posted to yo	u? * YES / NO
PAYMENT METHODS	
Cheque (payable to Suffolk Book Le	eague) enclosed for £
Bank transfer undertaken for £	_
Name of Bank: CAF Bank Sort Code: 40-52-40 Account No.: 00008468	
Payment Reference: Please provide you purchasing tickets for.	r name and date/s of the events you are
	d until SBL has received confirmation that de. Feel free to contact us to check that ets@sbl.org.uk
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EMAIL	ADDRESS
*If yes please include 75p to cover po	estage

