

BOOK CLUB 2014

FEBRUARY 2014

We have just been reading ***The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*** by Thomas Keneally, the story of a half-white, half-aborigine young man, raised by a Methodist minister, conscientious and anxious to prove himself in white society. But the odds are against him and he explodes in a fury of violent revenge. Not an easy read, but one that provoked a very broad discussion!

JUNE 2014

The group would like to say a big thank you to Paul for the grand job he has done in starting up and running the book group so successfully. His enthusiasm has rubbed off on us all and over the past two years we have grown into a lively, friendly group with lots to say about the book we have read.

Maggie Doherty and I have now taken over as convenors so that Paul can focus on his other U3A projects. We meet in Carlton Library on the first Tuesday of each month at 2:00pm and new members are always welcome.

Authors on our next year's list are Michael Frayn, Iain Banks, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Catherine O'Flynn, Barbara Kingsolver, Khaled Hosseini, Susan Hill, Vikram Seth. If anyone is interested in joining us, our next book is ***Spies*** by Michael Frayn. We will be discussing it when we meet on Tuesday 8th July. Happy reading folks!

Jean Berry

JULY 2014

This month's read, ***Spies*** by Michael Frayn, recommended by Keith, turned out to be one of the most popular books we have read so far. Set during the Second World War, the novel depicts a bygone era of childhood, recorded mainly from the perspective of a young boy. Stephen feels strangely detached from others and struggles to understand events happening around him. The theme of spies is explored from a number of angles.

We enjoyed Frayn's evocative, sensory descriptions, the intricacy of the plot and use of a framework narrative. We discussed how childhood experiences have changed since the 40s, when children played out for hours, created dens and understood so little of the adult world.

Maggie Doherty

AUGUST 2014

Our book this month was ***The Crow Road*** by Iain Banks. Based in Scotland it tells the story of Prentice McHoan, his family, relationships and intrigue over the whereabouts of his Uncle Rory. There was a wide differing of opinion among the group, with some thoroughly enjoying the story and finishing it in two days, while others eventually gave up on the book. Several found the constant changes from past to present frustrating and confusing, stopping the flow of the story and making it difficult to know who was who.

However, after the merits of the book were discussed - the clever humour, characterisation, relationships and vivid descriptions of beautiful Scottish landscapes, some people decided to give it another try. We will see if they thought it worthwhile....

Our next meeting on Tuesday 2nd September is reader's choice, where two people each choose a book and talk about their choice to the group. Others are free to choose whether or not to read any of the books. The two books chosen are ***Guards, Guards*** by Terry Pratchett and ***Troubles*** by J.G. Farrell.

Jean Berry

SEPTEMBER 2014

This month Keith and Jean gave presentations of books of their choice. Keith's talk on ***Guards! Guards!*** by Terry Pratchett emphasised the commitment and enthusiasm of fans of this writer. To underline Pratchett's range and diversity, Keith brought in a huge collection of his novels and a Discworld map. He explored Pratchett's zany humour and the different series he has produced, inspiring some of us to sample this fantastical world.

Jean's choice, ***Troubles*** by J.G. Farrell proved to be popular with the group. Jean chose to explore aspects of the humour in this story, set in Ireland in 1919, at a critical time in history. She provided an insightful summary of the complex plot, peopled by well defined characters. The setting of the novel is the decaying Majestic Hotel, which is a metaphor for the disintegration of part of the British Empire.

The group appreciated the depth of Keith and Jean's preparation and their interesting presentations.

OCTOBER 2014

Our book this month was ***Poisonwood Bible*** by Barbara Kingsolver. It is a story told by the wife and four daughters of Nathan Price, a fierce evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959. The family are totally unprepared for life in the Congo and Nathan Price is both ignorant and unsympathetic to the customs of the Congolese leading to disastrous consequences for himself and his family.

Although the book is a novel, it gives the reader an insight into the politics of the Congo during the 1960's. Particularly the actions of America and Belgium, resulting in the democratically elected Lumumba being imprisoned and murdered.

Comments from the majority ranged from wonderful, brilliant, must read, whilst a couple thought the attitude of the father Nathan Price, towards his family and the Congolese too harrowing for them to read. Although some of us thought the story needed to be shortened (it was over 600 pages) comments were positive and we considered the story was a worthwhile read. In spite of the darkness of the novel the humour of the daughters brought a lightness for the reader.

NOVEMBER 2014

The Reading Group choice in November was very topical: the novel ***Strange Meeting*** by Susan Hill, set in the early months of the First World War.

After a reading of Wilfred Owen's poem, which inspired the title of the book, we engaged in a lively discussion. The majority of the group had been moved by the story and admired the writer's evocation of the "pity of war" and her sensitive depiction of the strong bond that develops between two very contrasting officers.

DECEMBER 2014

This month as a special treat the Reading Group visited Bromley House Library. Tucked away next to Barnado's charity shop on Angel Row, it is Nottingham's unique subscription library.

Stepping into the building is like stepping into another world and back in time. A stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of the surrounding city streets. It was intended that we would have a talk and tour followed by tea/coffee and cakes. However, because of meetings we had things the other way round and refreshments came first. Librarian, Geraldine joined us in our cosy room and gave a fascinating talk on the history of Bromley House.

The house initially belonged to George Smith, a rich banker and baronet in Nottingham. His son, also George, became George Bromley due to taking his mother's maiden name when he inherited a vast amount of money from his Aunt. As so often happens with very rich families, son George was not so upstanding as his father and after several altercations with the law was imprisoned and eventually bankrupt! Bromley House was put up for sale. Meanwhile Nottingham Subscription Library, which had been formed in 1816 as a gentlemen's library, was housed in Hockley on Carlton Street. Run as much as a gentleman's club as a library, larger premises were required to house the expanding collection. So, when Bromley house was put up for sale, it was bought by the N.S.L. and renamed Bromley House Library.

The talk was followed with a tour by our guide Frances. Thankfully we did have a guide, as the building is a maze of rooms and I'm sure we would have got lost (even though I am a member!). We started with a climb into the attic and into the photographic studio containing an original 19th Century camera (I've forgotten the name.) Husband thinks it must be an epidiascope, whatever that is. Then into the annexes all containing shelves of very ancient books. Bromley House is renowned for having its own filing system. Books were filed in the order they were bought, rather than alphabetically or by their topic, which can be confusing if you are searching for a specific book. Modern fiction and non-fiction however, are filed alphabetically by their authors and the librarians, along with volunteers have for some time been very busy putting books onto the newly installed computer system.



There is so much to write about the library. The famous mathematician George Green received most of his education and support from the library. One room houses a collection of books found in Alan Sillitoe's holiday home and these were donated by his sister when he died. A rare Meridian Dial consisting of a brass strip lies across the floor of the Standfast room. Cosy armchairs are dotted around and some overlook the beautiful garden, so that one can peacefully read a rare book or newspaper and feel you are living a grand Georgian Home. Bliss and well worth a visit. Even better become a member and enjoy this jewel.

Jean Berry