

**Writing from**  
Beverley Birch  
Tina Canham

Charlotte Clark  
Jayne Gould  
Keith Jones

Jacquie Knott  
Gill Lowe  
Kay McElhinney

Meg Reid  
Jeff Taylor

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# I72

The journal of

# Suffolk Book League

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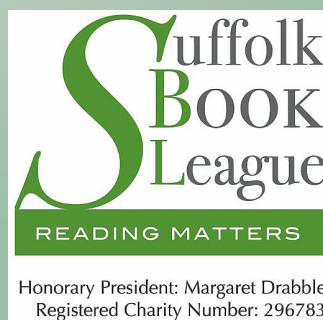
suffolkbookleague



suffolkbooktalk



Suffolk Book League



# BookTalk

MAY 2019

Created by John Ellison,  
Keith Jones and Jeff Taylor

# about us

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Suffolk Book League is a registered charity that has encouraged a love of reading since 1982 and continues to support a range of local initiatives across the county.

Aside from bringing a range of popular and distinguished writers to Suffolk, we have held short story competitions, donated books to hospital and hospice libraries, supported literacy groups and partner events, including the Suffolk Libraries School Book Mastermind competition.

Past speakers include Terry Pratchett, Doris Lessing, Sarah Waters, Hilary Mantel and Wendy Cope.

If you would like to be part of the next issue of BookTalk, or just fancy a chat, please send your contributions, thoughts, ramblings and comments to:

**The Editor, BookTalk**  
**85 Cliff Lane**  
**Ipswich**  
**IP3 0PD**

# member benefit:

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# from the chair

I'm feeling that being involved in Suffolk Book League is particularly joyful at the moment! Our meeting with Melissa Harrison on April 4th began with her reciting from her book, a unique experience for me, and then speaking with real passion about our county and countryside as she had explored it for her novel *All Among the Barley*.

The New Angle Literary Prize showcase, which was chaired by me along with our former chairman Brian Morron, was a fabulous display of the variety of styles and approaches to writing that can be enjoyed. It featured poetry, memoir, non-fiction, historical fiction and all supported with fascinating insights into how and why the authors had written as they did. I really don't know how the judges will decide and wait with bated breath for the name of the winner, to be announced at the dinner on July 3rd, where we can all get the chance to spend the evening with the authors and judges.

On May 4th Amanda Hodgkinson and I went to the Suffolk School Libraries Mastermind competition which the Suffolk Book League provide the prizes for. Such a joy to see that close reading of the text is alive and well! Many of the children got off the chair after the specialist round on a book of their choice with no wrong answers. Very impressive.

Another cause which we regularly support is Got To Read, a small local charity which helps people build confidence in reading, writing and speaking. They are always looking for volunteers so please read the article on the charity by Kay McElhinney on pages 14-15.

Finally, I have to mention John Ellison who stepped down, after long service, from our committee at the recent AGM. He was, until recently, our very diligent secretary and will be very much missed. Through the years he has been a regular contributor to BookTalk so it is appropriate that we include in this issue Kay's review of his second novel *Fragments*.

Suffolk Book League exists to encourage the joy of reading, come and join us as often as you can and spread the word.

# tell them about us

Now that our website has been renovated, we need to use every opportunity to let people know of our activity. We need to make enough noise to be noticed. Here are two ways you can help:

Use social media. If you use Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or any other means of giving information to others, give us a mention. We flourish mostly by personal recommendation, so it makes a real difference if you remind friends of the next meeting of the Suffolk Book League, and encourage them to be aware of what books interest you.

If you have a blog, don't forget to mention us.

If you belong to a Book Group, make sure you share our leaflets with all the members. Draw their attention to our website and tell them about the meetings where we meet and talk with authors.

SBL is a natural supporter and encourager of Book Groups, and many people who enjoy discussing their reading might well find a lot of pleasure in belonging to us. So, get a fistful of leaflets about our

programme, and spread them around.

If you are at a Literary Festival, especially in Suffolk or nearby, make sure there are leaflets about our activities available.

The more our membership grows, the more we can do. After all, we don't exist simply to listen to writers at our meetings, but to promote the reading of books. These days, Audio Books are the fastest growing part of the literary market. Although we are pleased that the literary inventiveness of writers should be enjoyed by all available means, we also believe in the book: that there is no substitute for the act of reading, of opening the covers, turning the page, and enjoying the smell and feel of a book. Surely, along with the wheel, one of the most brilliant inventions ever.

Enjoy your next book!

# zöe gilbert

BY GILL LOWE

Zoë Gilbert began by reading a quirky extract from 'Verlyn's Blessings' from her debut collection. *Folk*, which has a strikingly weird and ambiguous cover, is a series of stories weaving together narrative threads and characters. Zoë spoke about her breakthrough in winning the 2014 Costa Short Story Award for 'Fishskin, Hareskin'. She said that crafting short fiction is 'so hard'; she acknowledged the popularity of flash fiction, stating that this sub-genre was incredibly difficult but, if successful, could be extraordinary. She suggested that short stories are often dark, involving loss of some kind, perhaps of culture, love, parent or child. Zoë's writing process is measured and meticulous. She undertakes conscientious research but omits most of it, allowing her imagination freedom to invent her own rich, offbeat folk lore.

Questioned about the influence of Angela Carter Zoë said she couldn't emulate her but that any woman whose work has 'fairy tale inflections' was bound to be compared with Carter, who had 'shaken structures',

subverting limiting, patriarchal society. The template of pre-industrial fairytales was significant to her, where entering a bewildering forest or crossing an unknown sea may have metaphorical resonance. In *Folk* Zoë favours simple 'earthy, gutsy' Anglo-Saxon words rather than those derived from Romance languages. The setting is the 'rural rocky, unforgiving' island of Neverness which owes much to the 'out of time' landscape of the Isle of Man. The place seems familiar but, concurrently, strange because of Zoë's fantastical additions. Neverness has no identified religion and no technology to date it. Not specifying details of the story world is a disorientating, distancing and intriguing device. Zoë welcomes the diverse ways in which readers interpret her work. For some her world has post-apocalyptic qualities; civilization seems to be curiously tilted.

Zoë is involved with The Word Factory's masterclasses, workshops and literary salons. Interestingly she said that Cathy Galvin, founder of the organisation, was keen to reach out from Central London to include other areas of the UK.

Zoë resisted fixing a deadline with publishers, Bloomsbury, for her second book about the Great North Wood. She said she wants to take time for 'fine tuning'. This next book ranges temporally from 1200 to 200 hundred years into the future and will employ a different style for each connected episode. Zoë left us with a memorable, if uncomfortable, image for the power of fiction: it can be 'a fishhook into your soul'.

[Zoë Gilbert appeared on February 21]

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## zoë gilbert's recommended reads

For me, books can have a folkloric feel without explicitly retelling folk tales. It seems to spring from a dark-bright vision of nature, a feel for deep symbolism, and rejection of romance or nostalgia when it comes to our living landscapes. Here are five books that have this folkloric feel.

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### ***At Hawthorn Time***

by Melissa Harrison

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To take a long, and perhaps unnecessary, walk through England is to deliberately bear witness to all that is here, and all that is lost. Meandering, meditative, beautiful but resolutely unromantic, this book will fill you with trees and fields and the mud between.

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### ***Pollard***

by Laura Beatty

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Ann, lonely and out of kilter with the world, packs up her life in a couple of plastic bags and moves to the woods. We watch her learning to survive, and hear now and then from the trees, in this bittersweet, bosky book.

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### ***The Sing of the Shore***

by Lucy Wood

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Lucy Wood lives in Cornwall and dipped into its lore in her first collection, *Diving Belles*. Here, she shows us a haunted but very contemporary Cornwall, where the ghosts are as likely to be teenagers breaking into holiday lets as they are lost spirits.

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### ***The Stone Book Quartet***

by Alan Garner

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Four stories written in astonishing, hardy prose that reflects the stony landscape and accompanying dialect of a Yorkshire community. Garner makes you fall head over heels for his stout-hearted characters and their natural, if unforgiving, world.

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### ***Riddley Walker***

by Russell Hoban

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'On my naming day when I come 12 I gont front spear and kilt a wyld boar' begins this post-apocalyptic yet ancient story. Riddley's world is full of future folklore, and tracing its derivation from our own culture is a great pleasure in this book – as is the unique voice Hoban has created.

# linda davies

BY JEFF TAYLOR

Linda introduced herself as a journalist, a writer of adult thrillers and fiction for young adults. She described graduating from Teddy Hall (St Edmund Hall Oxford) in 1985 and working as an investment banker for seven years in New York, London and Eastern Europe. She described her earnings, 'always made on the right side of the law', as her running away money. She eventually ran away to write full time using her previous career as inspiration and making use of the many notes she would scribble at her trading desk.

The first of her financial thrillers *Nest of Vipers* published in 1995 sold 2 million copies in over 30 countries. At that time, she married the investment banker Rupert Wise and spent several years living in Peru which provided the background to her 2007 novel *Into the Fire*. The author described researching the narcotics trade in the Peruvian jungle which included sharing a lift with a silent air-force general in



a small light plane and then finding herself sitting next to the same officer on a commercial flight as if she was being unknowingly escorted out of the country.

After Peru she moved with her husband to Dubai but during a short sailing trip in a disputed part of the Persian Gulf, she, her husband and the captain of the boat were arrested by members of the Iranian Navy and held captive for 13 days. Linda recounted how she described herself to the Iranian authorities as a children's writer, sensibly leaving out the spy thriller element of her work. This event was eventually described in her memoir *Hostage: Kidnapped on the High Seas*, published in 2014.

Responding to a comment from a member of the audience Linda agreed that all the fictional heroes she has created have been strong women, 'probably a fantasy of what I would like to be'. This led onto a discussion of her latest book *Longbow Girl*, a dramatic story set in the wilds of the Welsh mountains where Merry Owen, travels back in time to the reign of Henry VIII to save her ancestors. The novel was inspired by the author's upbringing in South Wales and her ownership of a bow.

[Linda Davies appeared on March 13]



## linda davies's recommended reads

Lately I have been method reading. You've all heard of method acting, where actors stay in character, well I've been staying in subject and period as I research and write two distinct books. The period is the 1600s - the novel I am currently writing is set then, and the other topic is money – I'm writing a non-fiction book on the subject.

As well as reading many non-fiction books covering the 1600s, I enjoy diving into the period from a novelist's perspective. Two books stand out: *An Instance of the Fingerpost* by Iain Pears transports you back in time and shows you events from a series of different perspectives, making you question what is real and what is illusion. Andrew Taylor's *The Ashes of London* is a rich historical whodunnit, brimful of atmosphere and peopled with fascinating characters.

The best money books I have read recently are by Felix Martin, *The Unauthorised Biography of Money* and *A History of Money* by Professor Glyn Davies.

Felix Martin's book turns much of conventional theory about what money is on its head. It is revolutionary in its own way and compulsively re-readable.

Now I must come clean, Professor Davies is my late father. I remember him writing *A History of Money* over many years of my childhood, a labour of love for sure, but a work both of towering erudition and charm, eminently readable by the layperson seeking to augment their knowledge or to jump into what is a most fascinating subject that weaves through all our lives. His prize-winning book covers money from the ancient times to the modern day and has been updated in a new edition by another academic economist who specialises in finance, Duncan Connors. I read my father's book when it first came out and am now re-reading it with great pleasure, hearing his voice, once again.

# melissa harrison

BY KEITH JONES

Melissa introduced herself to members of SBL by reciting an extract from her work. She did so with a controlled passion that fascinated us, before going on to describe how she came to write her most acclaimed work to date. She brought out all the sensuous vitality of the natural world that has already made *All Among the Barley* widely acclaimed. There was a full room to hear her and meet her as she took us into a Suffolk, both like and unlike the one we know. This was a Suffolk without machinery, full of flowers and birds and suffering.

This novel, her third, is about fragility. This applies to the narrator, Edith Mather, who is in her early teens, and has just left school. It is 1934. She lives on a farm, surrounded by a slow-moving world and its seasonal rhythms, full of birdsong and small fields. A quiet and reflective adolescent, she has few friends, and her childhood still shelters her as she lives at home with her family, wondering how she should engage with adult life and with the future. She is highly ambivalent about it.

It applies to Edie's whole way

of life as well. The changes in her own body and mind are reflections of changes that are unavoidably coming to a style of living whose solidity is an illusion. The thirties were a time of continuing depression in agriculture, with many farms being abandoned, and prices heartbreakingly low. Then Connie, a romantic agrarian journalist appears, eager to record the songs and practices of a way of life that is fast disappearing. She also brings to Edie a hint of the great world of which she knows very little. Edie is then fascinated and disturbed by the attention of a boy from a nearby farm (a more progressive farm, too). She is profoundly challenged by these experiences, and maybe Edie herself does not have the strength to meet what is demanded of her.

Melissa told us that she begins her writing from considering nature and the seasons. Character and plot, she said, come subsequently. All the same, this novel conveys the inner life of Edie with an uncanny accuracy. What Edie cannot say, and what she avoids saying, is as significant as what she does tell us, and it is left to us to interpret her narrative in a fashion that is beyond her. This is most subtly done. *All Among the Barley* can sit with *Lark Rise to Candleford*, *Akenfield* and the work of George Ewart Evans in portraying an English country life that has gone.

[Melissa Harrison appeared on 4 April]

# melissa harrison's recommended reads

Five books inspired by folklore.

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## **Lanny**

by Max Porter



A flawless, playful, heartbreaking, genre non-confirming, unforgettable tale of contemporary village life meets ancient magic.

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## **Jackself**

by Jacob Polley.

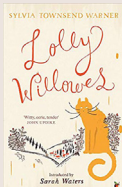


A suite of new myths about a beguiling figure who recalls Edward Thomas's 'Lob', Kipling's 'Puck of Pook's Hill', jack-in-the-green, the Green Man and Jack from my own novel, *At Hawthorn Time*.

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## **Lolly Willowes**

by Sylvia Townsend Warner



The 1926 novel Edie reads in *All Among the Barley*: witchcraft, humour and a serious, proto-feminist core.

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## **Common Ground**

by Rob Cowen



Place-writing, nature writing and memoir mixed with fiction and haunted by deeply strange (in a good way) folk stories.

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## **Witch**

by Rebecca Tamás



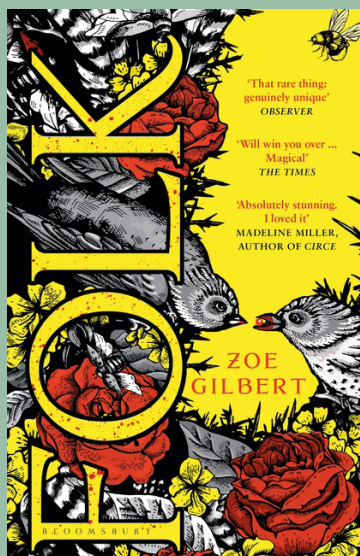
An extraordinary new poetry collection: terrifying, sexy, feminist, and either empowering or challenging, depending on your viewpoint.

# folk

BY TINA CANHAM

The saying goes 'never judge a book by its cover'. This goes out of the window when you see the stunning cover of Zoë Gilbert's book *Folk*. This book is a collection of interwoven stories set on a fictional island called Neverness. These stories can be read as standalones but ones set over a course of a lifetime. A haunting, dark and compelling book. You never really know the time it is set in. Anyone who knows folktales will know that they are generally dark themed and Zoë's homegrown folktales are no exception to this. Neverness is a brutal and also a beautiful place where nature takes centre stage. Zoë's writing is rich and descriptive but not overly so. Some of the stories stand out more than others. She won the Costa Short Story Award in 2014 with 'Prick Song' which is the first story in the book.

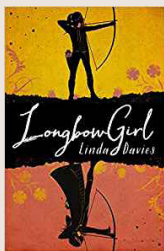
There are some funny moments in some of the stories 'The Neverness Oxmen' springs to mind. Other stories that stand out for me are 'The True Tale of Jack Frost' which evokes the



fairytale like quality of the Brothers Grimm, dark, foreboding and the chill just comes off the pages. Another is 'Verlyn's Blessings' which has such a wonderful character in Verlyn who was born with a wing instead of an arm. The last story of the book 'Tether' comes full circle and ends with the residents of Neverness gathering to watch the Gorse Games as they did in the first story only with the next generation taking part. A lovely map is included inside the book, which is always a plus for me, where you can track all the places in Neverness where all the stories are placed in. This is a wonderful gem of a book and one which I treasure dearly.

# longbow girl

BY BEVERLEY BIRCH



Haunting mystery, ancient riddles, cunning villains, danger in the wildness of the Welsh mountains, a satisfying hint of romance: this is an exciting novel for younger YA readers who

enjoy a galloping plot with daring characters in a richly evoked setting.

Teenagers, Merry and James, are from very different backgrounds, their families arch enemies for generations. Yet Merry and James have an unbreakable friendship. Merry, with an unusual skill in this modern age – her prowess as an archer – is the Longbow Girl, upholder of a centuries-old family tradition. It dates back nearly 700 years to when, with a timely arrow, an ancestor saved the life of sixteen-year-old Edward, the Black Prince, heir to the English throne. As reward, the Prince gave her ancestor the land which Merry's family has farmed ever since, while the eldest in each generation takes on the tradition of longbowman, training from a young age. That is, until Merry becomes the first girl longbow warrior.

But that reward to Merry's family was punishment to James' family. The gifted land was cut from the vast estates of James's aristocratic ancestor for failing to protect the young prince. So began the bitter feud, which

endures into the present. James resolutely fights it in his determination to stay loyal to Merry.

Then Merry makes an extraordinary, haunting discovery – just as a crisis of frightening proportions threatens her family. As her life in the present-day collides and loops with the distant past, she faces the ultimate challenge: listen to the call of ancient legend, the lure of the past, and risk her life to use her longbow skills in earnest.

It's a story of self-discovery for both Merry and James – testing courage, convictions, endurance and loyalty to each other to the limit.

Linda Davies has drawn brilliantly on her own childhood: given a longbow for Christmas at eight and training determinedly to master it, like Merry, she too roamed the Welsh mountains on a pony, daydreaming.

Dramatic and crackling with danger: strongly recommended. Winner of the East Anglian Children's Book Prize 2016.

[Beverley's latest YA novel, *Kisiri*, will be published in early 2020 by Guppy Books. Author of picture books, novels, narrative non-fiction and retellings of classic works, you can find her at [www.beverleybirch.co.uk](http://www.beverleybirch.co.uk) and on Twitter @bevbirchauthor]

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# all among the barley

BY JEFF TAYLOR

I like Melissa Harrison's *All Among the Barley* for two reasons.

Firstly, I enjoyed the result of what appears to be a huge amount of research put in by the author into rural life in Suffolk in the early 1930s. This work is noted by the author in her acknowledgements.

I was particularly struck by the importance the author places on the resonance of the Great War, as it was called then, during the period of her novel, 1933 to 1934. This chimes in with the many references to the war which occur in the work of contemporary authors of the time who wrote about a semi-fictional Suffolk during the inter-war period. Adrian Bell is the best known of these authors but I would recommend lesser known writers such as Neil Bell [pseudonym of Stephen Southwold], Harold Webber Freeman, John Owen [pseudonym of children's author Frank Elias] and Doreen Wallace.

Secondly, I enjoyed the fact that the author felt able to bring into the light themes which weren't, for the most part, explored by these earlier Suffolk authors. One of these themes, fascism, is reflected in the character of Constance FitzAllen who appears early on in the novel. In a



recent review of *All Among the Barley* in the *Guardian* newspaper, Clare Clark criticised the author for underplaying this 'dark underbelly' of the novel and writing 'here the looming menace

of fascism remains more theoretical than felt'. I think that Harrison was right not to push fascism as a great menace at this time. The author Doreen Wallace, who was at the centre of the anti-tithe militancy in 1933, with her husband on their Suffolk farm at Wortham, wrote to her friend Winifred Holtby a year later about Oswald Mosely's Blackshirts arriving in support: 'We let them camp and do what they liked, knowing that they meant well, and imagining that they could do us no harm'.

I look forward to more fiction being written exploring this fascinating inter-war period in Suffolk.

# fragments

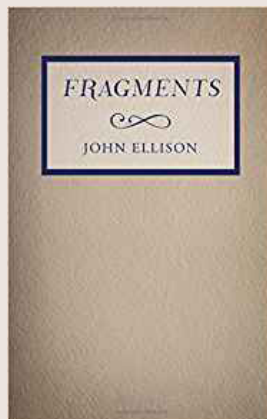
BY KAY MCELHINNEY

Ah, the Swinging Sixties! Love and peace, long hair, twanging sitars and a pervasive herbal smell...or maybe not, down in East Ham or off the Holloway Road.

In *Fragments*, John Ellison's second novel, a retired lecturer begins to read some old diaries and is surprised by the vividness of the memories of 1968-9 they invoke, when he was living off the Holloway Road and lecturing in law at a local college in the East End – and wearing a pinstriped suit rather than loon pants and a cheesecloth smock.

The book brings back the times' strange melange, where the sixties swung for a privileged carefree few whilst for others the war and National Service still dominated their thinking; where social freedom and the nascent women's movement butted up against misogyny, racism and homophobia while Enoch Powell's speeches inflamed and divided the country.

Clive Bates' colleagues are clearly delineated and although there is a large cast you are never unsure as to which of them is speaking; they range from fervent left-wingers to ex-Army majors, idealistic newbies and jaded old hands doing the least possible. How well it brings back the 'good old days' of local government and education, full of round pegs jammed in square holes biding their time till they



could draw their pensions.\* Younger readers may well find the content of some of the conversations in those unreconstructed days quite shocking, but I thought it was quite accurate – if somewhat startling to remember just how things were. The device of private conversations between male colleagues enables the author to highlight the routine misogyny of the times, and I had forgotten just how prevalent ex-servicemen were still, with their unspoken bond, and how their attitudes were bound to lead to confrontations and mutual incomprehension.

*Fragments* paints a picture of a particular group of people in a particular place at a time of great social change, and at a time of great personal changes for many of them, including the main character. Those of us old



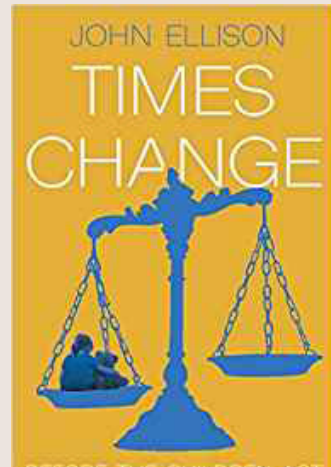
enough to remember the period will find it stirs up memories, and younger readers will find it a sometimes surprising insight into the past.

*\*The section about trying to get supplies from the stationery cupboard, like drawing teeth, brought back so many memories. I did laugh.*

### Question & Answer

Q. Why are you writing now?  
How far back does your writing urge go?

A. From my early twenties my urge to write was inseparable from my urge to discover things – about personalities, motives, and mysteries from the past. Much time over a decade was devoted to researching the last year of WW1 from an anti-war standpoint. I produced a typescript and submitted it. The narrative contained many human touches. Interest was shown, but no contract surfaced. After thirty-five years, in recent months – having put aside for the moment novel number three – I have been reviving, revising, rejuvenating this '1918' book. Its provisional title is now 'Censorship Shattered'. I plan submission by the summer, ideally to a publisher bubbling over with excitement.



Q. Authors you admire?

A. I think especially of books I have relished and interacted with. An early find was Scott Fitzgerald's work in the Bodley Head edition. Another was *USA* by John Dos Passos. My reading is quite wide-ranging. I can read a Dostoevsky novel in tandem with a Jane Austen. Enriching memoirs absorbed include Cockburn's *I, Claud* and Ilya Ehrenburg's six volumes. Lacey Baldwin Smith's *Henry VIII* held me fast.

[*Fragments* was published by Matador in 2018. John's debut novel *Times Change: Before The Children Act* was published in 2016, also by Matador.]



# got to read

BY KAY MCELHINNEY

Imagine being diabetic and not being able to check the ingredients on a ready meal; having children and not being able to read the letters from school or a bedtime story; being told to claim Universal Credit online and not being able to fill in the form, and spending your life avoiding any situation where you could possibly be asked to read or write something. There are many, many people in Ipswich who live like this – it is estimated that here could be more than 3,000 people who are what's called 'functionally illiterate', i.e. at a severe disadvantage every single day of their lives because they can't read.

Got to Read is a small local charity that has been helping people in Ipswich in this position by training volunteers to work with them on a one-to-one basis, firstly using a phonic-based reading scheme and then on to other resources. Our aim is to help them to be able to confidently read whatever they want to, so they bring



in the local paper so they can talk about it with their workmates, or their technical manuals, or the all-important bedtime stories they want to read to their children, or the letters from the hospital – whatever they see as their greatest need and that will give them the greatest sense of achievement.

Everyone involved with Got to Read gives their time voluntarily; our only overheads are for the rent of our office and its associated costs and resources for our readers. Everything is free to our readers (including stationery) so that there are as few barriers as possible to learning for them. It can take up to 2 years for someone starting from scratch to



become a confident reader and in the 5 years that we have been running I'm proud to say that several people have achieved that, as well as all the others who were further along the road to 'functional literacy' when they came to us.

I'm sure lots of SBL members will remember helping with the Summer Reads programme we ran for a couple of years, where we listened to learners from literacy classes reading so they had practise over the long summer holiday. Not only did the learners keep their studies going, we noticed the way their confidence increased – and this is exactly what happens with the people who come to Got to Read.

If you would like to help Got to Read, there are several ways you could. We are soon going to be training new

volunteers if you would like to do that, or if you can offer some help with the admin in the office that would be great – and money is always extremely welcome! You can donate online via [localgiving.com](http://localgiving.com), or you can send a cheque to Got to Read, Tower House, 17 Tower Street, Ipswich IP1 3BE.

Email me at [gtrkaymce@googlemail.com](mailto:gtrkaymce@googlemail.com) if you would like some further information.

# book mastermind

BY JEFF TAYLOR

Suffolk Libraries has been organizing their annual Book Mastermind Competition for nearly a quarter of a century. The 24<sup>th</sup> 'battle of the book brainiacs' was launched in November last year with 22 secondary schools across the county taking part in the early rounds of the competition. This year's final, took place on 3 May in Stratford St Andrew and involved nine contestants from Claydon High School, Ipswich Academy, St. Joseph's College, Bungay High School, Pakefield School, Sir John Leman High School, Culford School, King Edward VI CEVC Upper School and Stowupland High School. The winner was Josh from Ipswich Academy pictured here being presented with the trophy.

The first time the Suffolk Book League supported the competition was in 1997/1998, for the third competition. In issue 87 of BookTalk (September/ October 1997) Anne Parry, as Editor, wrote under 'Committee News': 'Suffolk Schools Mastermind Competition is a competition for county schoolchildren in years 7-9, ages 11-14. Each competitor chooses his or her own book and enters a series of rounds starting in form groups and ending in a regional final. It has been so very successful that a general knowledge round has been included in



the area and county finals.

The competition has been organized by the county library's School Library Service. They approached the Suffolk Book League to ask for sponsorship. We felt that this is an important part of our commitment to encourage reading and to promote books wherever we can. So, we have agreed to give £250 for prize money. The winner will have a book token to the value of £50 and their school will be able to choose £200 worth of books for their school library, which in the current climate is much needed.'

Following on from this, in Issue 90 (April/May/June 1998) of BookTalk Anne wrote: 'It was a tense morning on March 17<sup>th</sup> for the eight finalists for this competition. They had by now had to read four or five books to get this far and some were anxiously seen huddled in corners revising before the start. Most had brought along a support group from their schools, so there was an audience of about 70.

I have to say that their stress was almost equaled by the intense mental support given by the Director of Libraries (Amanda Arrowsmith), the Chairman of the SBL (Anne Parry) and the three kind members of the Schools Library Service who had devised the competition, prepared the questions and were now assuming the mantle of Magnus Magnusson (Malcolm Emmett) and his scorers and timers (Jean Martin and Judy Smith). We were all willing each child to do well and have the confidence to *know* that they can do well and I found myself longing to jump up and shout 'Oh, don't *linger* on a question – press on, press on!' (I didn't, my husband kept me in good order).

The book round was a tight finish but in the second General Awareness round a clear lead was established by Stephen Lewis, Stowupland High School, (his book

was Sue Townsend's *Adrian Mole: the Wilderness Years*). He received the SBL's £50 Book Token and his school our £200 Book Voucher. The second and third prizes from the Suffolk County Council School Library Service went to Sarah Barkley, Thomas Mills High School, Framlingham (her book was E. Nesbit's *The Railway Children*) and Rory Porter of Deben High School, Felixstowe (one of two Roald Dahl fans, his book was *Matilda*). The children had been able to choose their own books but within a certain length and they were encouraged to choose a different author, or series for each round.

When I gave the prizes I told all the children the SBL thought they were wonderful for entering the competition and shouldering the stress and hoped that the joy and pleasure of reading would stay with them forever. They are the readers of the future, so I hope that all BookTalk readers agree that our sponsorship was worthwhile.'

Little seems to have changed with regard to the competition over the years except for the fact that the Schools Library Service has been disbanded. Long may the competition continue.

# ipswich children's book group 1976 – 2019

BY JAYNE GOULD



Ipswich Children's Book Group was founded in 1976 by Marjorie Taylor, a teacher, and a group of friends, who had heard about the work of the Federation of Children's Book Groups.

The aim of the Federation and its member groups is to bring children and books together, celebrate the joy of reading and provide parents and educators with information and advice about children's books.

Over the past 43 years, Ipswich Children's Book Group has organised a wide range of activities in pursuit of these aims. These have included talks by leading authors and illustrators, book fairs, competitions, quizzes and book themed parties. Events for adults have included two national weekend conferences and two one day conferences – Picturing the Past, about historical fiction for children, and Adventures in the Real World, exploring information books.

Award winning authors who have visited Ipswich at our invitation include Jacqueline Wilson, Michael Morpurgo, Nick Butterworth, Michael Foreman, Chris Riddell and Tanya Landman.

The Federation co-ordinates a number of national initiatives, such as the Children's Book Award, National

Share a Story Month and National Non-Fiction November, all of which the group participates in.

This year, Ipswich Children's Book Group is delighted to participate in Elmer's Big Parade, with our Young Elmer on the theme of An Elephant's Tale. To truly reflect the aims of the group, members and others were invited, for a small donation, to nominate their favourite book, the title of which was then painted on Elmer by professional artist and committee member, Hannah Mee. A very successful live painting event was held in Waterstones Ipswich to launch the project, with children able to take part in a range of activities. We have more Elmer-themed happenings planned for the summer, when the Big Parade is taking place!

Membership of the group is open to anyone with an interest in children's books, whether as a parent, teacher, bookseller, librarian, writer or illustrator. So, if you would like to find out more, please do contact the membership secretary, Shirley Imlach, on [shirley.Implach@gmail.com](mailto:shirley.Implach@gmail.com).

Find us online at [www.fcbg.org.uk](http://www.fcbg.org.uk).  
Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/IpswichCBG>  
Twitter <https://twitter.com/IpswichCBG>

# a favourite author

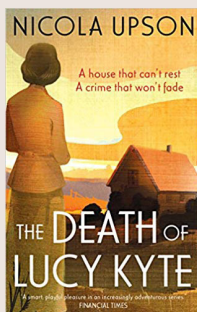
BY MEG REID



My favourite series of books are written by Suffolk born novelist Nicola Upson

and feature the real-life golden age crime writer Josephine Tey as the lead character. Set in the 1930s, they blend aspects of Tey's real life with fictional mysteries. As well as being completely engrossing, atmospheric books which set intriguing characters against vividly painted settings Upson's books have personal resonances for me.

*Angel With Two Faces*, the second in the series, is set in Cornwall around the Penrose estate which I've walked through very many times while on holiday. As a lifelong addict of BBC Radio I was particularly keen to read the sixth in the series, *London Rain* the story of the murder of a BBC broadcaster during the celebrations for the coronation of George VI in the early days of Broadcasting House.



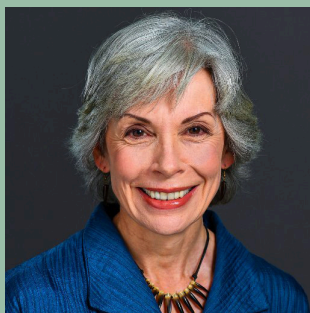
*The Death of Lucy Kyte* includes subtle references to Edward VIII's secret liaisons with Wallis Simpson in Felixstowe.

I have old and much read Penguin copies of Tey's novels on my book shelves. She only wrote eight novels. I hope Nicola Upson will produce far more.

[Meg Reid is Director of the Felixstowe Book Festival. Nicola Upson is appearing on 2 June in conversation with Maggi Hambling at the Orwell Hotel, Felixstowe and again on Sat 29 June in conversation with Elly Griffiths as part of the Felixstowe Book Festival. <https://felixstowebookfestival.co.uk/>]

# a favourite author

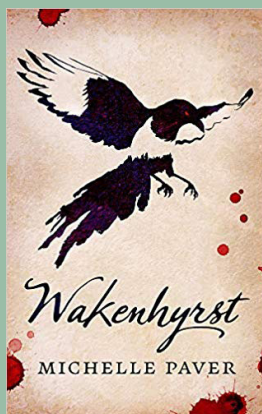
BY CHARLOTTE CLARK



I would fully recommend the new Michelle Paver novel *Wakenhyrst*. I have thoroughly enjoyed her other two

novels for adults *Dark Matter* and *Thin Ice*; both set in snow and isolation with a growing sense of unease. These books felt like ghost stories in the M. R. James tradition or, a more modern comparison, Susan Hill. Both have you wondering what is created just by the human mind or what could be a very real threat. *Wakenhyrst* builds on these ideas of isolation, obsession and real or imagined danger but also gives Michelle Paver a chance to beautifully describe the Suffolk countryside and fens, both flora and fauna.

Set in Edwardian Suffolk the book is inspired by East Anglian folklore and countryside traditions uneasily mixed with strict Christian teachings in a very oppressive society. At the heart of the story is the newly



rediscovered Medieval church painting, inspired by the real Wenham Doom at St Peter's Church. It is a thoroughly gripping book with brilliantly

drawn characters and you can almost smell the Fenland setting. It was also great to see that Michelle Paver can move on from ice and snow to create isolation and unease in a more familiar landscape.

[Charlotte Clark, Manager of Southwold Library, organises the Slaughter in Southwold Crime Writers' Festival (June 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>), with support from the Friends of Southwold Library and the Crime Writers' Association. <http://www.southwoldartsfestival.co.uk/> ]



# new angle literary prize winners' award dinner 2019

The shortlist for the biennial New Angle Prize for Literature was released at the end of March. Prize-winners will be announced at an Awards Dinner on Wednesday 3 July to be held at Hintlesham Golf Club, Suffolk. Details can be found on the Ipswich Institute website <http://www.ipswichinstitute.org.uk/> For tickets to the dinner either ring the Institute on 01473 253992 or email [library@ipswichinstitute.org.uk](mailto:library@ipswichinstitute.org.uk)

Here are the shortlisted authors with judges' comments.

**Tom Bolton**, *Low Country, Brexit on the Essex Coast* (Penned in the Margins, October 2018). 'A journey through Essex; a travelogue, a mapping of the history of the region and also an unrolling of Britain set against the backdrop of Brexit. It's a gripping narrative and the photographs which accompany the text are beautiful additions to the story'.

**Matthew De Abaitua**, *Self & I* (Eye Books, March 2018). 'A beguiling memoir set in the 1990s. Matthew is living in a remote cottage in Suffolk as the writer Will Self's assistant. A funny



and thoughtful book which has much to say about the art of writing'.

**Melissa Harrison**, *All Among the Barley* (Bloomsbury, August 2018). 'A beautifully written story of Suffolk in the 1930s, and a young girl's tragic move into adulthood in an isolated farming community in the years before the Second World War'.

**Anna Mackmin**, *Devoured* (Propolis, May 2018). 'An intriguing world of hippies, communes and childhood collide in this riotous story which manages dark themes with humour, tenderness and grace'.

**Esther Morgan**, *The Wound Register* (Bloodaxe Books, March 2018). 'This book of poems is based around the Wound Register, or Casualty Book of the Norfolk Regiment during the First World War – Morgan's East Anglian family history is woven into the poems including her own present life as a mother'.

**Stella Tillyard**, *The Great Level* (Chatto & Windus, July 2018). 'This mesmerizing and complex novel shines its light on the engineering feats of land reclamation in the fens in the 17th century'.



# suffolk book league events may to july 2019



**Tessa Hadley**  
Thursday 16 May

Tessa Hadley has written six novels: *Accidents in the Home*, *Everything Will be All Right*, *The Master Bedroom*, *The London Train*, *Clever Girl* and *The Past* which won the Hawthornden Prize in 2016. Her most recent novel, *Late in the Day*, was published on 14 February. She teaches at Bath Spa University.



**Alex Pheby**  
Monday 10 June

Alex Pheby's first novel was *Grace*. His third novel, *Lucia*, published by Galley Beggar Press in June 2018, takes the reader inside the darkness of Lucia Joyce – gifted dancer, lover of Samuel Beckett, daughter of James – who spent her last thirty years in an asylum.



**Haydn Middleton**  
Thursday 11 July

Haydn Middleton is the author of six novels and numerous books for children. He also publishes as Haydn Kaye. He has lectured in history. His new novel is *The Ballad of Syd and Morgan*. It's about a meeting between 22 year old Syd Barrett of Pink Floyd, and the great Edwardian novelist, 89 year old E. M. Forster.

please email the SBL Membership Secretary on [tickets@sbl.org](mailto:tickets@sbl.org) who will then be in touch. You will pay for any reserved tickets on the door and seats must be claimed fifteen minutes before the start of an event.

These events will be held at the Ipswich Institute Reading Room 15 Tavern Street, Ipswich IP1 3AA.

Doors open - 7pm. Event starts 7.30pm. £4 for members £8 for non-members. Students FREE with ID.

If you would like to reserve a seat

# quiz:

## moon by latymer

It's 50 years since Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon. Let's celebrate that anniversary with an appropriately themed quiz.

1. Who is the little girl mentioned in the title of a Ted Hughes' moon poem?
2. Which Tolkien novella tells of a dog who flies to the moon?
3. What name links a 1928 ballet, Joseph Conrad's father, and NASA?
4. Whose autobiography was *The Moon's a Balloon*?
5. Who wrote a celebrated short story entitled 'La Distanza Della Luna'?
6. Which book of the Bible talks of bringing 'no more... new moons and sabbaths'?
7. From which fictional country do Tintin and Captain Haddock fly to the moon?
8. Which painter's life inspired Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence*?
9. Toni Morrison, Zane Grey and Neil Armstrong were all born in which US state?
10. What name is shared by a power station, a Dorset MP, and a *Moonraker* villain?
11. Which minister wrote that 'moons shall wax and wane no more'?
12. Which US diplomat wrote *The Conquest of the Earth by the Moon* in 1809?
13. Whose 1906 poem paints the moon as 'a ghostly galleon'?

Reading from top to bottom, the first letter of each answer should give you the name of an English bishop who wrote one of the earliest works about a trip to the moon.

NB Names of authors, poets, etc. are surnames unless otherwise stated. Good luck!

For the chance of winning a £10 Waterstones' gift card please send your anagram answers with your name and address on a sheet of paper to Book Talk Quiz, 85 Cliff Lane Ipswich, IP3 0PD by 1<sup>st</sup> August or email [booktalk@sbl.org.uk](mailto:booktalk@sbl.org.uk) by the same date.

# answers to quiz from issue 171: salinger by latymer

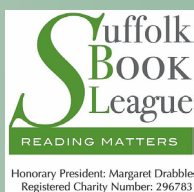
There were no winners for this quiz.

1. Franny's boyfriend is asked about which Bohemian poet in a station waiting room?
  - Rainer Maria **Rilke**
2. The Glass children appear on which radio show named after a Telemachus quote?
  - **It's a Wise Child**
3. What was the name of the 1949 film adapted from a Salinger short story?
  - **My Foolish Heart**
4. Whose poem published in 1796 inspired the title of a Salinger story?
  - 'Comin' Thro the Rye' by Robert **Burns**
5. Which of Holden Caulfield's teachers takes him to the Natural History Museum?
  - Miss **Aigletinger** took them 'damn near every Saturday'
6. Salinger wrote about Marx Brothers and Mickey Rooney films at which US college?
  - **Ursinus** College in Pennsylvania
7. In which English county were both Salinger and his 'Sergeant X' stationed?
  - **Devon**
8. Who illustrated the front cover of the 1953 *The Catcher in the Rye* US paperback?
  - James **Avati**
9. What English town links Henry James, E. F. Benson and a Salinger title?
  - Lamb House in **Rye** was home to James and Benson
10. Which of Salinger's *Nine Stories* concerns a hyper intelligent 10-year-old boy?
  - **Teddy**
11. After the Liberation of Paris, which war correspondent did Salinger meet in The Ritz?
  - Ernest **Hemingway**
12. In 1961, which author reviewed *Franny & Zooey* for the *New York Times*?
  - John **Updike**
13. Salinger attended the funeral of which Algonquin Round Table member in 1951?
  - Harold **Ross**, editor of *The New Yorker*

All being well, we can rearrange those initial letters to form the name of a poet greatly admired by Salinger:

- **Arthur Rimbaud**

That was ridiculously tough so well done if you got anywhere near this!



## **Issue 172**

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