THE *NEW* GLADSTONE REVIEW

Issue No. 6

August 2019

an occasional e-journal

Informal commentary, opinions, reviews, news, illustrations and poetry for bookish people of philanthropic inclination

Contents

1. The future of the Gladstone Review

As some readers will know, increasing calls on my time have led to me to reflect on whether I should continue to produce the Review on a regular basis. Since ceasing to make a charge for it, I have no idea how many people read it – although occasionally, as well as local correspondents, I hear from readers in the USA, Australia and mainland Europe. I know there are technical ways of recording the number of 'visits', but trying to interpret such monitoring would seem to be of questionable value.

However, on the basis of a number of comments from known readers I have been encouraged to continue with this means of written expression. Alongside my day jobs, as a university academic and director of an NGO, essay writing has been a rewarding avocation for many years in the fields of what might be described as *liberal education* and *green politics*. But rather than sticking to a quarterly schedule, I have decided that the Review will become a more 'occasional' publication.

Continued publication will also be helped by the inclusion of more contributions from readers, many of whom I know have interesting ideas to share and stimulating ways of doing so. In fact, I am pleased to report that this issue includes two such articles – those from Penny Young and Matt Turpin – who have written engaging and insightful essays. I am most grateful to both of them and am sure readers will also appreciate their articles.

As a basic principle, I think it would be useful all-round if the Review became a forum for dialogue on important social and cultural concerns in which reason and thoughtful expression were seen as an effective counter to the apparently relentless advance of facile 'tweeting.'

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2. Nottingham, UNESCO City of Literature

Matt Turpin

UNESCO – the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation was formed in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War with the simple mandate *Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed*. While international diplomacy and the United Nations could attempt to maintain the fragile peace of the time, it was understood that (*p)olitical and economic arrangements of governments are not enough to secure the lasting and sincere support of the peoples. Peace must be founded upon dialogue and mutual understanding. Peace must be built upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity.*[1]

It's probably best known for its World Heritage Sites, where globally important cultural artefacts are protected for us all. Yet it is also instrumental in forging and strengthening links between countries through culture, and in the early years of the new millennium decided to bring that forward as a priority. A network was planned, to bring cities together across the world.

When the Sneinton-born playwright Stephen Lowe appeared on a BBC Radio Nottingham show in 2014, it seemed a routine exercise in arts publicity. He talked of his career, of his early success with the breakout hit play, *Touched*, and so on. Yet during the conversation with the DJ he hit on a riff about Nottingham, and the unfortunate fact that despite the city being crammed with writing talent, it was still grossly overlooked by many. Building to a climax, he put down a challenge: W*hat city could boast of such a depth of talent, past and present, than Nottingham? Make yourself known*.

It was an amusing, borderline pugilistic, challenge, but one that caught the imagination of many Nottingham writers and sparked a discussion. Yes, we do seem to have a rich heritage. Yes, we do seem to have a wonderful contemporary scene. We have the libraries, publishers and artists to rival much larger cities. Why were we not making more of it?

Poet Pippa Hennessey, who was then Development Manager at Nottingham Writer's Studio, discovered that UNESCO had begun building network, identifying cities that excelled in various cultural forms: folk art, music, gastronomy, film, media arts, design and literature. She checked the criteria, familiarised herself with the underlying ethos, and from there a board was formed with representatives from both Nottingham universities, the city council and library services, and cultural organisations across the city and county. An expression of interest was lodged with UNESCO, and the process to show Nottingham was a global player was underway.

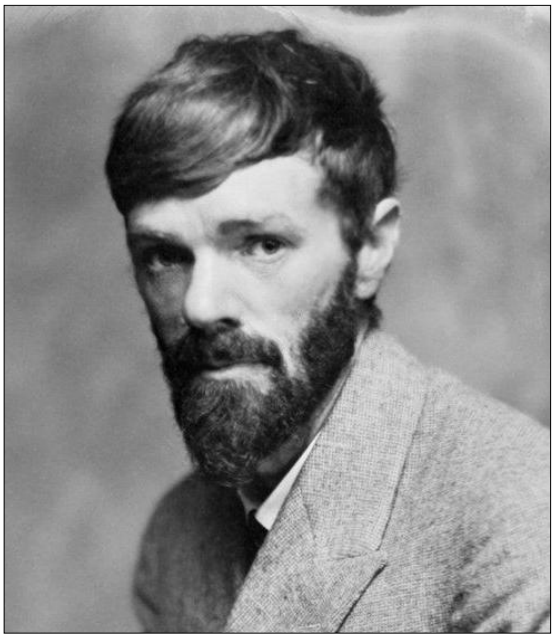
We didn't necessarily expect to win the accolade. Norwich, Dublin and Edinburgh were already Cities of Literature – all predominantly Anglophonic countries in the British Isles. UNESCO was keen to seek out cities further afield, particularly in areas of development. Yet it was felt the mere process of bidding was something that would reap great reward for the city; an effective cultural stocktake of the literary assets we held. So it proved, with many gems unearthed, partnerships formed and inspirations created. Rather like Dorothy and her Yellow Brick Road- traipsing companions, the journey was the important part; the destination a bonus. With this pragmatic, and retrospectively pessimistic approach, we assumed we would not get the title.

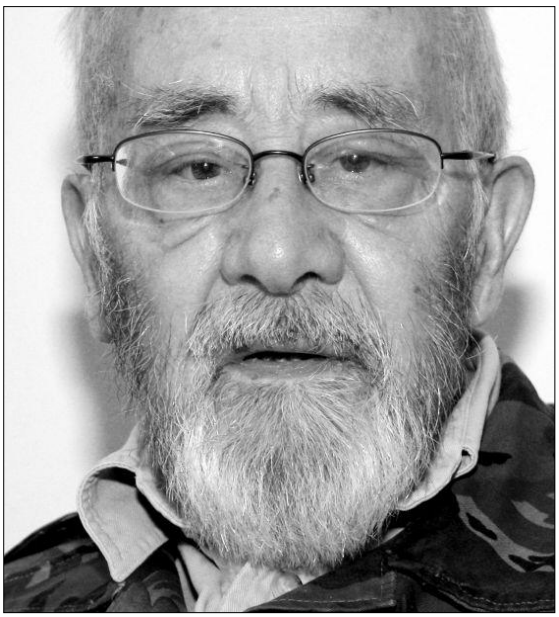
On December 11th 2015, UNESCO announced that Nottingham would be henceforth be known as a UNESCO City of Literature. Our bid had proven attractive through its unique approach. This was a grassroots movement which had co-opted large institutions, rather than vice-versa. We made much of

our historical reputation as being a radical city – much mention of the Civil War, the Luddites, the hypocrisy-busting writings of Byron, Lawrence and Sillitoe, as well as a token mention of that global icon of proto-socialism, Robin Hood – and set out a mission statement that words and the power that lies within them is the indulgence of all, not just an elite few.

Over the near four years since we became a City of Literature, we've put together a team of four: Sandeep Mahal is our Director, strategising and steering us; Jim Hall, who looks after our many projects as Programme Manager; Leanne Moden, our executive assistant and de facto poetry scene liaison; and myself: I deal with communications, looking after our digital presentation to the world.

Notable literary men of Nottinghamshire





Some of their *bon mots*

Lord Byron
Always laugh when you can. It's a cheap medicine

D H Lawrence
Never trust the teller. Trust the tale

Alan Sillitoe
If you stood between the lions in front of the Council House for an hour a week everybody who lived in the town would sooner or later pass by.

In that short time we've crammed in much; the following are merely some highlights:

- Selected, from a tight field of candidates, a ***Young Poet Laureate***. Georgina Wilding held the title for 18 months, performing with established national poets such as Roger McGough, Ian Macmillan, Jackie Kay and the erstwhile Laureate herself, Carol Ann Duffy. She now works as Creative Director for the rapidly expanding Nottingham Poetry Festival.
- Fund-raised enough money to provide every school in Notts with a copy of Jackie Morriss / Robert Macfarlane's ***The Lost Words,*** a sumptuous book of poetry, art and nature put together to arrest the erasure of nature words from the vocabulary.
- Created ***Young City of Literature Ambassadors***, where 14 secondary school pupils have been selected to represent us in their respective schools, while receiving mentoring, workshops and free tickets to cultural events.
- Consulted and helping develop plans for a new Central Library.

We have set out one challenge we wished to tackle: the appalling rate of illiteracy in Nottingham. We languish at the bottom of the national league tables[2] when it comes to the ability to read and write. This in turns feeds directly into other issues: illiteracy and poor literacy skills are directly correlated to many malign matrices: poverty, stifled social mobility, criminality. There is so much value in literacy, yet far too few resources allocated to understanding and promoting this. This is no recent issue: Nottingham has historical problems.

This is, of course, a mammoth problem. The reasons behind the figures perhaps need some contextualisation, of course, a cursory look at the figures would explain the certain eccentricity of Nottingham's borders queer the figures - as does the transitory nature of an inner-city urban population. This might mitigate the seriousness of the problem, but not explain it away: any trained demographic statistician would still identify a problem, not just in the urban centre but in the once-prosperous small towns and villages that cluster around the now defunct pits in rural North Notts.

We can't directly attack the root causes of this: historical underinvestment into Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands as a whole; the death of mining and heavy industry and the impact of a decade of swingeing austerity. These are matters for our national politicians to address. We can, however, smartly target interventions to reverse declines in reading rates, and understand the greater picture. This is what underpins everything we do.

We work closely with groups already involved in dealing with poor literacy rates; from the individual intervention of The Literacy Ambassadors, to the fine work of the Small Steps, Big Changes campaign. We link up groups, help them chase funding and provide support where we can. It has been striking how well the city works together on such issues. We encourage groups and individuals to use the power of the network we are part of, and as such have facilitated many cross-city exchanges with our fellow Cities of Literature.

We are one of 28 Cities of Literature around the world, a network that includes Bucheon in South Korea; Montevideo; Baghdad; Durban, Seattle, and many more fascinating cities with unique claims to the title. A full list, and details of each city, can be found here. Each have been awarded their status on individual merit, and tend to be ran in different ways. Being a part of the network doesn't mean we receive funding from UNESCO – rather, we are expected to be self-sustaining in our running costs. It's also not a temporary title: as long as we don't stray too far from the tenets of the network, we remain permanent members.

In May 2019, we co-hosted the UNESCO Cities of Literature with Norwich: this five-day international bonanza was named 'Nottwich', not just an idle portmanteau, but a nod to Graham

Greene's fictional city where he set his novel 'A Gun For Hire'. Greene had lived in Nottingham, not entirely happily, in the mid 1920's (he converted to the Catholicism that would shape his work at St. Barnabus Cathedral on Derby Road) so it felt a nice little nod to one of our temporarily fostered sons.

Nottwich proved to be an event beyond expectations. Delegates from the other cities were treated to a lecture in the grand Council House by (Nottingham High School for Boys alumni) Robert Macfarlane; a tour of the city culminating, naturally, in Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem; visits to Newstead Abbey and Lakeside Arts; and a grand finale at Wollaton Hall. Ideas were discussed, partnerships formulated, best-practice shared.

As the world lurches away from many of the liberal progressive certainties we once assumed would be continually ascendant; and many countries retreat into petty nationalism, introversion and fact-free populism, the role of a network that understands the importance of identifying universal values, while celebrating local diversity, is more important than ever. Nottingham is proud to be a City of Literature and our motto 'Building a Better World With Words' has never rang out so loud.

[1] https://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco

[2] https://nottinghamcityofliterature.com/blog/literacyandnottingham

Matt Turpin is project and communications manager of UNESCO City of Literature: Nottingham

3. A view of the entrance to Gladstone Books at the Newark Antiques Centre

4. A small selection of antiquarian books sold from Gladstone Books in recent months

The majority of books sold are second-hand, but I do aim to stock rarer books – and, in particular, antiquarian books. There's no official definition of 'antiquarian,' but the term is often applied to books published over a hundred years ago – and that is the definition used here. To draw readers' attention to this feature of my book stock, I list here a *selection* of 25 such books sold over the last few months: all were hardback and in good condition. By comparison with equivalent copies advertised on the internet my prices are very modest.

Essays

Ben Jonson *Timber: observations on men and manners* [Dent, 1902]
John Locke and Francis Bacon *Selected Essays* [Joseph Smith, 1845]
Robert Louis Stevenson *Virginibus Puerisque* (faux leather) [Chatto, 1906]

Fiction

Nathaniel Hawthorne *Twice-Told Tales* (gilt edge) [Paterson, 1883]
W Thackeray *Catherine, Lovel the Widower etc* (leather, gilt edge) [Nelson, 1904]
Bunyan *Pilgrim's Progress* (with memoir and colour plates) [Routledge, 1864]
R Kipling *Puck of Pooks Hill* (leather) [MacMillan, 1906]
R L Stevenson *St Ives*(leather, gilt edge) [Heinemann, 1905]
W Scott *Heart of Midlothian* [A & C Black, 1897]

Gardening

S R Hole (Dean Hole of Caunton, Notts) *A Book of Roses* [E Arnold, 1901]
James Udale *Gardening for All* [Mark & Moody, 1910]

History

J W Dawson *Egypt and Syria: physical features in Bible history* [Religious Tract Society, 1885]
J G Edgar *Runnymede and Lincoln Fair* (illustrated, gilt edge) [Ward Lock, 1906]
Mary Mitford *Our Village* (illustrated, gilt edge) [MacMillan, 1893]

Poetry

Tennyson *Poetical Works* [MacMillan, 1907]
Bret Harte *Poetical Works* [Routledge, 1890]
Byron *Poetical Works* (leather, gilt edge) [Oxford, 1896]
S Waddington (editor*) English Sonnets by living writers* [Bell, 1893]
R W Emerson *Poems* [Walter Scott, 1888]

Reference

Benjamin Vincent *Haydn's Dictionary of Dates 14e* (full leather, *ca*.800 pp) [E Moxon, 1873]
Francis Turner *The Pawnbrokers Act of 1872* [Jackson & Keeson, 1882]

Science and Technology

F A Talbot *All about Inventions and Discoveries* (attractive gilt embossed cover) [Cassell, 1916]
John Timbs *A History of Wonderful Inventions* [Routledge, 1868]
Oliver Lodge *Pioneers of Science* [Macmillan, 1918]

Theology

Thomas a Kempis (arranged by Liddon) *The Imitation of Christ* (in rhythmic sentences) [Elliot Block, 1889]

5 Of swearing: oaths and insults – an opinion.

From my earliest memories I have always taken pleasure in words – their ability to conjure up rich mental images, the rhythms and cadences they often convey in verse and dramatic expression and the precision and excitement with which they can explain original ideas. Often I find that the most satisfying way to appreciate a writer's language is to quietly read it aloud to myself.

But, of course, words can be used to elicit ends of a quite different nature – to condemn, insult, offend and incite anger. And I suspect I am not alone in finding the recent trend to increasing use of offensive language in public discourse to be indicative of shallow thinking, poor ability to appreciate other's views and a lack of respect for manners on which the existence of a civilised society depends.

When I was eleven, the headmaster of my high school in South Wales (what would elsewhere be called a 'grammar' school) occasionally took small groups of us boys for what might be best described as tutorials. Running the school probably allowed him few opportunities to practise teaching in his own academic field – chemistry – but he clearly relished the rare occasions when he could maintain some contact at the 'chalk-face.' Remarkably, nearly 70 years later, I can vividly remember a lesson when, with a calm dignity and no hint of preaching, he discussed 'swearing.' Then, swearing generally meant the blasphemous us of words like 'bloody,' 'Christ!' and even 'Gor blimey!' (God blind me!), which he explained were taking in vain the names of God and Jesus – and which he argued, even if you were not yourself a Christian believer, was offensive to those who were. That might all seem very tame in today's world, but I think that what most impressed my young mind was his cool (scientific?) analysis of the language and sensitivity to other's feelings. And, of course, to 'swear' (like taking an 'oath') is really to express deep conviction in a profession of belief – a meaning which has become corrupted by common misuse.

Look up 'swearing' in contemporary interpretations, such as Cambridge University's online Dictionary and you find a preponderance of references to crude sexual and scatological terms, e.g.:

> dirty word, eff, expletive, four letter word, profanity, and the f-word.
>
> *Swear words and taboo words can intensify what is said, but they can shock or give offence. Swearing and the use of taboo words and expressions is quite common in speaking. We often hear and use it both in private and in public settings and in films, on television and on the radio.*

It seems that, of late, a shift in meaning has occurred from my late headmaster's emphasis on religious offence – to profanity, in which references to sexual and excretory functions are deemed more liable to shock and insult. One interpretation is that the change is due to release from deep-seated sexual inhibitions, as also evident in 'dirty jokes,' which even in 'liberated' 2019 are sure to elicit much laughter from radio and TV audiences. But in a world in which sex in its various forms is so openly discussed and analysed, it seems strange that it retains any potential to shock or offend taboo.

But what is most disturbing to me is the resort to such 'swearing' by allegedly-educated people, such as politicians in and/or seeking high office. To those liberated from childish inhibitions and who commend the warmth and beauty that flow from consensual sexual relationships, the vulgar use of associated terms as means of expressing contempt seems to reveal much about their users' immaturity and/or impoverished personal experiences; and to question their fitness to exercise political power.

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6 The Discovery of Slowness'

'What remains of me need not always be my personal self.' J.F.

Penny Young

Of the great triumvirate of names associated with Arctic expeditions – Shackleton, Scott and Franklin – perhaps the least generally familiar name is that of Franklin. Sir John Franklin was the explorer who set out in 1845 to discover the North-West passage, a route through the polar regions north of Greenland and Canada to the Pacific ocean – a route which, once discovered, would greatly lessen the journey time of ships trading between Europe and the Far East. It was an expedition that ended in disaster as ships and crew met with unremitting snowstorms, giant icebergs, crushing cold, and one of the deadliest enemies to be met with at sea: scurvy. But, although it ended in seeming failure with the loss of the two ships and the entire crew, it was because of Franklin's courage and determination that the North-West passage came to be discovered.

The story of John Franklin's life is the stuff of boys' adventure stories: from his unhappy childhood in Spilsby, Lincolnshire, through his rise in the Royal Navy from midshipman to rear-admiral, his taking part in the Battle of Trafalgar, other naval exploits, time spent as Governor of Van Diemen's land (better known to us as Tasmania) where he had continually to battle with the British government for a more enlightened approach to dealing with transported convicts, and, finally, his three expeditions to the frozen and inhospitable regions of the Arctic.

It's an adventure story that German author Sten Nadolny has captured in this beautifully written novel, a fictionalised account of Franklin's life, *The Discovery of Slowness.* But, you may wonder, if Franklin's life was so action-packed, where does slowness come into it?

Young John Franklin was born, it seems, with a certain disability. At ball games with village schoolmates he was never able to catch a ball; more than that, his eyes, unable to follow a ball's trajectory, took time to focus. He was clumsy, and slow to understand questions put to him, slow to answer, as if his brain needed time to catch up with his ears. One can imagine the wretched childhood he had in a small rural village. No one, least of all his own father, to whom he was a great disappointment, would have believed him a candidate for the life he was one day to lead. His wretchedness came to a head when he ran away from home, eventually reaching Skegness, where he had his first glimpse of the sea and of ships sailing back and forth. But he wasn't there long; very soon his family tracked him down and he received a severe thrashing from his father.

Following this schoolboy escapade he became seriously ill – which slowed him down even further. But it gave him an opportunity to think: he was an intelligent lad, and his disability led to him observing and thinking more deeply about the meaning of things; he studied people and listened 'with detachment'. He learnt 'that when people talk too fast the content becomes as superfluous as the speed'. One of his visitors when he was ill in bed was his aunt Eliza's future husband, one Matthew Flinders, a naval officer. Matthew 'spoke sensibly, with pauses'. Unlike everyone else, he 'wanted to

hear a lot of what John had to say and waited patiently until his answers were ready to come out. John, too, had many questions . . . knowing about the sea was called navigation. John repeated the word many times after Matthew. It meant stars, instruments and careful thought. That pleased him. He said, "I'd like to learn how to set sails".' On Matthew's last visit he told John he was going away for two years 'to Terra Australis' – after which he would be in command of his own ship. He tells John, 'Don't run away again. You can become a sailor.' He promises to send John some books on navigation, and to take him on as midshipman on his return.

And so the course of John Franklin's life is set, with many discoveries to follow – not least discoveries about himself, how to turn his disabilities to advantage; taking time to answer questions, not being rushed into making quick (but not always the best) decisions, mastering his craft, learning about the world and about people, gaining in confidence and gaining the respect of people in positions of authority, and the respect and trust of his men.

In 1818, Franklin was commissioned by the Admiralty to take charge of two expeditions, one of which was to find a way through to the Pacific: a voyage into the ice. Two ships set out, the *Trent* and the *Dorothea.* Nearly a year later, two ships haltingly returned. Reading about what happened during the course of that year had this reader on the edge of her seat, biting her nails.

The following year, Franklin was sent on a further expedition, this time a long and arduous trek by land and river to the Arctic, which involved negotiating for food and equipment with native Americans and Inuits, not knowing whom he could trust, and facing treachery, starvation, cannibalism and death. More edge-of-the-seat, nail-biting stuff.

In May 1845, two vessels, the *Erebus* and the *Terror,* set sail from Greenhithe under Franklin's command. Neither of them returned. They did in fact discover the North-West passage; but the copper-sheathed ships became trapped in drifting pack ice, which gripped more firmly than any iron maiden. Sir John died on board ship, of a stroke, on 11 June 1847, and was buried in a grave of ice. With no hope of freeing the ships, the surviving officers and men – over a hundred of them – set out to walk to the nearest fur-trading post to get help, all of them finally succumbing to the effects of scurvy: extreme physical and mental weakness and inevitable death.

After many rescue attempts ordered by the Government, Sir John was pronounced officially dead in 1852. It was then that Franklin's widow, Jane, worked hard and unremittingly to sponsor a final attempt to discover her husband's fate, commissioning a ship called the *Fox.*

Papers, artefacts and bodies were found: papers revealing the fate of Sir John and the ships; artefacts (including a supply of still edible chocolate) proving not all the men had died from starvation, the bodies indicating the presence of scurvy – and something else. In a final sobering scene, the ship's doctor and the ship's captain examine the skeletons; they'd found bones 'neatly separated, with smoothly cut surfaces that could have been made with a saw.' The doctor immediately understands the sad truth: '"scurvy is a deficiency disease. The flesh of a man who dies of it lacks exactly the same ingredients that the sick require for their survival. It therefore didn't even . It did them no good".'

The *Fox* had set out in the hopes of finding Franklin still alive. As the captain said, "He never lived quickly, so he won't have stopped living quickly either." In many ways the novel is a discourse on time, reflecting on its meaning, how it's measured, how it's perceived, its 'ominous acceleration': Franklin notices in London that 'many clocks now had second hands; only ships' chronometers had used them before. Clocks and people had become more precise. John would have welcomed this if the result had been greater calm and deliberation, but instead he observed everywhere only the pressure of time and haste.'

As the bones of the crew members are collected together, and they are photographed by a man from the *Illustrated London News,* the final words are spoken by the *Fox's* captain: 'It was a worthy and brave crew. The passage of time was too slow for them. Whoever does not know what time is cannot understand a picture, not even this one.'

The Discovery of Slowness is translated from the German by Ralph Freedman, and is published by Canongate Books. In an appendix, the author has added a list of books and documents relating to John Franklin's career, including Franklin's own account of his expeditions in the Arctic.

The house where he was born in Spilsby is apparently still there. There are statues of him in Spilsby and in London. In Westminster Abbey a memorial plaque bears the following lines by Alfred, Lord Tennyson:

Not here! The white North has thy bones, and thou
Heroic Sailor-Soul,
Art passing on thine happier voyage now
Towards no earthly pole.

Penny Young

Penny is the former editor of 'Folio', a quarterly arts magazine produced in Southwell. She has long been fascinated by stories of Arctic expeditions and shipwrecks at sea, ever since hearing as a child the story of the Flying Enterprise, whose captain went down with his ship and writes- *'as I understood it at the time; he was actually rescued at the very last minute, but the image of him standing on deck while the boat went down captured my childish imagination and stayed with me.'*

7 Reading rots the mind?: a defence of bibliophilia

Bibliophilia is defined in the Merriam –Webster Dictionary as *a great or excessive love of books* and also as *an enthusiastic or extreme interest in collecting books.* Some define it, less flatteringly, as *pedantic or detached from the real world*. The phrase '*Reading rots the mind'* seems to be in the same vein. It was a saying that Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the genetic code, for which he was awarded a Nobel Prize, displayed on a wall of the Cambridge office he shared with another Nobel Laureate, Sydney Brenner - to suggest that being too influenced by other people's ideas might inhibit your own original thoughts. (Even so, Crick read widely, and wrote several books! And Brenner attributed much of his own scientific achievement to his habit of frequent random browsing in bookshops.[1])

Unsurprisingly, I prefer the more favourable definitions; and, at the very least, acknowledge Lewis Carroll's wisdom, as displayed in 'Alice Through the Looking Glass': "*When I use a word*" Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "*it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less.*" "*The question is,*" said Alice, "*whether you can make words mean so many different things.*" "*The question is,*" said Humpty Dumpty, "*which is to be master - that's all.*"

But despite a long-standing regard for books as sources of wisdom, knowledge and pleasure, I'm certainly not enchanted by them *simply* as a medium of communication (which would include many shallow novelettes and ghost-written 'celebrity' biographies). Nor am I oblivious to the dangers of addiction to certain books as an escape from reality, in which they serve as 'literary sedatives.' I suspect like all who would accept the title, my bibliophilia is very selective. We are drawn to certain categories of book, the natures of which are highly diverse. In the case of someone *selling* books, as I do, this gives rise to two separate collections – those of personal interest and those which appear to have intrinsic value to some people, but are not in one's own field of interest. There is, of course some overlap between the two – and that serves as one of the more gratifying aspects of book-selling, in which one can share a common interest with a customer.

But, for me, the value of most of the books I seek out is that they are sources of *ideas.* Works of philosophy are clearly prominent, but the category also includes many books that might be shelved, in a public or academic library, under *science, history, technology, politics, essays, theology, arts* etc. Perhaps the omission from that list of *poetry* would not be surprising; but I think it would be regrettable to exclude it from the class of *ideas.* In the case of books sold through Gladstone Books, this motive is still evident; for as someone has remarked on the Book Guide website: *Great to find this gem of a bookshop, full of books to make you think, across a range of topics*.

But I can no longer avoid focusing on my real motive for collecting books, namely, that the ideas laid out within them provide the seed corn for my own original thoughts. As Dr Johnson put it in the quotation below, serious reflection is fuelled by ideas that may have lain dormant in the subliminal strata of the mind – only to *imperceptibly advance* in a new guise in a novel mental environment.

The more accessible, and more diverse, this mental seed corn, the better equipped one is to address new challenges. Of course, on deeper reflection, many of one's original ideas are abandoned. But some must survive that later sifting, or human understanding would never advance.

[1] (See: https://www.webofstories.com/play/sydney.brenner/199)

Dr Johnson on the value of reading

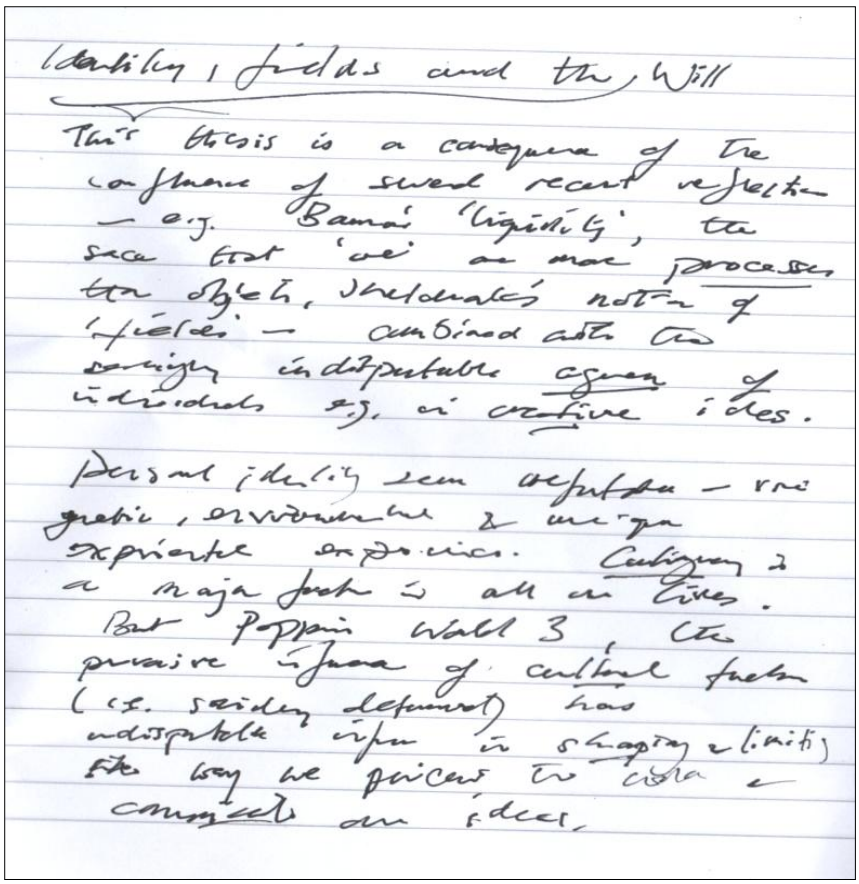
Books have always a secret influence on the understanding; we cannot at pleasure obliterate ideas: he that reads books of science, though without any fixed desire of improvement, will grow more knowing; he that entertains himself with moral or religious treatises, will imperceptibly advance in goodness; the ideas which are often offered to the mind, will at last find a lucky moment when it is disposed to receive them."

Dr Samuel Johnson*: Adventurer 137 (February 26, 1754)*

A personal example

Below is a scan of a page in my notebook, made (I noted) when travelling on the 9.20 a.m. train from Newark to Kings Cross on 15th February 2018. Such trains are packed with middle-class commuters - of whom the young lady sitting next to me seemed typical. Hunched over their lap tops, their tap-tapping is interspersed with mobile 'phone conversations that to the unavoidably eves-dropping adjacent passenger seem utterly inconsequential.

Reflecting on how I might escape being absorbed into this occult virtual world, I took the note book from my bag and the fountain pen from my inside pocket and proceeded to scribble down these barely legible notes on an idea I wanted to develop.



In more legible form it reads:

Identity, fields and the Will

This thesis is a consequence of the confluence of several recent reflections e.g. Bauman's 'liquidity,' the sense that 'we' are more processes than 'objects,' Sheldrake's notion of 'fields' – combined with the seemingly indisputable 'agency' of individuals e.g. in creative ideas.

Personal identity seems irrefutable, via genetic, environmental and unique experiential experiences (sic!)*. Contingency is a major factor in all our lives. But Popper's World 3, the pervasive influence of cultural factors (socially-determined) has indisputable influence in shaping and limiting the way we perceive the world and constrains our ideas*.

Now, it is no part of my aim here to provide even a brief summary of the rather incoherent ideas on an argument that these notes will underpin. The latter will, I hope, appear one day as a small part of a book I am in process of writing. Rather, the point of including it here is to demonstrate how my reading of various books (some philosophical, some scientific and some sociological) has suggested interactions and complementarities between the ideas expressed of which their authors were most probably unaware (and sometimes inevitably so, because they lived at different times).

My point is that the ability to learn of such ideas, from a diverse set of sources, was only really practicable as a consequence of having assembled that eclectic collection in the first place. Most of the books in my ever-growing library were bought (very cheaply, as second-hand copies) decades ago – put by as an investment for the future. But not, as most people these days tend to assume, as a *financial* investment, but as an *intellectual* investment, often of long-standing value. So my response to Crick's provocative jibe '*Reading rots the mind*' is an emphatic – '*Not in my book!*'

The nature of my bibliophilia is perhaps best revealed as the fruits of my personal library, about which I have written elsewhere as follows: *The ability to pick up, at random, any of the thousands of books on my shelves gives me enormous pleasure. Sometimes, I assimilate it to that which Montaigne reputedly experienced in his circular library.* I suspect there are others, although perhaps in ever-decreasing numbers, who share this absorbing, and perpetually enlightening, experience.

Michel de Montaigne *coined the term, and genre, of 'essays'.*

The currently-named ***Montaigne Tower*** *is the southern tower of the Chateau de Montaigne- a historical monument located in the French département of Dordogne.*

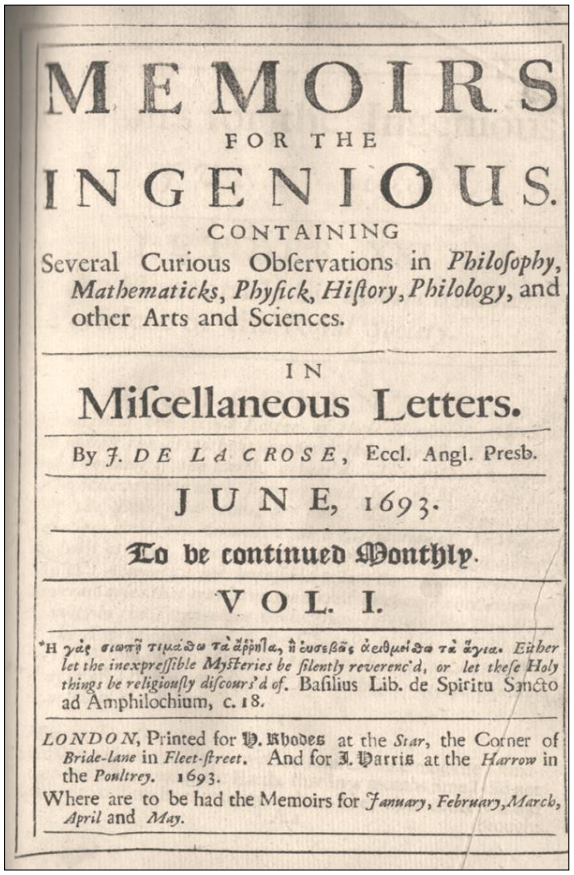
It was renovated and redecorated to his specifications in 1571, following his retirement from public life. It notably contained the famous library and study where he spent "most of his days" and where his ***Essais*** *were written – after which this literary form is named.*

The tower is the only vestige of the original 16th century castle, the other buildings being rebuilt following a 19th century fire.

BM

8. *Serendipity*: The first Literary Journal to be published in English - in 1693? And a classic novel published in 1787

Probably, no one will be surprised to learn that one of the rewards of selling second-hand books is that, occasionally, and by pure chance, some volumes that turn up are just too fascinating to put on sale. Recently, I was offered a few boxes of books that came from the library of a deceased Oxford academic. When I eventually found her relatives' house, tucked away in an area unfamiliar to me, which had entailed several 'phone calls *en route* to find – I wearily rejected the invitation go through the boxes and select only the books that I really wanted, saying that, to make up for lost time, I was happy to agree with their request 'to take the lot off their hands.'



MEMOIRS
FOR THE
INGENIOUS.
CONTAINING
Several Curious Observations in *Philosophy, Mathematicks, Physick, History, Philology*, and other Arts and Sciences.

IN
Miscellaneous Letters.

By *J. DE LA CROSE*, Eccl. Angl. Presb.

JUNE, 1693.

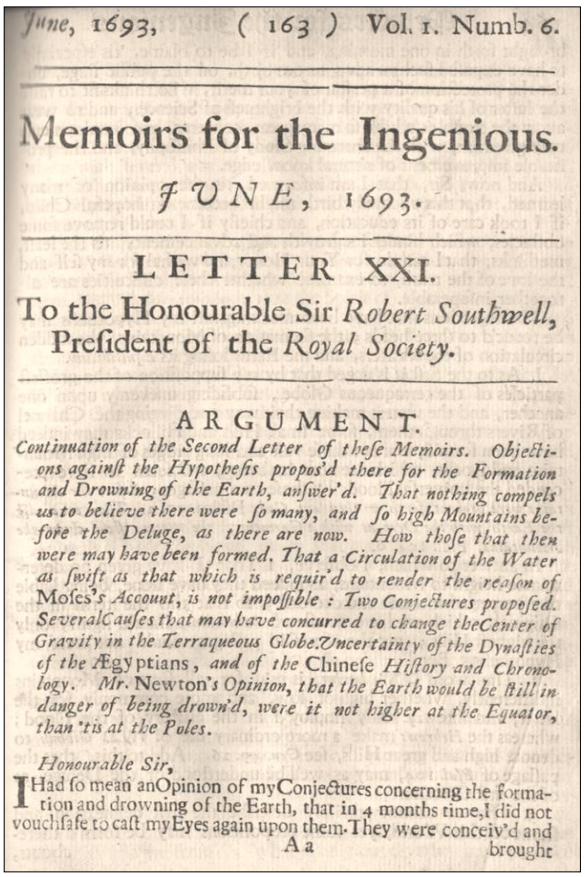
To be continued Monthly.

VOL. I.

Ἡ γὰρ σιωπὴ τιμάσω τὰ ἄῤῥητα, ἢ σωτερῶς ἀσεμνύσω τὰ ἄγια. Either let the inexpressible Mysteries be silently reverenc'd, or let these Holy things be religiously discours'd of. Basilius Lib. de Spiritu Sancto ad Amphilochium, c. 18.

LONDON, Printed for W. Rhodes at the *Star*, the Corner of *Bride-lane* in *Fleet-street*. And for J. Harris at the *Harrow* in the *Poultrey*. 1693.

Where are to be had the Memoirs for *January, February, March, April* and *May*.



June, 1693. (163) Vol. 1. Numb. 6.

Memoirs for the Ingenious.

JUNE, 1693.

LETTER XXI.

To the Honourable Sir *Robert Southwell*, President of the *Royal Society*.

ARGUMENT.

Continuation of the Second Letter of these Memoirs. Objections against the Hypothesis propos'd there for the Formation and Drowning of the Earth, answer'd. That nothing compels us to believe there were so many, and so high Mountains before the Deluge, as there are now. How those that then were may have been formed. That a Circulation of the Water as swift as that which is requir'd to render the reason of Moses's *Account, is not impossible: Two Conjectures propesed. Several Causes that may have concurred to change the Center of Gravity in the Terraqueous Globe. Uncertainty of the Dynasties of the* Ægyptians, *and of the* Chinese *History and Chronology. Mr.* Newton's *Opinion, that the Earth would be still in danger of being drown'd, were it not higher at the Equator, than 'tis at the Poles.*

Honourable Sir,

I Had so mean an Opinion of my Conjectures concerning the formation and drowning of the Earth, that in 4 months time, I did not vouchsafe to cast my Eyes again upon them. They were conceiv'd and

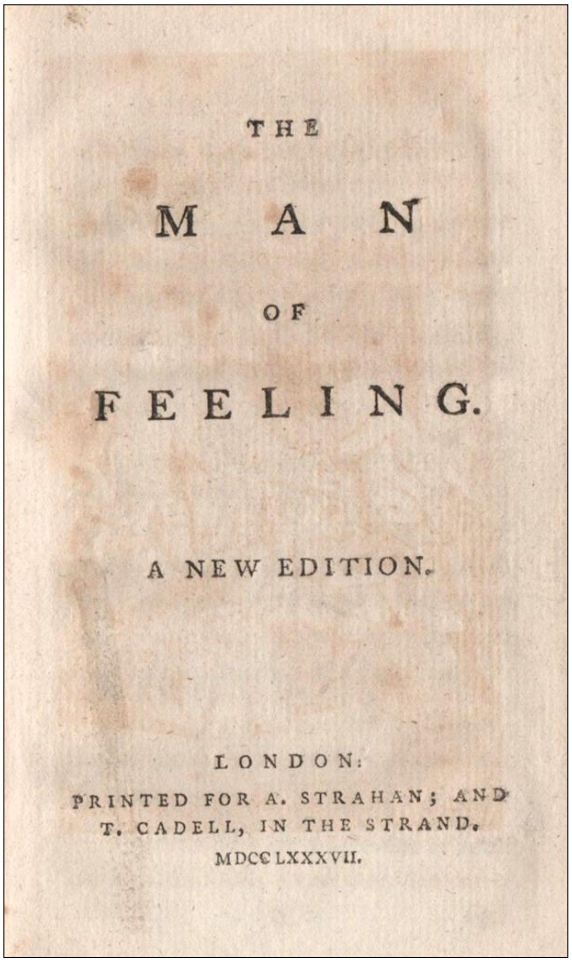
 brought

A few days later, rummaging through them, I found that a number of the volumes certainly merited a little money spent on minor repairs. The most treasured is the complete leather-bound set of the monthly *Memoirs for the Ingenious* for the year 1693, published at the *Star, at the corner of Bride Lane in Fleet Street, London* and edited by *F de la Crose*. Research has revealed that this was probably the first successful and genuine 'literary journal' to appear in English, embracing the fields of *philosophy, mathematicks, physick, history, philology, and other arts and sciences.* Only the *Mercurius librarius*, or *Faithful Account of all Books and Pamphlets* (1680) predated it, but that was merely a catalogue, published weekly or fortnightly in London.

The main article, illustrated above, in the June issue of the *Memoirs*, took the customary form of a letter, which was addressed to the then President of the Royal Society, coincidentally a Sir Robert Southwell (an Irishman, with no evident link to our local town of Southwell). With reference to such luminaries as Isaac Newton, it advanced a theory for the formation of the Earth's mountains and seas which, as an example of bold and speculative reasoning, is just up my street!

Almost as fascinating among the others was a 1787 copy of *The Man of Feeling* which had first been published in 1771. I had never heard of it before, but discovered that it is still considered to be sufficiently important for Oxford University Press to have included it in their 'World Classics' series.

Bearing the name of no author, it later transpired that it was written by a Scotsman, Henry Mackenzie, and purports to be a biography of a 'Mr. Harley'- written in tribute by his friend, Charles.


THE

MAN

OF

FEELING.

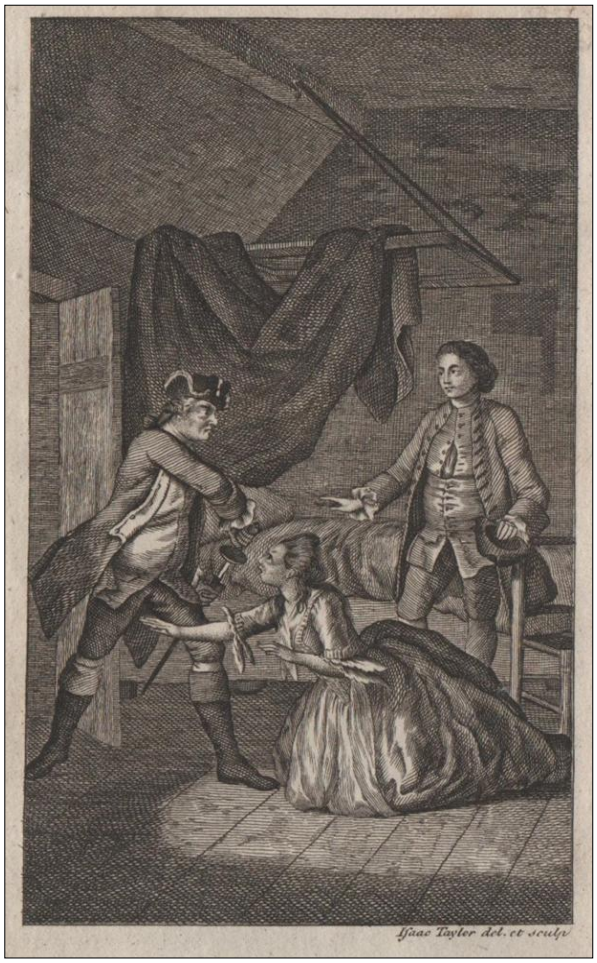
A NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR A. STRAHAN; AND

T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.

MDCCLXXXVII.



The outcome is a collection of, often unconnected, scenarios in which on a protracted visit from the provinces to London, Harley, encountering various people in pitiful states, attempts to assist the insane, the indigent, prostitutes, decrepit soldiers, prisoners and fortune tellers; as well as railing against the injustices of slavery. With a style that reminds me of his more notable contemporary, Dr Johnson, Mackenzie uses these examples to examine contemporary social, political, economic and moral issues, in a manner that seems well in advance of the more prejudicial views then dominant. But, to quote Professors Bending and Bygrave in their introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition '*Can a pure Man of Feeling coexist with the modern world, or is he an anachronism whose time has never and will never exist? Is a modicum of self-interest necessary for survival in the social world*?'And perhaps that comment applies as much now, in the 21st century, as it did in the 18th.

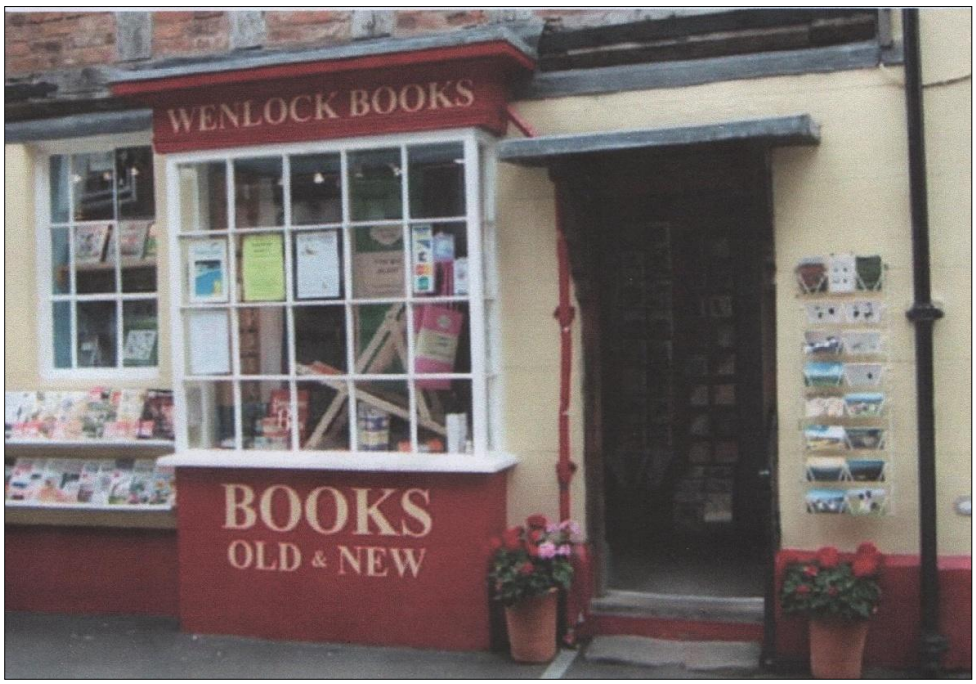
Alongside the challenging ideas, I find the fine use of language (as long as you get used to recognising when to pronounce a letter as an 'f' or an 's' !) to be a delight in itself. But I suspect that's something with which few of a younger generation would agree.

BM

9. Closure of an iconic bookshop

A sign of the times was the recent announcement of the impending closure of a well-known bookshop, which has been badly affected by the influence of sales through Amazon. *Wenlock Books*, at the heart of the creative and literary community of Much Wenlock, and the founder of the nationally acclaimed Wenlock Poetry Festival, has been a favourite haunt of mine when travelling in that area of Shropshire.

Although not exclusively a second-hand shop, the upstairs was devoted to an extensive second hand books department, where leisurely browsing was welcomed and encouraged. Surrounded by ancient oak beams and with snug corners, the air of tranquillity was conducive to becoming lost in thought.



As reported in a recent article in the *Guardian* newspaper, the owner has announced that the decision to close had been "very, very difficult" because she had relished the pleasure of selling books to regular and appreciative customers for nearly 30 years: (a sentiment which I share, but regrettably now experience only rarely). But a combination of personal illness, an increasingly quiet high street and, notably, customers' preference for online shopping (often displayed when potential customers openly check Amazon prices on their mobile phones) forced her to close the shop at the end of June. A review in the *Guardian* in 2005 had called it '*nothing short of a gem*.

My own experience is rather different, despite sometimes witnessing mobile phone checking in my presence. More generally, I suspect that the former appeal of second hand bookshops as sites of serendipity, and for stimulating ideas, has been overshadowed by a preoccupation with those compact portable devices which, at the stroke of a finger, provide a steam of instant gratification for 'news,' 'facts' and the nearest source of access to current 'wants.' When such expectations have become engrained, and curiosity appears to hold no promises of surprise, 'old books' – with their dated 'data,' are simply too much trouble, even to waste time looking through. The reality is that genuine interest in reflective literature seems to have become confined to very few, usually older, people.

BM